

Tiger poo pregnancy test nothing to sniff at

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Dr Tamara Keeley with Adira and Akasha

A non-invasive pregnancy test for tigers developed at The University of Queensland has played a key role in the latest tiger cub births at Dreamworld on Queensland's Gold Coast.

UQ reproductive biologist Dr Tamara Keeley analysed the faeces of Dreamworld's nine-year-old [tiger](#) Nika to confirm her two pregnancies last year, which resulted in the births of male cub Kai, and female cubs Adira and Akasha.

Dr Keeley, from UQ's School of Agriculture and Food Sciences, has used non-invasive endocrinology tests to monitor wildlife over the past

13 years.

She said the hormone test was done with little impact on the tigers.

"You need a non-invasive way to monitor tigers to confirm pregnancies without disrupting their normal routines," she said.

"Testing their faeces enables us to gather valuable information about their hormones without the need to restrain or sedate them."

Dr Keeley said one of the challenges in tiger reproduction was that they did not ovulate unless they physically mated, which is different to most other species.

"Another challenge is that most tiger pregnancies are not visually obvious until the last 10 to 12 days of their 105- to 110-day gestation period," she said.

"With this hormone test, we are able to confirm that the tiger is pregnant about a month and a half into her gestation, so the zookeepers can optimise her management and care during the pregnancy to ensure the best outcome for the cubs."

She said zookeepers could collect faeces easily in a routine clean-up, making it much safer than handling the tigers.

"Anything we can do to improve reproduction in a captive setting ensures that the animals can be perpetuated over time in a captive breeding program.

"So it's really important for any species that's threatened or endangered, including tigers."

General Manager of Life Sciences at Dreamworld Al Mucci said it was important for handlers of captive animals to know as soon as possible when tigers were pregnant.

"The welfare and care of our tigers and wildlife in our collection is a top priority so we needed a safe way to identify Nika's pregnancies. This method was by far the best and the simplest," Mr Mucci said.

"Kai and his sisters are a testament to the important role that scientific knowledge plays in captive wildlife management and to the success of our partnership with UQ."

Dr Keeley also worked with Dreamworld staff last year to assist with the successful breeding of a rare Lumholtz tree kangaroo.

She has established a new wildlife endocrinology lab at UQ's Gatton campus and she and Associate Professor Stephen Johnston teach an animal reproduction course where students learn to run simple hormonal tests to detect pregnancy in animals.

The course is an important component of two new programs – the Bachelor of Veterinary Technology and the Bachelor of Wildlife Science – available this year at the University's Gatton campus.

Provided by University of Queensland

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