

AAV NEWSLETTER

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DECEMBER 2009

THE AVIAN WORLD FEELS THE LOSS OF MARGARET PETRAK

The AAV Extends Its Condolences to Friends and Family of Margaret Petrak.

Dr. Margaret Petrak (University of Pennsylvania, 52) 81 of Medway MA died October 19, 2009.

Margaret Petrak was a pioneer in establishing the speciality of Avian Medicine. Her scholarly and authoritative text *Diseases of Cage and Aviary Birds* was one of the first books edited by a female veterinarian and filled a great void in the veterinary literature for guiding practitioners in the care of pet birds.

Margaret was a charter member of the Association of Avian Veterinarians, served as a board member in AAV's formative years and later on the committee that developed Avian Certification. She was an Honorary Life member of AAV.

She spent her career at the MSPCA's Angell Animal Medical Center where she served an internship after graduating with honors from veterinary school. As a staff veterinarian she educated hundreds of interns in the art of clinical practice. The kindness and gentleness that she modeled left a lasting impression on all who were fortunate to have worked with her.

Margaret was a member of the law enforcement staff and worked endlessly on behalf of mistreated and abused animals. She was often an expert witness for the many law enforcement cases prosecuted by the MSPCA.

Donations may be made in memory of Margaret Petrak's to the AAV Avian Research Endowment Fund, PO Box 811720, Boca Raton, FL 33481.

Fungus pushing frogs toward extinction

By Jamie Voyles

A type of lemur frog, *Phyllomedusa lemur*, that is threatened by the *chytridiomycosis* fungus. Biologists in Australia have solved one of the great mysteries of modern ecology — how a simple fungus is pushing the world's frog populations closer to extinction. The answer surprised them: It's as if millions of humans were keeling over with heart attacks from athlete's foot.

The realization that frogs across the globe were dying came in 1989. It wasn't until 1998 that the deaths were linked to a fungus named *batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*. Still, no one knew how this superficial skin infection was killing frogs by the thousands — until now.

The answer lies in the special nature of frogs' skin, through which they can not only breathe but also absorb water. Researchers at the Amphibian Disease Ecology Group at Cook University in Australia discovered that when frogs contracted the skin disease *chytridiomycosis* from the fungus, it disrupted their ability to properly regulate electrolytes. Their paper is in a current edition of the journal *Science*.

Electrolytes are crucial to the body's ability to send the electrical signals that tell the heart to pump. When levels fall too low, cardiac arrest can follow. This sometimes happens with human athletes who exercise too long in hot weather and lose too much water and salt in their sweat.

The team took blood samples from sick and dying frogs and realized their electrolyte levels were well below normal. When they gave the frogs an electrolyte solution to drink, some of them recovered enough

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FROGS

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to try to jump to avoid being captured, says study author Jamie Voyles. In the end, though, all the treated frogs died from the infection.

Though the species of fungus has existed for half a billion years, it appears to have recently evolved into this more deadly form and begun to spread, says Erica Rosenblum, a professor of biology at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho. She studies the genetics of the fungus. Where it first emerged is still unknown.

By some estimates, almost a third of amphibian species are threatened with extinction. A 2007 paper in the *Journal of Herpetology* estimated that the current extinction rate could be 211 times higher than it has been in the past.

A paper in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in 2008 found that more than 6,300 families of amphibians are at risk globally and reported the fungus had been implicated in serious declines and extinctions of more than 200 amphibian species, "posing the greatest threat to biodiversity of any known disease."

While other trends contribute to frogs' extinction, including habitat loss, new predators and water pollution, "the thing that is really imperiling them is this strange fungal disease," Rosenblum says. "We know of many hundreds of species that are infected, but my guess is that the actual number is far higher."

Frogs are an important part of the food chain and are crucial to a healthy ecosystem. "They are the food supply for snakes and birds and everything else that eats those animals," Voyles says. "So losing them is quite devastating."

Avian Community Mourns the Loss of Joel Pasco

Joel Pasco never met an animal he didn't like. He was surrounded by wildlife on the final day of his life, Saturday, Oct 24th. He was grateful that he'd been feeling well enough to take a trip to the Sierras to fish with his good friend, Cris Hagen. He went to bed Friday evening after a day of enjoying the outdoors, and died in his sleep. He was 62.

Battling esophageal cancer, diagnosed in late 2006, had taken a lot out of Joel, but he continued working a couple days a week at the animal hospital he founded—All Creatures Care Cottage in Costa Mesa—and volunteering at the Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center in Huntington Beach.

Joel received his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Illinois in 1972 and completed an internship at the Animal Medical Center in New York.

Before settling down, Joel took a cross-country trip to California with a fraternity brother, and when it came time to decide where to practice veterinary medicine, he headed west to Newport Beach. He worked at the Newport Center Animal Hospital in South Laguna. In 1978 he co-founded the Alliance for Wildlife and Rehabilitation and became its first president.

Joel was a member of the Southern California Veterinary Medical Association,

the California Veterinary Medical Association, and the Association of Avian Veterinarians. He was a past president of the Orange County Chapter of the SCVMA, co-founder of the Avian & Exotic Society and Director of Veterinary Services for the Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center.

Without a doubt, the Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center wouldn't have been possible without Joel.

He made the treatment and protection of animals his life's work for more than 30 years. He shared his love for animals with his wife, Jean, his children, Jessica and Andrew, and his son-in-law Kurtiss Nielsen. And he passed along that sense of stewardship to his grandson, Christien.

Joel also loved bonsai and accumulated an impressive collection of bonsai trees. He spent hours tending to individual trees and miniature forests. He was a member of the Kofu Bonsai Kai club and the California Bonsai Society.

A memorial service celebrating Joel's life will be at the Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center in Huntington Beach on Saturday, November 7th, 2 pm. For those so inclined, monetary donations should be sent to the wildlife center.

Wetlands & Wildlife Care Center
21900 Pacific Coast Highway
Huntington Beach, CA 92646

MEMORY GAME

Developed by the European AAV, this game not only enhances your memory but also hones your skills in identifying hematology and histology slides. There are 32 images (64 cards). The goal of the game is to win all of the cards. Turn over two cards on each turn. When a player can match two from memory the player takes those two. Complete descriptions of the slides are included along with species represented and instructions on how to play.

A great pastime at breaks, or for tests of identification skills.

Proceeds from sales of the game support the EAAV Helga Gerlach Fund. \$49 PLUS SHIPPING - MC/VISA accepted. Order from the AAV Publications Office: aavpublications@aav.org



Ferret gets swine flu from its owner, a first

By Jacques Von Lunen, special to The Oregon...

It appears that certain pets can catch swine flu from their owners.

Oregon just registered its first case of a natural human-animal transmission of the H1N1 virus. Actually, it may be the first such recorded case anywhere, said Emilio DeBess, Oregon state public health veterinarian.

A ferret, whose owner had shown flulike symptoms, tested positive for swine flu on Oct. 8.

The owners took the ferret to a veterinary clinic in Portland on Oct. 5 (DeBess said the clinic asked not to be identified.) The animal had severe respiratory illness and showed many of the symptoms people associate with the flu: fever, weakness, coughing and sneezing.

After hearing that the owner suffered from flu symptoms just before the ferret got sick, the treating

veterinarian called DeBess, whose responsibilities include serving as a consultant to Oregon vets.

DeBess asked the vet to send in a sample of the ferret's nasal secretions. It was tested at an Oregon State University lab, which found genetic markers for the strain of H1N1 that's infecting humans. A lab of the U.S. Department for Agriculture confirmed the finding on Oct. 9.

This came as little surprise to DeBess. Ferrets, which are sensitive toward respiratory illness, have been used in labs to see how the flu will affect people, he said. But this may be the first case anywhere of a ferret catching the flu from its owner, without the help of lab technicians, he said.

The ferret is recovering.

DeBess put the staff at the clinic on "fever watch" after the test results came in. No one at the clinic had gotten sick as of last week, he said.

Ferret owners need to be careful during flu season. And that goes both ways. If you have a ferret that's sneezing and coughing, wash your hands a lot and definitely take it to a

vet. If you are sick with flulike symptoms, handle your ferret sparingly. Don't cough or sneeze near it.

The same is true for birds, DeBess said. Birds are basically the origin of all flu viruses, historically, and they "can get any and all flu viruses," he said. However, no cases of birds contracting H1N1 are documented in this country.

In the past five years the flu virus has mutated into a strain called H3N8, which infects dogs. It's not known to transmit to humans. No known strain infects cats, and neither cats nor dogs can carry H1N1.

Your 2010 membership renewal

is due January 1, 2010. Your timely renewal will ensure uninterrupted access to the Member's Only area of the AAV website. Late renewals may be purged from the Member's Only list and forfeit their discounted renewal rate. Late renewals will need to re-apply for login codes after 2/26/10.

2009 Proceedings, Milwaukee, WI

The digital copy of the 2009 proceedings is up on the AAV website. (www.aav.org). Sign in the Members Area, Select the link to *Publications* and then to *Proceedings*. The access codes can be found behind the member's only wall.

Access is case-sensitive. Non-members will be denied access.

Hard copies may be ordered from the publications office. (\$55+\$5 shipping).

There are also a small number of the proceedings from the combined Sunday program; AAV-Pre Surgical Patient; AEMV- Small Mammals (\$25)

Fax order to: 817-599-0088

IN-MEMORIAM CARDS SHOW YOUR CLIENTS YOU CARE WHILE YOU DONATE TO RESEARCH

The AAV offers beautiful cards to send to your clients after the loss of a beloved pet. The cards are heavy weight, are on off-white card stock, and each has its own gold foil-lined envelopes.

You may purchase a set of six cards for \$30. Clients appreciate that you care and that you are contributing to the research that can save other pets.

At the same time, you are supporting the AAV research fund that was started in 1980. A list of studies receiving AAV grants is published on the AAV Web site.

You may contact the publications office directly to order these cards, or print out the publications order form from the AAV site (www.aav.org).

Photo by Megan Parks





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Conference Corner
**31st Annual Association of
Avian Veterinarians Conference & Expo**
with the Association of
Exotic Mammal Veterinarians
San Diego, California
San Diego Marriott Hotel & Marina
August 1-5, 2010
www.ConferenceOffice.com/aav

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