

Tassie vet clinics join national program for wildlife health

Two Hobart veterinary clinics that routinely care for wild birds and animals have joined a national program to help track the health of Australia's wildlife.

Kingston Animal Hospital and Mayfair Veterinary Clinic treat animals from south-eastern Tasmania and often further afield, including feral and wild animals such as possums, snakes, birds and pademelons. Some of the more unusual wild animals they have cared for include Tasmanian devils, swift parrots, goshawks, seals, and lyrebirds.

Wildlife Health Australia CEO Dr Rupert Woods said Kingston Animal Hospital and Mayfair Veterinary Clinic are the first Tasmanian veterinary clinics to join the national sentinel clinic surveillance program.

Dr Woods explained the data collected through the program is used to better understand disease threats to livestock, human health and biodiversity.

"Tassie has a great biosecurity system. Addition of sentinel clinics adds to the big picture of wildlife health. Clinics associated with zoos and universities around Australia are also submitting data, which complements data received from all Australian governments and contributes to Australia's National Wildlife Health Information System, a small, but important part of Australia's broader biosecurity arrangements," Dr Woods said.

"We can help Australian governments keep an eye on potential threats to farmed animals such as avian influenza, diseases with human health implications such as Australian bat lyssavirus (which has not been found in Tassie), and biodiversity, like beak and feather disease which is currently a risk for the endangered orange-bellied parrot. Wildlife are the most common source of emerging diseases so we are also on the lookout for anything new, or diseases found overseas that could one day come into Australia. An example is white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease that is exotic to Australia but is decimating bats in North America.

"Knowledge of the health of our wildlife and what diseases are out there improves our understanding of risk, decision-making and ultimately benefits all Australians," he said.

Dr James Harris, of Mayfair Veterinary Clinic, has practiced as a veterinary surgeon for 58 years, in North America and then Australia. In a recent eight year period, his clinic treated over 3,800 wild animals.

Dr Harris said he was pleased to participate in the surveillance program as he had a "great interest" in public health.



Dr James Harris, of Mayfair Veterinary Clinic, with a young wombat



Dr Chris Lee, of Kingston Animal Hospital, with a quoll

Dr Chris Lee of Kingston Animal Hospital agreed it was a good idea to record the data and add to the national knowledge of wildlife health.

“We have two vets here with a particular interest in wildlife health, Alex Kreiss and Natasha Czarny, and they will both be participating in the program,” Dr Lee said.

The four other veterinary clinics participating in Wildlife Health Australia’s sentinel clinic surveillance program are Adelaide Koala and Wildlife Hospital, Lort Smith Animal Hospital in Melbourne, the RSPCA Queensland Wildlife Hospital in Brisbane, and Boongarry Veterinary Services in Cairns. Wildlife health surveillance occurs in all jurisdictions in Australia, including the Australian Antarctic Territory.

The sentinel clinic program is one of a number of national wildlife surveillance activities that are coordinated by Wildlife Health Australia and help support Australia’s broader biosecurity system.

More information:

www.wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au

About:

Wildlife Health Australia is the peak body for wildlife health in Australia. Wildlife Health Australia was established as the Australian Wildlife Health Network in 2002 as a national government initiative, and its work continues following incorporation as an independent company in 2013. Major funding for Wildlife Health Australia is provided by the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

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