

## World Rabies Day 2023

*Lesley van Helden*

World Rabies Day has been observed for the past 17 years on 28 September, the anniversary of the death of Louis Pasteur, who developed the first rabies vaccine in 1885. World Rabies Day is coordinated and promoted each year by the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC), with the aim of raising rabies awareness and preventing rabies deaths, with the ultimate goal of eliminating rabies. This year, 100 World Rabies Day events taking place in South Africa were registered on the GARC website.

In the Western Cape, rabies prevention activities take place throughout the year, but World Rabies Day and the month around it provide a good opportunity to highlight this part of our work and raise further awareness of the need for action to eliminate rabies deaths.

In our province, 34 different rabies vaccination campaigns were organised, marketed and carried out by our team of animal health technicians in



**Figure 1: Animal health technician, Janica Chapman, vaccinates a dog at a rabies prevention campaign in the Malmesbury area. (Photo: M. Chapman)**

the field (Fig. 1). Approximately 23 000 dogs and cats were vaccinated in September, both during these campaigns and as part of routine vaccinations done during farm visits.

Vaccination campaigns were complemented by liaison with 19 different local animal welfare organisations during the month and providing them with free rabies vaccines to increase vaccination coverage in the communities in which they work.

In addition to vaccinations, our



**Figure 2: Michael Swart (State Veterinarian: Malmesbury) spoke to Mia Slabbert on Grootplaas. Watch the video at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZUq5\\_x-nFc&t=9s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZUq5_x-nFc&t=9s)**



**Figure 3: Pippa Hudson interviewed Lesley van Helden (State Veterinarian: Epidemiology) on CapeTalk. Listen to the podcast at <https://omny.fm/shows/afternoons-with-pippa-hudson/world-rabies-day-1>**

officials organised and participated in a range of other rabies awareness activities.

Rabies awareness talks for school children are one of the most frequent and effective awareness activities done (Fig. 4). In September, 14 schools in the Western Cape were visited for this purpose. Children learn about caring for their pets' basic needs and how providing healthcare for animals protects the health of their families at the same time. Fun activity books produced by GARC are handed out to reinforce the message.

The NAMPO Cape Expo, which took place in Bredasdorp this month, provided another opportunity to raise awareness about rabies and other veterinary issues among the agricultural community. Officials from the Swellendam office staffed a Veterinary Services exhibit at the expo where they could interact with members of the public (Fig. 5).

In Oudtshoorn, the state veterinary office organises the annual Oudtshoorn Animal Day, in collaboration with local schools, businesses and non-profit organisations. The day is a fun day out for the whole family and includes a children's magic show, a dog obedience show, a school animal art competition (Fig. 6), a family pet lookalike photo competition, a colour run, musical performances, a reptile display and educational show, barrel tractor rides, a jumping castle, carnival games, face painting, pawprint nail art, market stalls and primary animal healthcare services including, of course, free rabies vaccinations for all dogs and cats attending. All funds raised on the day are used to finance animal welfare sterilization campaigns.

Most events and vaccination campaigns are advertised on local radio. To create more general awareness, two of our state veterinarians, Michael Swart and Lesley van Helden, also did media interviews about World Rabies Day on national television (Fig. 2) and radio (Fig. 3), respectively.



**Figure 4: Children ready to listen to a rabies awareness talk at their school (Photo: M. Vrey)**



**Figure 5: Veterinary Services created awareness of rabies at NAMPO Cape in Bredasdorp. (Photo: M. James)**



**Figure 6: Oudtshoorn Animal Day children's art competition (Photo: C. Fox)**

# Outbreak events

Two cases of **rabies** were confirmed by laboratory testing in the province this month:

- ⇒ An **aardwolf** came onto a farm near **Murraysburg** and chased the workers. It was shot before it could make contact with people or other animals on the farm. Dogs and cats on the farm had been vaccinated previously against rabies and so were revaccinated by the local animal health technician in response to this case.
- ⇒ A **goat** near **Beaufort West** stopped eating and drinking and was biting the two goat kids housed with it. The goat was killed and the carcass collected by the local animal health technician for testing. She had coincidentally vaccinated all dogs and cats on the farm and on neighbouring farms against rabies earlier that same week. All people who had had contact with the goat received post-exposure prophylaxis.

Two out of six **chickens** kept at an animal welfare association near **Malmesbury** died suddenly. Samples taken from the carcasses tested positive for **H5 avian influenza** virus, but further typing results have not been received.

**Avian influenza** (AI) virus and/or antibodies were detected on eighteen **ostrich** farms in the **Oudtshoorn** (10), **de Rust** (2), **Langkloof** (3), **Heidelberg** (2) and **Touwsrivier** (1) areas. Avian influenza virus was detected via PCR on ten farms but all except one were negative on the H5 and H7 subtyping tests and so the subtype is unknown. H5 virus was detected via PCR on one farm near Oudtshoorn, bringing the total H5 virus detections in ostriches to two in 2023. Four farms in the Oudtshoorn area have been shown to be AI-negative after follow-up testing.

Several **wild hares** were found dead in the veld on a property in the **Ladismith** area. The carcasses had already been partially consumed by scavengers, so samples could not be taken, but an outbreak of **rabbit haemorrhagic disease** is strongly suspected.

**Salmonella Enteritidis** was cultured from crates of **chicks** arriving on a broiler farm near **Worcester**. The farm has implemented a *Salmonella* monitoring and reduction programme in response.

**Erysipelas** lesions were seen on a small number of **pig** carcasses after slaughter from two farms in the **Swartland**.

**Abscesses** were treated in a billy **goat** and a **sheep** ram on a property near **Vanrhynsdorp**.

**Red lice** were identified in a flock of **sheep** near **Beaufort West**.

A farmer in the **Vanrhynsdorp** area suspected bluetongue in his **sheep** and called the local animal health technician. On inspection, the sheep were found to be suffering from **dikkop**: swelling of the face caused by photosensitivity from ingestion of toxic plants, usually wilted *Tribulus terrestris* (Figs 7 and 8).



Figures 7 and 8: Sheep showing clinical signs of dikkop (Photos: J. Kotzé)

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