

## Zoo Patients Add Variety to VSG Caseload

- by Richard Jakob-Hoff BVMS Senior Veterinarian New Zealand Centre for Conservation Medicine

Auckland Zoo has had a long and very beneficial relationship with the Veterinary Specialist Group vets - dating back to the early 1990's when our elephant Kashin developed an infection in one of the toe bones of her right front foot. An expert elephant trainer was imported from Australia to help train her to lie on a purpose-made 'jumbo-sized' mattress (to prevent pressure damage to muscles and nerves during prolonged anaesthesia). An experienced elephant anaesthetist came over from San Diego to lead a team of human and veterinary anaesthetists and technicians. Dr. Alex Walker of VSG led the surgical and nursing team in successfully removing the infected pieces of bone in what was only the second time such an operation had been performed anywhere in the world. Because limb amputation in heavy animals like elephants isn't feasible, this infection could have been life threatening had it progressed up the foot. Instead, Kashin - by far the Zoo's most popular animal- made a complete recovery and continues to thrive. Regular X rays of Kashin's front feet, taken by Peter Nicholson and Russell Wade of Portable X-Rays, are checked for any early signs of infection with the expert help of VSG's Dr. Chris Warman.

Drs Walker and Warman and, more recently also Drs. Richard Jerram and Mark Robson, have generously provided diagnostic and surgical help to the Zoo on

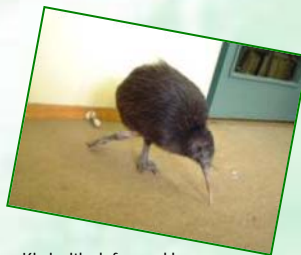
numerous occasions since then. As well as Kashin, their patients have included an agouti with a complicated fracture of the tarsal joint, a kiwi with a deformed leg corrected by a 180° rotation and plating of the tibio-tarsus and, in association with human surgical specialists, an orangutan that has needed exploratory abdominal surgery on three occasions. All of these animals have recovered very well.

Dr. Warman regularly helps by performing and interpreting ultrasounds on species as diverse as red pandas, chimps and chameleons.

The expertise and time of all these colleagues has been provided free-of-charge, as has the use of the specialised equipment and facilities at VSG. The Zoo is deeply grateful for this generous, on-going sponsorship. The focus of the Zoo's veterinary team is disease and injury prevention and consequently the number of surgeries needing to be performed is small. However, when the need arises for particularly complicated surgeries or diagnostics we are very grateful to be able to call on the expertise at VSG. The whole team - from receptionists to veterinary nurses to veterinarians, bend over backwards to help when needed and we couldn't wish for better colleagues. Their efforts make a big contribution towards our job of ensuring the Zoo's animals receive the highest standard of veterinary care.



Chameleon



Kiwi with deformed leg



Alex Walker & Richard Jerram with Kiwi



Lion cub



Otter prepared for ultrasound



Chris Warman and lion cub at MRI



Veterinary Specialist Group