



# The Islander



Christmas Island Community Newsletter

Berita 岛简  
Masyarakat 民讯  
Pulau Krismas

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## AUSTRALIA DAY BIG BREAKFAST

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Premier's Citizenship Awards  
POON SAAN  
COMMUNITY HALL  
TUESDAY 26TH JANUARY 2016  
7.00AM - 10.00AM

### Potentially serious pathogens found in feral cats on Christmas Island

A Murdoch University researcher has found a range of pathogenic bacteria and parasites which can have serious consequences if transmitted to humans in feral cats and black rats on Christmas Island.

Narelle Dybing from the School of Veterinary and Life Sciences found the bacteria *Leptospira*, which can cause Weil's disease and *Bartonella*, which can lead to cat scratch disease.

Both of these disease-causing bacteria are zoonotic, meaning they can be transmitted from animals to humans if they come into close contact with one another. Whilst infection with *Leptospira* and *Bartonella* can result in initially indistinct symptoms such as fever, headaches, chills and muscle aches, further progression can be much more serious, leading to jaundice, swollen lymph nodes and even organ failure in humans.

Ms Dybing, who is investigating infectious diseases for her PhD at Murdoch University, said: "Zoonotic strains of *Leptospira* are most commonly transmitted to humans from dogs and black rats; however, in our study we detected human pathogenic *Leptospira* in 43 per cent of cats tested on Christmas Island.

"Flying foxes have also been shown to carry and shed *Leptospira*; however, it is unknown if the Christmas Island flying fox – the one remaining native mammal on Christmas Island – carries *Leptospira*.

"It is transmitted in urine, so people who do water sports can be at risk. The beginning symptoms are like the flu for humans – so it can be under-detected because of this. The illness in humans is treatable but it has to be identified early. Many animals seemingly carry it with no ill effects."

Ms Dybing also found *Bartonella koehlerae* in a feral cat in the south west of WA. This was the first case of this pathogenic bacterial species in the southern hemisphere.

*Bartonella koehlerae* is pathogenic to humans, commonly causing severe immune responses and swollen lymph nodes, and in severe cases heart issues and hallucinations. "Human infections of *Bartonella koehlerae* have recently been reported from the US and Iran," said Ms Dybing.

Rat lung worm, or *Angiostongylus* has also been found by Ms Dybing on Christmas Island. She said none of her samples from mainland WA were positive for this parasite, but there have been several cases reported from the eastern states of Australia.



Whaleshark Photo: Yvonne McKenzie



Above: Ms Narelle Dybing





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**Premier's Australia Day  
Active Citizenship Awards 2016**

**POON SAAN COMMUNITY HALL  
TUESDAY 26TH JANUARY 2016  
7.00AM - 10.00AM**

**WE ARE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS FOR THIS EVENT,  
IF YOU ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP, PLEASE CONTACT:  
ARFAH OMAR 9164 8300 ext.231/MOB: 0400221391  
WEI HO 9164 8300 ext.221**