

MEDIA RELEASE

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**Wildlife Health Australia celebrates International Day of Women and Girls in Science 2024
– hear from one of our wonderful women in science; Dr Erin Davis**

Wildlife Health Australia is celebrating International Day of Women and Girls in Science this Sunday (February 11) by recognising the remarkable scientific contributions made by its impressive array of team members who are individually and collectively, inspirational women in science.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science celebrates the achievements and contributions of women and girls in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Of WHA's scientific team, 80% are women and they work across incredibly diverse areas including wildlife disease surveillance, emergency preparedness and management, research, epidemiology, disease risk assessment and prevention, forging impactful partnerships, and a wholistic approach to One Health.

WHA's Project Office for One Health, Erin Davis shared her insights into the vital work of women in science at Wildlife Health Australia:

“As a member of the International One Health team, our aim is to adopt a one health approach, recognising the interdependence of human, animal, and environmental health to ensure a healthy planet. We integrate wildlife health with one health to improve understanding of what drives emerging global wildlife health risks, including zoonotic diseases, how to assess and manage wildlife health risks, and to help support and promote people working with wildlife in the Asia Pacific region.

“My greatest aspiration is to make a significant contribution to the protection of wildlife, using a whole of system approach that recognises that by protecting wildlife, we also protect ecosystems, biodiversity, people, and the planet. I believe an important part of this is supporting, educating, and empowering women working in the field of wildlife science.”

International Day of Women and Girls in Science was established in 2015 following the passing of a UN resolution recognising that women are under-represented in science and technology fields; tend to be given smaller research grants; tend to have fewer promotional opportunities and have shorter careers than their male counterparts. As well, it has been shown that schoolgirls are less encouraged to study science than boys.

Honouring this year's International Day of Women and Girls in Science, Wildlife Health Australia's National Coordinator and Chief Operating Officer Dr Tiggy Grillo said:

“We are very proud to acknowledge our wonderful team of women in science who are making such vital contributions to healthy wildlife, but also healthy ecosystems, animals in

agriculture and also human health. Our whole team works tirelessly to ensure that excellence in scientific endeavour is supporting a healthy planet.”

An interview with Dr Erin Davis, Project Officer- One Health Surveillance and Wildlife Collaborating Centre for Australia and the Indo-Pacific, Wildlife Health Australia.

What motivated you to choose to study and have a career in science?

My passion for understanding and improving animal health and a deep-seated curiosity about the natural world motivated me to pursue a career as a veterinarian. Working in wildlife health gives me the opportunity to combine this passion with a profession that can make a tangible difference in safeguarding not only wildlife, but also human health and the environment. I enjoy the dynamic and impactful nature of scientific work, where every day brings new challenges and discoveries.

Your role at WHA is in One Health, can you explain what that is? Why is it important globally?

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What is your greatest aspiration from within your current job?

My greatest aspiration is to make a significant contribution to the protection of wildlife, using a whole of system approach that recognises that by protecting wildlife, we also protect ecosystems, biodiversity, people, and the planet. I believe an important part of this is supporting, educating, and empowering women working in the field of wildlife science.

Can you give me a summary of your involvement and achievements in the Homeward Bound program about Women in STEM?

I was lucky enough to have been chosen to take part in Homeward Bound, a ground-breaking 12-month leadership initiative for women in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine). I've been participating with an amazing cohort of over 100 women from around the world, to increase leadership capacity, strategic capability, visibility, and collaboration, to help create better outcomes for the planet. The program culminates with a voyage to Antarctica in 2025, one of the most ecologically sensitive and inspiring areas on earth. I see this program as an opportunity to build my leadership skills, and to develop my ability to support other women who work or want to work in STEMM fields and who are passionate like I am about a healthy, thriving planet.

Of WHA's science team, 80% are women; what are some of the cool things they are working on?

Eighty per cent of WHA's science team are women who are engaged in a diverse range of programs. These include our surveillance, emergencies, capacity building, and international one health programs, with women who work hard to safeguard our wildlife, but in doing so, also protect the health of humans, other animals, and the environment. I feel very lucky to work with some amazing women in science at WHA, with their skills in collaboration, scientific endeavour, leadership, communication, and education continuing to inspire me daily!

For example, our surveillance and emergency teams continue to make significant and ongoing contribution to surveillance, communication, and preparedness activities for the risk of an incursion of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) via wildlife to Australia. Our newest program capacity building manager has built a program that focuses on developing WHA's capability to improve relationships, knowledge, skills and systems for wildlife health, including building mutually beneficial partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations and the development of WHA's first Reconciliation Action Plan.

You've given talks at schools about scientific endeavour – what's important to impart to the next generation?

There are many important things to impart to the next generation! I'm driven by a desire to play my part to help leave the world in a better place. I would emphasize the importance of curiosity, critical thinking, and perseverance in scientific endeavours. I encourage students to pursue science to make meaningful contributions to society and to understand the responsibility we have in shaping a sustainable future. I hope to inspire and show young girls that a career in science can be incredibly rewarding, and that women in science is vital to help bring diverse perspectives and innovative approaches to the table, to enhance research, problem-solving, and to foster a more inclusive and equitable scientific community.

Background:

International Day of Women and Girls in Science takes place on 11 February and celebrates the achievements and contributions of women and girls in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

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