

AAV Member Spotlight: Pilar Fish, DVM

It is with great pleasure that we announce a new addition to the AAV newsletter: Member Spotlight. This special feature showcases the association's most valuable asset—our members—by highlighting our diverse backgrounds, professional activities, experience, and geographic locations.

If you would like to be featured in this section, or would like to suggest a fellow member to profile, please complete the [Member Spotlight Questionnaire](#) today.

Pilar Fish, DVM

Director of Veterinary Medicine, National Aviary
Pittsburgh, PA USA
AAV member since 1994



What was the first bird job you ever had?

Even though I've had pet birds all my life, my first real job working with birds was as a veterinarian during my Internship in Exotic Animal, Wildlife, and Zoo Animal Medicine at Kansas State University with Dr. James Carpenter. This was an intensive year of training where I learned about the intricacies of avian medicine. Dr. Carpenter taught me the principles of working on fragile birds that I still use to this day and now teach to the students that train at the aviary. My experience at KSU was the foundation of me becoming an avian veterinarian.

What was the last interesting avian medical or surgical issue you dealt with in your work?

Part of the National Aviary's mission is to be active in conservation programs that benefit wild birds. One of these programs is breeding Andean condors to release the offspring in the Andes Mountains. Our condor pair produced 2 chicks in the past that now live in the wild. Unfortunately this valuable pair had a crisis where the male suddenly died and the female was ill. After examination, rodenticide toxicity was a differential diagnosis which was later confirmed with the male's necropsy results. A nearby park was poisoning rats with brodifacoum and the condors ate a dying rat. The female was declining rapidly with significant clotting abnormalities that were not responding well to Vitamin K therapy. A blood transfusion was needed but with no other condor, I decided to collect blood from our Steller's and Bald eagles to transfuse her. She was very critical at that point and there were many challenges due to her size and nature. But the transfusion worked and she made a rapid and full recovery in ICU. It is now rewarding to see her thriving, with a new mate, and a new exhibit on the way. The outcomes of these types of difficult cases can become very fulfilling as a vet.

Best benefits of AAV membership?

One of the best benefits of being an AAV member is reading the Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery. This is a significant resource for avian veterinarians to learn the latest procedures and treatments. The journal provides a wealth of practical information that I use to try to improve the way I practice medicine. I have been a member of AAV for 20 years and look forward to the educational opportunities it offers whether it's with the journals or other resources like attending the conferences and practical labs. AAV has always been instrumental to me continuing to develop as an avian vet.

What is your favorite avian species and why?

In the past 11 years working at the National Aviary, my eyes have been opened to the phenomenal diversity of bird species. My new favorite birds to work with are tanagers, honeycreepers, finches, and canaries. They may be tiny but are packed with attitude and energy. The aviary opened a new exhibit, Canary's Call, featuring these birds with a powerful educational message: birds are crucial sentinels for environmental health; we need to listen to them. These birds are spectacular as individuals and collectively important to the environment. My new favorite birds inspire me to take action in conservation programs.