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Rabies outbreak surges

'Many, many more' cases than the 70 so far confirmed in Bay

Riaan Marais
maraisr@theherald.co.za

The rabies outbreak in Nelson Mandela Bay is far worse than reflected by current figures, and is on course to be one of the worst ever seen in the province.

State and private vets, who are scrambling to contain the outbreak, say the 70 confirmed cases in the Bay are a drop in the ocean.

"We can without a doubt say there are many, many more," Dr Lungile Jali, district deputy director for veterinarian services, said.

Canine rabies already claimed the life of nine-year-old Owami Bhuti of Motherwell last week.

With only 13 people known to have survived canine rabies worldwide, the fears over what will happen should the spread not be contained are very real. Jali said state veterinary services had noted a steady increase in rabies cases in the Bay since January, but became worried when the numbers started to spike last month.

"Lab results have confirmed rabies in about 70 dogs in Nelson Mandela Bay since January.

"However, the real figure is far greater as not all animals that show symptoms are necessarily tested in labs, but we



SAVING LIVES: Dr Matthijs Ravensberg, of the Mount Croix Animal Hospital, vaccinates 'Woofie' against rabies
Picture: EUGENE COETZEE

know they also contracted the deadly virus and had to be put down [euthanised]," he said.

"We had confirmed cases in dogs in Bluewater Bay, followed by a large-scale vaccination rollout in that area.

"Around the same time, horses near Amsterdamhoek also exhibited symptoms and lab results confirmed the infection.

"Since then we have seen a steady increase.

"From mid-August, cases in Nelson Mandela Bay began to spike."

Bhuti's death highlighted the virus's danger to people and the trauma inflicted on

families having to watch loved ones suffer such an agonising death.

Rabies has a near 100% mortality rate, with little more than a handful having survived globally since 1970 — the most recent case being a four-year-old boy from KwaZulu-Natal in 2012.

He managed to receive a post-exposure prophylaxis (also used to treat exposure to HIV) shortly after being bitten by a rabid dog, which ultimately saved his life.

Private veterinarians said the rate at which the virus had spread was troubling and immediate action needed to be taken before more animals — and people — lost their lives.

Mount Croix Animal Hospital vet Dr Matthijs Ravensberg said the city had not seen a rabies outbreak as bad as this in decades.

He warned pet owners to take the necessary steps to ensure the safety of their animals and themselves.

"I never thought I would see a single case of rabies in my life, and now we've [seen] three confirmed cases in the last month."

Ravensberg said all three cases were dogs brought in from the northern areas.

Other vets have reported

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Music to their ears



An outdoor concert of gratitude was held by the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra at Grootte Schuur Hospital in Cape Town yesterday to show recognition and appreciation for the work being done by frontline healthcare workers across the nation during the coronavirus pandemic
Picture: ESA ALEXANDER

Fraudster feels the burn after braai meat plunder

Devon Koen
koend@theherald.co.za

He lied about being involved in a car accident so that he could claim from the Road Accident Fund (RAF) when in reality he fell off a roof, and then, even when the courts gave him a second chance, he went on a shopping spree for braai meat he never paid for.

Unfortunately for Neville Peacock, he will not be putting those chops on a fire this Her-

itage Day. The 54-year-old Nelson Mandela Bay resident was convicted of fraud in 2019 after lodging a R250,000 claim with the RAF for a car accident which never actually happened.

After pleading guilty to the charge on March 19 2019, he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, wholly suspended for five years.

But now he has run foul of the law again, this time for stealing groceries from

Shoprite. Already serving a sentence for another unrelated matter, Peacock faces further jail time if the Geberha Commercial Crimes Court decides to implement his three-year suspended sentence for his fraud conviction.

In handing down sentence at the time, magistrate Lionel Lindoor had agreed to suspend the prison term on condition that Peacock not be convicted of fraud or theft in the period of the suspension.

But hunger and an apparent appetite for a braai must have overcome him, as just over a year later, Peacock was caught stealing 2kg mixed chicken pieces, two bulk pork packs, various types of boerewors, frozen chicken, beef mince, mutton braai chops and spicy Russian sausages.

The value of the stolen goods amounted to just more than R740.

In a confession before the Commercial Crimes Court,

where Peacock appeared briefly yesterday, he said he had gone to Shoprite in Stanford Road, Korsten, on March 25 last year.

He then told how he had walked casually through the aisles collecting the items on his shopping list and placing them carefully in the bag he had with him.

"I then proceeded to leave the store without paying. I passed all the till points," Pea-

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'Vaccination is the best control measure against rabies and we implore people to bring their animals to the vaccination sites for free inoculations'

Rabies outbreak surges

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cases from Kariega, Despatch and Motherwell.

The large number of stray dogs in the city is a major concern and possibly one of the largest contributing factors to the virus's quick spread.

Animals with rabies can present a variety of symptoms. They always die after becoming infected.

The virus is spread through contact with saliva, most commonly when an infected animal bites or licks another animal or person.

Domestic animals, particularly dogs, are most dangerous to people.

They most commonly become hyper-aggressive, drool excessively and foam at the mouth.

They will often be seen snapping at imaginary objects and become noticeably uncoordinated.

They suffer from muscle paralysis, lose the ability to swallow and eventually die.

Some people have also reported a change in the tone of a dog's bark or a cat's

miaow, along with changes in behaviour.

Cattle, horses and other livestock can also contract rabies. However, the rate of the spread of the virus within a herd is minimal as most livestock do not bite when they become aggressive.

According to Jali, wild animals often exhibited the opposite change in behaviour.

"Under normal circumstances, wild animals such as jackals or mongoose, run away from people.

"However, once they contract rabies they become tame.

"However, they can still bite without warning, possibly transmitting the virus."

According to guidelines by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, a person who believes they may have been exposed to rabies should immediately rinse the infected area and seek medical assistance.

Quick treatment with a post-exposure prophylaxis could prevent the virus before it infects the person, but once symptoms are exhibited, there

is no known treatment.

"Unless your animal is vaccinated, do not assume it is safe," Ravensberg said.

"All three cases we had were from dogs kept behind closed gates, but they were somehow still exposed to infected animals.

"Pets can be vaccinated at three months of age and should receive a follow-up shot before their first birthday.

"From there, they should be vaccinated annually to ensure immunity."

He said infected dogs could either be extremely aggressive or very lethargic.

Jali said as September marked Rabies Awareness Month, more teams would be seconded to the Bay from next week to assist with free animal vaccinations.

"Vaccination is the best control measure against rabies and we implore people to bring their animals to the vaccination sites for free inoculations."

SA Vets' Association Eastern Cape secretary Dr Mark Pellissier said private veterinarians were joining the cause from

early October with a campaign to fast-track vaccinations in high-risk areas.

"We have bought 10,000 vaccines from the government and many private vets have volunteered their time to roll out vaccination projects in the first week of October.

"We only need to confirm venues.

"We understand that government vets are overrun, so we want to do our part."

Pellissier said if 70% of domestic pets were vaccinated around the city, then they could develop herd immunity and effectively stop the spread of rabies.

"Throughout Rabies Awareness Month many private practices have been offering free or heavily discounted vaccinations to the public.

"We want to encourage people to look after their animals and get the vaccinations. It could save your pet, and maybe even your own life."

Anyone who suspects an animal may be infected should contact the state veterinarian on 041-406-6700.

WHAT IS ON AND WHERE

Notice is hereby given that the 38th Annual General Meeting of the Port Elizabeth Animal Anti-Cruelty League will be held on **Thursday 30th September 2021** at 17h30 at the Victoria Park Sports Club, Victoria Drive, South End. Tea and light refreshments will be served after the meeting.