

BIG News



Newsletter of the Australian Veterinary Behaviour Interest Group (AVBIG) -
a special interest group of the AVA

President's Report

There's a first time for everything and this is mine. How I came to be in this position was also a first, I do believe, with our General Meeting being held in a bus, on the way to our AVBIG dinner at the AVA conference in Perth. We will go to any length to achieve a quorum at our meetings! So, with the passing of the microphone, the odd lurch and horn toot, and a minor traffic jam, we formed our new committee. I would like to thank Amanda Cole, Trepheena Hunter, Kathy MacMillan and Fiona Walton for the enthusiasm and dedication they have already shown in their roles and for staying on. To Diane van Rooy, welcome back and welcome aboard to Sally Nixon. You have both already stepped in and helped enormously.

Congratulations to Amanda for taking on the role as President Elect. Her clear thinking, knowledge and enthusiasm will carry AVBIG far over the next years to come.

I must say a huge thankyou to Andrew O'Shea, who has finished his 2 year role as President and can be congratulated for working tirelessly for AVBIG. He has overseen many successful stand-alone conferences (Bob Bailey and Susan Friedman) and popular speakers for the AVA Conference (Gary Landsberg, Jon Bowen). Polite Pets Month is a testimony to his hard work. For 3 years he has been at the helm and will continue to work on this initiative to provide education on mental health matters. We sincerely appreciate the impressive amount of work Andrew has contributed and are very grateful that he is able to continue to help us in his role as Past President. Not one to take it easy, Andrew has also taken on the important role of Policy Advisor, so will be actively engaged in ensuring AVA policies reflect our values regarding animal behaviour and welfare.



SPRING 2014

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Another big thank you goes to Kate Lindsey who has left the committee. Kate worked hard during her year with AVBIG and can be congratulated on organising a delightful dinner in Perth, field trip to the Perth Zoo (read on!) and gift for Gary Landsberg.

We also said a farewell to Gaille Perry who has been an integral source of wisdom to AVBIG for many years. Please read on to find out more about her impressive commitment to veterinary behaviour. Gaille is still on the AVA Education Committee so will be making sure we have quality presenters for the PanPac Conference in Brisbane next May.

So, what have we been doing during these chilly winter months?



The issue of finding quality speakers and organising Conferences and Seminars is a major responsibility for AVBIG. As such, we have formed a subcommittee, responsible for sourcing speakers and stream-lining the process. I would like to thank Amanda Cole, Gabrielle Carter, Jacqui Ley and Pam Scanlon for taking on this task.

We have been addressing concerns raised by our members, on a variety of topics including the frequently raised issue of electronic collar use on dogs and cats. Please note the AVA are currently reviewing this policy and you are encouraged to submit comments here: <http://www.ava.com.au/node/26886>

Another issue we are re-addressing is the confusion surrounding non-specialist titles and whether “veterinary behaviourist” is acceptable or not. We will be attempting to clarify the position with the AVBC on use of appropriate nomenclature.

Polite Pets Month is a very popular and important opportunity for behaviour problems and mental health to be brought to the general practitioner and the public’s attention. We are continuing to investigate how to improve the delivery of this message to reach a wider audience.

Much of our committee work is based around communication, to you as members but also to the public and veterinarians without special interest in behaviour. We are always grateful for any comments, contributions or ideas you might have to assist us. We are also here to help with any questions you may have.

Finally I would like to welcome all our new members to their first edition of this newsletter and remind everyone of the following:

WHO WE ARE

The Australian Veterinary Behaviour Interest Group (AVBIG) seeks to keep members informed of the latest developments in the exciting and dynamic field of veterinary behavioural medicine. Far from being a small niche of veterinary medicine, there is a behavioural component to most consultations seen by the general practitioner. Furthermore, behavioural problems remain a leading cause of euthanasia in young pets.

A greater understanding of behavioural medicine by the veterinary profession will lead to improved animal welfare and strengthening of the human-animal bond.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Australian Veterinary Behaviour Interest Group (AVBIG), a special interest group of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), was established to improve human and animal welfare by increasing the understanding of animal behaviour and its significance in veterinary science.

I trust you can all keep warm during this last month of winter,

Katrina



Gaille Perry



At the AVBIG annual meeting in May, Gaille Perry stepped down from the AVBIG executive after 10 years of service, being the last 'surviving' member of the original committee. The influence of Dr Perry has been significant as she has been instrumental in changing the perception of the veterinary profession in this country from behavioural medicine being a 'marshmallow' subject to a serious scientific discipline.

Gaille remembers the time that a chance gift of a book was enough to spark her interest in behavioural medicine and start her on a career path that would lead to the formation of AVBIG.

'We have come a long way since, as a first year student, I was given a copy of *The New Knowledge of Dog Behaviour* by Clarence Pfaffenberger. I had a new puppy, put his methods into place and was hooked! Veterinary Behaviour didn't exist and all my early reading was done in the medical school library (Scott and Fuller were medicos). It has been an amazing journey.'

Fortunately, partly through Gaille's efforts, the career path of future veterinary behaviourists is more clearly defined. The activities of AVBIG have been instrumental in increasing the awareness of behavioural medicine within the veterinary profession.

Yet, back in 2005 a battle needed to be waged before AVBIG was born. Dr Perry was instrumental in this fight. Dr Kersti Seksel remembers fondly what occurred after an application to form a special interest group was initially rejected by the AVA.

"At the AVA conference, Gaille and I went around and collected \$50 from about 50 members (I did it a pub night when there were a few beverages on board) - we had them sign a form stating they were full paying members. I have a clear recollection of a bunch of us outside the trade exhibit making plans for the new group."

Dr Debbie Calnon believes Gaille's influence was crucial in gathering the numbers required for AVA to accept the formation of the new special interest group.

"I believe Gaille was instrumental in encouraging colleagues to join as her passion for behaviour had been communicated in many forums and this set the stage for a good sign up"

From these humble beginnings, AVBIG grew and grew. Gaille served as president for two years between 2008 and 2010 and had a large influence on the direction of the fledgling special interest group. The rise of AVBIG mirrored a greater interest in behaviour amongst the veterinary profession and a demand from the pet owning public.

Dr Perry proved very successful in luring high profile speakers from overseas to speak at seminars and conferences in Australia, further lifting the profile of behavioural medicine in this country. One of her proudest achievements was enticing Ray Coppinger out to speak at the first stand-alone AVBIG seminar. She recalls that 'it took a while to get him to come but it ended up being the best weekend conference I have attended.'

As Gaille steps off the committee to allow the next generation to direct AVBIG through further periods of growth, she admits there is still plenty of work to be done. One of the next steps she would like to see is for behaviour to become an integral part of the curriculum of every vet school in the country.

And her final words of sage advice for those looking to extend their knowledge in behavioural medicine:

"For those starting now the path is a lot clearer. There are major advances in knowledge every year. I have never heard of anyone who regretted getting involved in behaviour - the results are immediate and positive for veterinarians, patients and owners!"



2014 AVA Conference Photos



A Day at the Zoo

By Sally Nixon

After a full 4 days of good behaviour, sitting quietly in lectures, a small group of behaviour enthusiasts at the 2014 Perth AVA conference were rewarded with a trip to the Perth Zoological Gardens.

We arrived at the zoo before official opening hours. The absence of crowds allowed us to see the more timid creatures that are often hiding away, and many animals were more active just prior to feeding.



Everyone was delighted to see the fabulous example of environmental enrichment that is the orang-utan catwalk. It was a fabulously designed enclosure that created a balance of meeting species specific requirements while also allowing visitors to appreciate these amazing animals.

We were treated to a lovely and wholesome early lunch before receiving a short but informative presentation on the challenges of working with social groups in confinement. The Perth zoo prides itself in looking beyond the five freedoms to delve into the proximate needs of each species in more detail. Planning social groups to limit reproduction in a way that does not affect their welfare is challenging but is an important requirement in captivity where there is limited space. The zoo provides reproductive opportunity for these animals only when the provision of appropriate care for any potential offspring at another zoo becomes available.

After delivering such an informative presentation, the head veterinarian of the zoo treated us to a tour. First stop was the dingo enclosure. The dingos are well handled and are able to be walked through the zoo regularly.

Next was a guided tour of three different areas:

The nocturnal house. The ambient lighting in this building is modified so that the animals sleep during the hours when the zoo is closed and are active when visitors come to see them.

A demonstration of treatment of a white-faced gibbon's hand facilitated by positive reinforcement training and the feeding of the otters while we were provided with a description of plans for their new expanded enclosure.

Target training of the female sun bear to enable routine procedures such as teeth brushing, ear and eye checks, and intramuscular injections. They were also teaching her to allow an

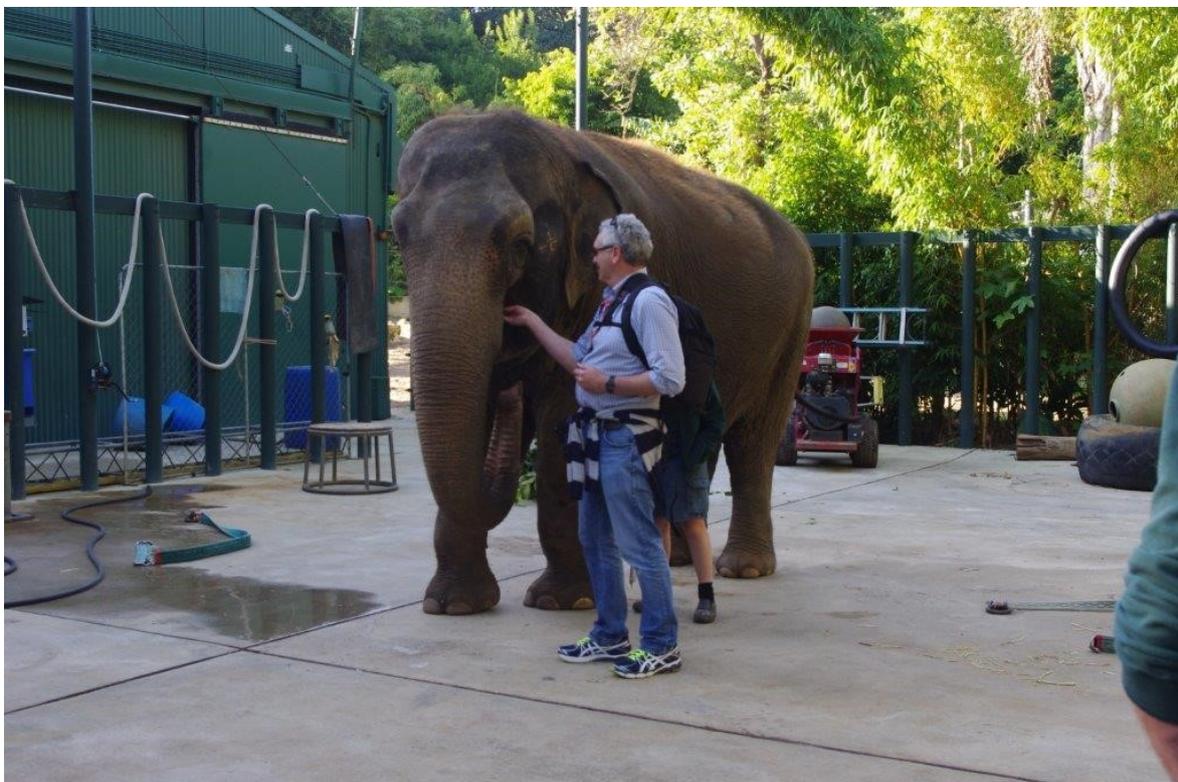


ultrasound probe to touch her abdomen so they would be able to monitor any future pregnancy.

Last on our tour was a special visit to the staff area of the elephant enclosures. After a discussion on the elephants' diet and the varying personalities of each elephant, we received several warnings not to cross the yellow lines then went in to meet them. We saw how they had learned to bang their feeders to gain the food more quickly creating much more ruckus than a buster cube or a wobble kong! The bull elephant keeper showed us how regular positive reinforcement training can be used as an aid in enrichment. And we all got to feed a female who is particularly tolerant of strangers. So tolerant that she is sometimes also walked through the zoo! It was explained that one female elephant needs regular treatment for foot problems. Her treatment was a good example of how shaping behaviours using positive reinforcement enables treatment success with minimal risk to the animal or the workers involved. Such conditioning, as also seen with the sun bear and the white-faced gibbon, is an important component in successful veterinary care of zoo animals.

Watching the work that could be done with these captive wild species was another indicator of the changes that can be implemented in the handling of domestic species for veterinary care. Altogether, it was a lovely day: informative, fun and with beautiful weather.

Photo credits– Martin Roche and Doris Beck



2014 Kersti Seksel Student Award

Background

The Kersti Seksel Student Award was established in 2012 by AVBIG (Australian Veterinary Behaviour Interest Group). It is named in honour of Kersti Seksel in recognition of her contribution to veterinary behavioural medicine in Australia.

It is open to veterinary students of an Australian Veterinary School who demonstrate an interest in behavioural medicine in veterinary practice and a genuine desire to develop this interest upon graduation.

Criteria for 2014

- The Kersti Seksel Student Award is open to veterinary students (BVSc/BVMS/DVM) currently studying at an Australian university.
- Winners will be selected from the applications received by the due date.
- This award focuses on the applicant's desire and potential capability for a career including behaviour in veterinary practice.
- Applicants must be current AVBIG student members. Upon receipt of the applications, membership currency will be checked (as per AVA current member database). Applications from non AVBIG student members will not be eligible to be judged.
- The award is not convertible to other benefit.
- While previous winners of the award are ineligible for the 2013 prize, unsuccessful applicants from previous years are encouraged to apply.
- The judging panel's decision is final and no correspondence or other communication about their decision will be entered into.

If suitable applicants are not forthcoming for the current round of the award, AVBIG reserves the right to decide to withdraw all or part of the prize as they see fit.

Prize

The top three entrants will each receive a cash prize of \$250.

How to enter

Applications close on 30 September 2014. No late entries will be accepted.

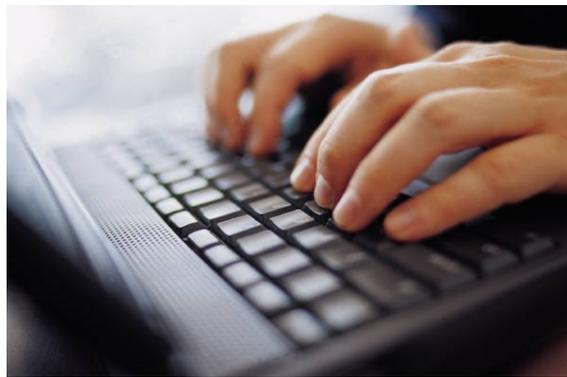
Successful entrants will be notified by 1 December, 2014.



AVBIG Facebook Group

The aim of this group is to provide a forum where members can ask questions and share news, information and media that may be of interest to other members. The group is classed as 'secret' so only those that are invited (ie. AVBIG members) will be able to view posts or know who is part of the group.

If you are not already part of the group, please email avbigpublicityofficer@gmail.com and request to be invited. If you do not have one already, you will need a facebook account to access the group. Go to [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com) and follow the prompts to join—it is free.



AVBIG Discussion Group

The AVBIG Discussion group is a moderated email list, where any current AVBIG member can post a behaviour related question or item. The list is also a way for the AVBIG committee to inform members of up-coming events, seminars, and conferences that might be of interest to members.

There are two ways you can get on board the list if you are not already a discussion group member:

- 1) You can log onto Yahoo groups (if you are already a member or are on other chat groups through Yahoo! this is the easiest way) and then send a request to join the AVBIG group. Finding the group is easiest using the 'search for a group' function – type in AVBIG and the group should show. Click on 'Join this group'. This application will be forwarded to the list manager, who will then check you are a current member of AVBIG before accepting you.
- 2) Alternatively, you can send an email to the discussion group moderator at the following address:

AVBIGDiscussionGroupModerator@gmail.com

You will then be sent an invitation via Yahoo! – simply follow the prompts in the email to join the list.

Australian Veterinary Practitioner call for papers



The Australian Veterinary Practitioner is a peer-reviewed journal produced by the ASAVA. They are very interested in seeing behaviour articles submitted (case studies or research). The guidelines for authors can be found at the following address:

http://www.ava.com.au/sites/default/files/AVA_website/ASAVA/AVP%20Guide%20to%20Authors.pdf

Aim and scope of journal:

The *Australian Veterinary Practitioner* (AVP) is the official journal of the ASAVA. The AVP aims to disseminate high quality, relevant clinical information to the practitioner by publishing refereed, scientific studies, clinical reports and clinical reviews.

If you would like further information you can email the editor directly at bruce.parry@ava.com.au

AVBIG Committee Contacts

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