

## **National training highlights wildlife disease risks**

Wildlife diseases that could threaten the Top End, such as screw worm fly and avian keratin disorder, will be the focus of a special training workshop for local vets, to be held from 3 to 4 April in Darwin.

The workshop is the fourth in the series and focuses on emerging diseases of wildlife.

The workshops are presented by the Australian Animal Pathology Standards Program, an initiative of the Australian Society for Veterinary Pathology, and Animal Health Australia, and are supported by Wildlife Health Australia.



Dr Cheryl Sangster, a leading veterinary pathologist from the University of Sydney, is presenting the workshops.

“It is important to be able to recognise and respond very quickly, if these diseases ever do make it to Australia,” said Dr Sangster.

Wildlife Health Australia’s national coordinator, Dr Tiggy Grillo, will also be presenting at the Darwin training session.

Dr Grillo said Australians needed to be prepared for more cases of never-before-seen diseases in wildlife, as part of a global trend.

**Dr Cheryl Sangster, University of Sydney, with an echidna**

“Wildlife health is an issue worldwide. Emerging infectious diseases are increasing with climate change, people and product movements, and land use changes. The most common source of emerging diseases is wildlife, and diseases can then spill over to people and farmed animals,” explains Dr Grillo.

Wildlife Health Australia plays an important part in Australia’s biosecurity surveillance system.

“With the help of our surveillance partners, which include zoo wildlife hospitals, private and university veterinarians and government agencies from all states and territories, Wildlife Health Australia pulls together reports of wildlife disease incidents into a national database, to inform government responses in agriculture, trade, health and environment. Our aim is to quickly detect new diseases, so that effective action can be taken,” said Dr Rupert Woods, Wildlife Health Australia’s CEO.

“It is also part of our remit to build national capacity for rapid diagnoses of emerging wildlife diseases, hence this program of training,” he said.

Training sessions have been completed in Sydney, Launceston and Brisbane in March. Training in Darwin will be run on April 3 and 4. The final session will be held in Perth on April 6 and 7.



**Dr Rupert Woods, CEO, Wildlife Health Australia**

## Available for interview

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## About

**The Australian Animal Pathology Standards Program (AAPSP)**, is an initiative of the Australian Society for Veterinary Pathology and Animal Health Australia. <https://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/laboratory-services/australian-animal-pathology-standards-program/>

**Wildlife Health Australia** is the peak body for wildlife health in Australia. See [www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com](http://www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com) and <https://vimeo.com/192373588>.

**Screw worm fly** maggots are parasites of all domestic and wild mammals, birds and people.

The fly is not present in Australia. However it is in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia and is considered the most serious exotic pest threatening Australia's livestock industries. This status is due to the difficulty in eradication requiring extensive use of sterile male release, the wide host range and the damage to the food production of northern Australia that is possible from this pest.

**Avian keratin disorder** causes beak deformation in birds. It was first seen in Alaska in the 1990s, and it is believed to be spreading. It is thought to be caused by a recently identified virus.