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Newsletter



October 2015

Candidates Sought for Editor of Journal of Wildlife Diseases

The Wildlife Disease Association (WDA) is seeking an Editor for Journal of Wildlife Diseases (JWD), a peer reviewed quarterly scientific journal. This is a half time contract position as described below. Applications will be accepted starting October 1, 2015, the first round will close December 1, 2015, and interviews will be conducted in the Fall-Winter of 2015-16.

The Editor is assisted by a Managing Editor at Allen Press who facilitates quality assurance of new submissions, correspondence with authors and AEs during peer review, and handling of proofs. The Editor provides final review and approval of the author-approved proofs before online posting and mailing of the print Journal.

The Editor is encouraged to attend publishers/editors meetings, to keep abreast of the changing standards and innovations in scientific publishing, and lead JWD into the future as an innovative, respected, and rigorous scientific journal. Travel to meetings is part of the Editors contract and is supported by WDA. Compensation is competitive with similar positions in North America and subject to Council approval.

Applications should be submitted to the WDA's Executive Manager (wda.manager@gmail.com) in electronic form, and mailed in hard copy if later requested, and should consist of a letter (no more than 1 page) explaining why the candidate is interested in the position, and should include specific editorial and related experience and past participation in WDA and related or similar organizations, and a professional resume not to exceed 3 pages. The deadline for the first round of applications is December 1, 2015.

Students reflect on the positive effects of travel grants:

Student Travel Grants are awarded to selected student members of the WDA each year to help support their attendance at the Annual WDA International Conference. Three of the students that received travel grants to attend the 2015 Conference share their experiences below. Other recipients for 2015 included: James Hassell (University of Liverpool), Anna Haw (University of Witwatersrand), Mauricio Seguel (University of Georgia) and Aditi Sriram (Massey University).

WDA is so supportive of its students

By: Krista Jones (Murdoch University)

It [the 2015 WDA International Conference] was an incredibly inspiring, educational, and entertaining event, with so many great presentations and the opportunity to chat with colleagues from undergrad to emeritus in such a relaxed environment. I received useful feedback from my own talk, gained ideas from those of others, caught up with old acquaintances, and met lots of new folks (including, sadly, some from my very own university that I knew nothing about)! So thank you again for allowing me to attend, as well as for everything you do for all of the many other student awards and events! It's so wonderful that WDA is so supportive of its students."

Coming home to WDA

By: Michelle Verant (University of Wisconsin-Madison)



The 2015 International WDA Conference was highly successful with an excellent scientific program and stunning setting along the Sunshine Coast in Australia. But, I would wager that these things are not what I (or most other attendees) will remember or have told stories about upon their return. It's the people.

WDA conferences are like the family reunions we all wish we could have, where passions are shared, lifestyles are familiar and differences of opinion are debated logically with evidence. I was born into the WDA as a first year vet student in 2006 and strongly believe that I would not be where I am today without the inspiration and support

of my WDA family.

I am deeply grateful for the generous support of the WDA Student Travel grant that helped fund my travel to the 2015 WDA Conference. As the Student Representative and Chair of the Student Activities Committee, I had the privilege of contributing to the Council meeting and coordinating student-related events during the conference. By all qualitative and quantitative measures reported at this time, I conclude successful completion of these objectives. This success would not have been possible without the energy and creativity of the dynamite students that volunteered to help plan and assist with the conference: Chris Neibuhr, Alanna Knight, Emma Nelson, Kath Adriaanse, and Sarah Doornsbusch.

This year's conference was a special and memorable year for me because I got to meet my Australasian WDA cousins. We traded knowledge, stories and culture throughout the week. I may be responsible for introducing a new invasive game to the region; rowdy contests of Canadian pool may now threaten the homeostasis of peaceful bars throughout Australasia. When I rocked up for dinner one night to an animated debate on the ethics and values of hunting in different regions of the world, I knew I belonged to this group. This conversation continued over pizza (until the spies overtook the resistance, twice!) and we began sharing stories from past WDA conferences.

The stories shared during the closing banquet demonstrated the rich history, passion, and care for fellow members that defines the WDA and gives our mission its strength. These qualities, like many of the wildlife species we work with, transcend international boundaries. This lesson is one that I will take home with me from this year's conference and draw upon when the going gets tough and the path is unclear.

There are enormous challenges for preserving wildlife health, biodiversity, and our homes on Earth, many of which were presented during the conference. However, my optimism has been strengthened. I am confident in the abilities and dedication of my current and future colleagues and appreciate the solid foundation we have to collectively build our future upon.

Your tax dollars at work: A sea otter vet reflects on WDA student travel awards

By: Tristan Burgess (University of California-Davis)

In its 65-year history, the Wildlife Disease Association has grown from a 28-member committee to the international peak body for wildlife health, with members on every inhabited continent (and members are well-represented among scientific visitors to the remaining continent).

Students have always played a prominent role in WDA and student awards date back to 1969. Bearing this in mind, it was with a deep sense of gratitude that I received a travel award to attend the 2015 WDA meeting on the beautiful Sunshine Coast of Queensland. The scientific program this year was astonishingly broad and very compelling, the company stellar as always and the location adjacent to a surf beach, left little to be desired. The fact that the journey took me back across the Pacific Ocean to my home country and afforded me the opportunity to see colleagues and friends dating back to my vet school days in New Zealand, made this a particularly special meeting for me. Naturally, it was a highlight of the meeting to present my work on protozoal encephalitis in sea otters to such an august audience.

I am always surprised by the unexpected places I discover people doing similar work to me at these meetings, be it the former pathology lecturer also presenting on Toxoplasma in marine mammals, or the friend I met at WDA-A 2009 (in the beautiful Catlins, New Zealand) using surprisingly similar analytical methods to study skeletal fluorosis in marsupials.

It is easy to become despondent when considering the enormity of the challenges facing conservation today. No other meeting I have ever attended leaves me so inspired and stimulated to take up the challenge that lies before all of us who work in the fields of wildlife health and conservation. I have never failed to leave a WDA meeting with more ideas and plans than I could possibly finish in the next 5 years - and that's the beauty of it.

Thank you WDA for the opportunity to attend this meeting, and thank you to all who took on the task of organizing it. A wise man (a WDA member, in fact) once said (to another WDA member, as it happens) 'if you want to be successful, you just have to work with

people who are smarter than you'. Based on this year's conference, that shouldn't be too hard.



Michelle Verant, Kath Adriaanse, and Chris Niebuhr.

Student Highlights from the 2015 WDA Conference



The 2015 WDA Photo Contest showcased the beauty of the wildlife we love and the excitement of working with these animals. Photographers competed for the People's Choice Award based on most popular votes and for top places in each category based on judges' scores. Over 50 photos were entered into the contest and a selection of the winning images is shown below. Several classes of animals were represented including birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, with the most popular image an invertebrate. Surprisingly, no fish or corals were entered – remember for next year, “they’re animals too”!

The Student-Mentor Mixer was held on Monday evening of the conference over drinks and appetizers on the veranda of the resort. Over 100 students and 30 mentors chatted about current challenges, past accomplishments, and bright futures. Bottles of wine were given to two of the most social butterflies based on a modified game of Bingo. Thank you mentors for sharing your time and wisdom and thank you students for your enthusiasm and excellent questions. Some take home messages included: follow your heart, set goals, take risks, be persistent, and collaborate - you may not achieve fortune, but you might just save the world.



WDA Constitution Approval



The WDA Constitution requires that it and Bylaws be reviewed and updated every 10 years. This year, the President and Executive Manager reviewed and proposed updates and modifications. Comments were then taken from Officers and Council (and all Section Chairs). The version posted at:

<http://www.wildlifedisease.org/wda/ABOUTWDA/ProposedChangesinWDAConstitution.aspx> contains the proposed updates to the WDA Constitution with changes highlighted in yellow. Please review, members will be polled to ask for approval after February 1, 2016. All comments can be sent to Carlo das Neves at Carlos.dasNeves@vetinst.no

Latin America Section

An infirmity and an opportunity: amphibians insist on sending us a message



By: Gilbert Alvarado, Escuela de Biología, Universidad de Costa Rica, gilbert.alvarado@usp.br

In the late 80's Costa Rica noticed a decline in several different anuran populations, especially of high altitude species. Among the ones that disappeared was the mythical golden toad (*Incilius periglenes*), inhabitant of one of the most important ecotourism sites in the country, Monteverde. As well as many other species, the golden toad was not observed by herpetologists for almost two decades. Unfortunately, Costa Rica turned into one of the most

affected places, but this phenomenon was described in many other territories around the world.

Since the first reports of species disappearances, the reasons behind its possible causes are still under debate and it has been a tough discussion...

In the mid-90's there is a possibility of a pathogenic agent playing a central role in the declines. In the south border of Costa Rica the first sightings of what would be later



described as a chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) occur. This fungus has been one of the most important infectious agents to capture the world's attention due to its presence in many of the amphibian population declines all over the world. After a decade of studies in Costa Rica, we notice its clear presence in practically every territory within the country; from the sea level up to 10.000 feet areas, and in the majority of ecosystems that this geographically heterogenic country provides us. Without a doubt, many questions come up regarding its role in the reported declines.

Nowadays, almost three decades later, nature gives us a second chance. Many of the populations we considered vanished, some of them for almost two decades, are returning. In Costa Rica, there are reports of herpetologists lead by the School of Biology and Center of Microscopic Structure Investigations (CIEMic) of the University of Costa Rica, of some species that have reestablished their populations and are currently healthy and coexisting with *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*. Among them is the Holdridge's toad (*Bufo holdridgei*) endemic to Costa Rica and one of the most commonly seen toad species during three decades, the vibicaria toad (*Lithobates vibicarius*), endemic to Costa Rica and Panama; where there were no reports of its presence since its disappearance. Both inhabit the chain of mountains that spread throughout the Costa Rican territory. Following their examples, several species around the country have survived thanks to the conservationist efforts of selected individuals and national organizations. This picture is undoubtedly a unique opportunity to study these animals and get a better understanding about the factors that allowed their survival. Such news brings us hope and motivation to follow through with study projects and research, aside from every possible conservationist effort in our power to protect these species.

Interview with our President, Marcela Uhart

Q) In your opinion, how relevant is WDA in the dissemination of knowledge and settlement of alliances in the research field of wildlife conservation medicine?

When it comes to free ranging wildlife, WDA is a very relevant organization because it brings together the most prominent specialists in the field and publishes a reference scientific journal on wildlife related issues, the Journal of Wildlife Diseases. Through their annual meetings, WDA actively promotes the connection between professionals and the exchange of information. In spite of that, the organization makes great effort to bring young students and professionals together with professors, tutors and renowned researchers. With its geographical sessions, WDA stimulates regional representation and enables the creation of bonds and collaborations among local colleagues, sometimes made difficult in a global level due to economical and/or language barriers.

Q) What are your expectations for the WDA Conference to be held in Bogota, Colombia?

I have no doubt that it will be a high quality event that will promote excellent studies being developed in Latin America in the fields of wildlife and One Health. It will also be the ideal opportunity to share experiences with local colleagues and straighten professional and personal relationships. WDA is one big family and through our local meetings we have the opportunity to bring up and build up our own Latin American family, with our very own characteristics. I have great expectations for the conference that is right around the corner and I am sure that it will be a great success; not only because of the efforts of our Colombian colleagues in organizing the meeting, but also because of the high level of all participants and unquestionable hospitality of beautiful Bogota.

Q) Please explain how your participations in WDA meetings and conferences have influenced your carrier and field of research (aside from broadening your professional network)?

I cannot even begin to list all that I have learned from working in the general organization and particularly, at the annual meetings. I believe that many professionals from my generation, including myself, had a phase when they were considered "underdogs", especially during grad school, because we did not fit into the traditional vet profile. Imagine how surprised I was when I went to my first WDA conference, around 1999 and met many other "underdogs"! To me it was like heaven.

The year I spent attending WDA conferences allowed me not only to keep myself updated on the breakthrough of wildlife medicine studies from all over the world, but also to improve myself as a veterinarian in an uniquely friendly environment. When a newly grad student starts in this field it is fundamental to have access to a network with hundreds of people that share the same interests, including professionals that are a reference in the field, and being welcomed with open arms, such as WDA does. The organization makes great efforts to enroll young people and promote their professional development, which is one of the highlights of this meeting.

There is no doubt that during the high quality WDA events our brains get exhausted with so much information, but full of ideas. Many of the research projects in which I have worked on throughout my career came up or were build up through the exchanges with other colleagues during the events or after key lectures that brought up an initial question. Ultimately, watching the lectures helped me to have professional standards and parameters of excellence, once there is no bigger pressure than the one we get from the colleagues we admire and want to impress.

Q) Now a few words to the veterinary students: in your opinion, how relevant is it for the biology-based students to participate and be affiliated to organizations such as WDA?

Few opportunities are more enriching than interdisciplinarity. Since I started in this field, I have been working daily with biology professionals from a broad variety of disciplines (ecologists, mathematicians, microbiologists, oceanographers, chemist, engineers, physicians), as well as with naturalists, native para-biologists and para-veterinarians, and more and more with enthusiastic citizens. There is no field of research that does not benefit from this broad networking. There are no questionings, methods or conclusions more valuable than those born in collaborative processes.

Interdisciplinarity is a must, because each and every field benefits from the exchange of knowledge and skills. I have spent years working this way and I am always surprised when people ask me about it, because personally, I have never experienced any conflicts whatsoever regarding this issue. WDA is a unique forum that brings together health professionals from all areas of expertise, something rare in the traditional veterinary scene. We are all very like to be part of it!

JWD Endowment Update



WDA is 3/5th of the way to its goal of raising \$2.5 million to endow the production of JWD and its worldwide distribution to those nations in the lower 2/3rds on individual GDP at no cost by 2020. This program has and will allow hundreds of colleagues in nations where conservation and health challenges are greatest to benefit from the knowledge contained in JWD.

A very generous anonymous donor has pledged to match every donation made to the JWD Endowment between now and January 30, 2016 (for a total up to \$9,100). When you go to renew your WDA membership this fall, please include an endowment gift. For a limited time only, your gift will be doubled.

No donation is too small. We would like to have 100% of WDA members support this important campaign. The more members we have supporting the endowment, the greater chance we have of garnering external support from major foundations. If they don't see us supporting our own endowment, they are not going to want to help.

The \$9100 was provided in the form of stocks and bonds through WDA's investment advisers Jacobsen and Schmitt. If you would like to do something similar or discuss options for making donations please email Angela Behm abehm@jandsadvisers.com to make an appointment or call 608-662-7500.

USGS National Wildlife Health Center Quarterly Mortality Report

April 2015 to June 2015

Written and compiled by the U.S. Geological Survey National Wildlife Health Center Epidemiology Team members: Anne Ballmann, Barb Bodenstein, Bob Dusek, Dan Grear, and Jenny Chipault

Highly pathogenic avian influenza in North America – 2015 second quarter update



As of early September 2015, the most recent detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) viruses in wild North American birds was a mallard from Davis County, Utah sampled in late-July 2015. This mallard, and the [June detections of HPAI](#) in Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) in Michigan (reported by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources) and a black-capped chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) in Minnesota (reported by

the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources), demonstrate that HPAI was present in resident wild birds during the summer.

The USGS National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) is a member of the Interagency Steering Committee for Surveillance for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Wild Birds and, in this role, is testing samples from live birds and hunter-harvested birds that are collected by participating agency partners in the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways.

The NWHC also continues to monitor for HPAI viruses by testing dead birds submitted for diagnostic evaluation (nationwide) and is the leading partner in mortality and morbidity investigation and associated diagnostics within the [Interagency Strategic Plan](#). Mortality investigations will facilitate early detection of HPAI in wild birds and will increase our knowledge of the spatial extent and species involved. Wildlife managers should remain vigilant for wild bird morbidity and mortality events and continue to contact NWHC to discuss submission and testing of carcasses from events that meet the [expanded submission criteria](#). Wildlife management agencies that investigate morbidity and mortality events independently or in collaboration with other diagnostic laboratories are strongly encouraged to report these events to the NWHC using our [reporting form](#) so that information can be captured on a national scale and displayed on [WHISPer](#), a [wildlife health information sharing website](#), to increase situational awareness.

In addition, the NWHC is conducting research into the ecology of HPAI and other avian influenza viruses in the Mississippi Flyway. This research began in the summer of 2015 and involves sampling wild waterfowl and peridomestic avian and mammalian species to test for active infection with avian influenza viruses and serological exposure to the HPAI viruses that were previously detected in 2015. This collaborative effort includes partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildlife Services within the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the University of Minnesota, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and private landowners.

To date, no humans or other mammals have shown signs of disease from these particular viruses but field personnel handling live or dead wild birds should take [appropriate precautions](#). For more information, see the [USGS Role and Response to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza fact sheet](#).

Small mammal mortality in Idaho

Mortality among small rodents, including southern red-backed voles (*Myodes* [formerly *Clethrionomys*] *gapperi*), montane voles (*Microtus montanus*), gophers (*Thomomys* sp.), red squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*), bushy-tailed woodrats (*Neotoma cinerea*), and unspecified mice, was reported in southwestern Idaho beginning in early June 2015. Carcasses were found on lawns and in parking lots individually or in clusters of five to 20 animals. Total dead was estimated at 2,000 individuals as of early July. In May 2015, plague mortality resulting from an infection with the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* had been confirmed by Idaho Bureau of Laboratories and Idaho Fish and Game in Piute ground squirrels (*Urocitellus mollis*) around Boise. The NWHC examined carcasses of 10 montane voles, two meadow voles (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*), and one red squirrel. No definitive evidence of a causative agent was identified. Grossly, the majority of voles were emaciated and had evidence of impact trauma. Enlarged submandibular lymph nodes were detected in two voles. Bacterial cultures and/or polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests of lungs, livers, and spleens from multiple voles tested negative for *Francisella*, *Pasteurella*, *Salmonella*, and *Yersinia* spp..

There have been numerous cases of plague and tularemia in wildlife, domestic pets, and humans (some fatal) reported in western states this spring and summer. Plague reports began in April in Arizona, and have continued through August, involving seven additional states (California, Colorado, Idaho, Nebraska, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming). Tularemia, caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*, was first reported in May among rabbits and rodents and cases have continued through August involving eight states (Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming). Transmission of these agents can occur through consumption of contaminated food or water, inhalation, contact with infected individuals (including pets) and carcasses, or through the bite of infected insect vectors such as fleas or ticks. Therefore, proper handling and cooking of game meat, safe water sources, and insect repellent are advised to reduce exposure. For more information, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) website or the NWHC [tularemia](#) or [plague](#) circulars.

Seabird mortality along southern coastal Alaska

Since May 2015, the USGS National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) has been assisting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Region 7 Migratory Bird Management Office, several USFWS refuges, the National Park Service, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game with investigations of multiple seabird mortality events along the Bering Sea and Pacific Ocean coastal areas of the Aleutian Islands East, Kodiak Island, Kenai Peninsula, and Prince William Sound. Estimates of the size and scope of these events have ranged from a few birds affected (~5-10) to >100 birds being found sick or dead at one time and location. The primary avian species reported to be affected to date include murrelets (common [*Uria aalge*] and thick-billed [*U. lomvia*]), sooty shearwaters (*Puffinus griseus*), black-legged kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla*), horned puffins (*Fratercula corniculata*), and glaucous-winged gulls (*Larus glaucescens*). Some of these avian mortalities have been concurrent with significant whale, pinniped, sea otter (*Enhydra lutris*), and fish mortalities throughout the summer.

Diagnostic investigations have been challenging due to remote locations and/or lack of suitable carcasses. As of August 2015, the NWHC has received multiple avian carcasses from field partners. The primary finding for both juvenile and adult bird specimens received has been emaciation; a few individuals have also had mild to moderate intestinal parasite infections. All birds examined have tested negative for highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses and pathogenic bacteria such as *Pasteurella multocida*. The cause(s) of the emaciation are still being pursued and diagnostic tests are still in progress, including algal toxin analysis. An extensive *Pseudo-nitzschia* bloom (the algae that causes domoic acid poisoning) in Kachemak Bay and other areas has been reported for much of this summer, but it is unknown at this time if it is responsible for these mortality events. Water temperatures have been higher than normal off the coast of Alaska during the spring/summer 2015, likely due to "the blob" (unusual and persistent masses of warm water) and/or El Nino activity in the Pacific Ocean.

The NWHC is partnering with the USFWS, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Marine Mammal Stranding Network, the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, the USGS Alaska Science Center, and others to gather more information regarding ecosystem parameters concurrent to these mortalities such as oceanographic conditions, shellfish closures due to paralytic shellfish poisoning, forage fish availability, and marine bird populations. According to the NWHC historic records, significant mortalities involving these avian species have previously been reported from these areas of Alaska during 1983, 1989, and 1998, but time frames were March-May and September-October. Diagnostic findings on birds examined during previous events were emaciation with unknown underlying causes.

The NWHC encourages wildlife biologists and resource managers along the west coast of the lower 48 states to be aware that mortalities might become more widespread during migration and as environmental conditions change in autumn; please report marine bird and mammal mortality event observations to help determine the overall magnitude and scope of these events and potential impacts to species involved. For further information, please contact the NWHC epidemiology team via email: nwhc-epi@usgs.gov or phone: (608) 270-2480.

To view, search, and download historic and ongoing wildlife morbidity and mortality event records nationwide visit the Wildlife Health Information Sharing Partnership event reporting system (WHISPers) online database: <http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/whispers/>

To request diagnostic services or report wildlife mortality:
<http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/services/>

