

AAV Member Spotlight: Patricia Latas, DVM, MS, BS

It is with great pleasure that we present 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.

What was the first bird job you ever had?

Bird bander field biologist and field museum collections

Most memorable AAV experience or contribution.

Submitting art for covers and auction; being able to contribute to AAV through art donations and monies raised via auctions!

What is your favorite avian species and why?

I love all birds....BUT I have to list the Kakapo as my favorite species. It is such a strange parrot, they are just so weird and wonderful; so interesting from biological, evolutionary, biogeographical aspects; plus they are amazing individual personalities; and they SMELL NICE! All my close seconds start with "K": Kagu, Kakariki, Kea, Kaka, Konure (!)

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

Examining the damaged eye of an old male Kagu sitting on his egg. Not a medical challenge, but a challenge as to the location, my language deficits, climate and terrain, and achieving a life-time dream of seeing these amazing birds wild and in the field. And listening to the chick inside the warm, heavy egg.

Best benefits of AAV membership?

Being involved with like-minded and inspiring people.

If you had not chosen your present career, what would you be doing?

I would probably be a retired field biologist studying biogeography, and/or a science illustrator.

What was your favorite class or activity in vet school/vet tech school/college?

Parasitology--what's not to love? What is not more awesome than parasitology field trips?

Describe an anecdote that would be of interest to your colleagues.

I will now tell the story of Lisa, a mature female Kakapo. Lisa was captured on Stewart Island (Rakiura) in 1982. She has had a number of offspring and a lot of eggs. Lisa is usually the first female to rush into mating, every year in which a breeding season happens. And so it was this time, a 47 minute session with her selected male, Blades. She has chosen Blades (also from Stewart Island in 1982) several times. Lisa rushed to her nest, and produced two eggs. One proved to be infertile, and one held a tiny, precious, viable embryo. This treasured egg was incubated faithfully by Lisa, until in an unfortunate accident, she crushed the nearly full-term egg. Because all nesting females are under close observation by dedicated staff and volunteers, the egg was rushed to the headquarters' incubator, and Lisa was given a dummy egg to replace it. The embryo was only a few days from hatching. Kakapo rangers patched it up with tape and glue...and it hatched! A miracle and testament to pure dedication, knowledge and compassion from the Kakapo Recovery Team. "Lisa-1" turned out to be a robust male kakapo, and months later was officially named Ruapuke, to celebrate the Maori heritage of Southern New Zealand. He is on his way to become a celebrity-in-training and ambassador for conservation. I am so honored to have served as a Kakapo volunteer, and as an illustrator for them. I was able to provide veterinary care for a few of them while on Whenua Hou. I came to know the new ones such as Ruapuke, and to revere the old distinguished ones, such as Barnard and Flossie. It was a real blessing to feed and care for hatchlings and giant, growing chicks. And what a treat to see them bouncing and skipping through the forest! Working with the Kakapo inspired me during some very bad times in my life, the lovely memories getting me through the rough parts of chemotherapy and surgery for breast cancer. These amazing birds solidified my dedication to avian conservation issues: as a vet, as an artist, and in every way I can contribute. They reminded me that wonder and amazement are driving factors in avian medicine.



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