



News

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ST. LOUIS ZOO WILL EXPAND PARTNERSHIP WITH CHARLES DARWIN RESEARCH STATION, GALAPAGOS NATIONAL PARK

The St. Louis Zoo will expand its cooperative effort with Charles Darwin Research Station and the Galápagos National Park this summer in a biomedical survey of endemic birds, it was announced today. “We want to ensure that new diseases are not being introduced to populations of endemic wildlife on the Galápagos Islands,” says Dr. R. Eric Miller, director of animal health and conservation at the St. Louis Zoo. “Our conservation partnership will set up an early-warning system to help safeguard the unique birds of the Galapagos and make sure that new diseases are not being introduced to populations there.”

The Charles Darwin Research Station and the Galápagos National Park manage the populations of endemic wildlife on the Galápagos Islands. Recently they became aware of new diseases, the same ones responsible for the extinction of so many Hawaiian birds over the last century. At about that time, Dr. Patty Parker joined the St. Louis Zoo and University of Missouri-St. Louis as Des Lee Professor of Zoological Research.

Dr. Parker and her students have been conducting research on the Galápagos hawk and the waved albatross, a bird that nests only on the Galápagos island of Espanola. Now with the new Des Lee Zoological Collaborative in place, Parker and the St. Louis Zoo are in a position to mount the first survey of avian diseases among the birds on Galápagos at a time when it is most needed.

“Perhaps the fauna of the Galápagos Islands represents the most pristine oceanic island fauna there is,” Parker explains. “There have been no extinctions. Alarming, however, was the arrival of the same mosquito that was responsible for



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bringing avian malaria to Hawaii and the appearance of avian pox on chickens and some native birds on the main island of Santa Cruz.”

A scientific team of St. Louis Zoo staff has taught a workshop on bird disease monitoring techniques to Ecuadorian personnel for the past two years. This training allows the park and station staffs to continue monitoring throughout the year.

Working with UMSL graduate students, the Zoo team returns to St. Louis with samples from both native and introduced birds for disease testing. To aid this effort, the St. Louis Zoo has stationed a board-certified veterinary pathologist, Dr. Timothy Walsh, at the Charles Darwin Research Station to train Ecuadorian veterinary scientists in pathology techniques and to provide more in-depth monitoring of bird species.

“We hope that our early-warning system and ongoing work will allow this partnership to safeguard these birds that live nowhere else on Earth,” says Parker.

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