



# Annual Report 2024

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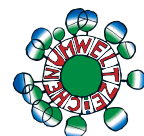
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Messerli Research Institute

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# Statements



**Heinz Schweizer**  
**Honorary President of the Messerli Foundation**

In 2023, a strategic agreement was reached between the three Vienna universities and the Messerli Foundation, enabling the Messerli Research Institute to strengthen its activities and expand into new areas in the coming years. The very fact that four new assistant professorships are to be established at the Messerli Research Institute reflects a highly positive, dynamic development. In 2024, Stefanie Riemer was appointed Assistant Professor of Companion Animal Management, and further appointments are in preparation. I have had the privilege of being involved since the Institute's founding in 2010. At the end of the year I handed over my role as the chairman of the Foundation's board for the Messerli Research Institute to Rudolf Aebbersold. I wish him success and fulfillment in this role – just as I was fortunate to experience during my tenure.

Photo: Messerli Foundation



**Eva-Maria Holzleitner**  
**Austrian Federal Minister for Women, Science & Research**

The Messerli Research Institute makes a valuable contribution to fostering a responsible and respectful relationship between humans and animals. Its interdisciplinary research brings together the natural and human sciences, thereby building a bridge between science and society. We need guidance grounded in sound scientific knowledge, especially in times when our coexistence with animals raises ethical, ecological, and health-related questions. I would like to thank all the researchers for their dedication and their work in the service of knowledge-based, societal progress. The University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, will continue to play its part in ensuring the success of this important mission.

Photo: BKA/Andy Wenzel



**Peter Sandøe**  
**Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board**

After nearly 10 years as the chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Messerli Research Institute, it was time for me to step down in 2024. I am glad that I was able to contribute to developing this experiment into a strong, internationally recognised research institute that contributes in many ways to fulfilling the Messerli mission and generates knowledge that benefits both animals and their owners and caregivers. I continue to wish the wonderful employees of the Messerli Research Institute every success!

Photo: Sandøe



**Matthias Gauly**  
**Rector of the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna**

In April 2025, I had the honour of taking on the role of Rector. The Messerli Research Institute is one of the truly outstanding institutions at our university. Since its founding, it has developed into a nationally and internationally recognised research centre that not only generates fundamental knowledge, but also produces insights that directly benefit animal keepers and the animals themselves. The latter is very much in keeping with the intentions of the institute's benefactor, Herta Messerli. I extend my sincere thanks to the staff of the Messerli Research Institute for their tremendous commitment and wish them continued success in the years ahead.

Photo: Michael Bernkopf/Vetmeduni



**Michaela Fritz**  
**Vice-Rector for Research and Innovation of the Medical University of Vienna**

In 2024, the Messerli Research Institute not only achieved outstanding results in research, teaching, and public outreach, but also strategically repositioned itself both in terms of content and organisational structure to prepare for the future. It was possible to set the course for long-term, interdisciplinary, and inter-institutional cooperation and growth, thanks to the generous support of the Messerli Foundation and trusting collaboration between the three universities. For the Medical University of Vienna, this collaboration opens up exciting research questions and contributes to its international positioning on the topic of human-animal interactions.

Photo: MedUni Wien/Matern



**Manuela Baccarini**  
**Vice-Rector for Research and International Affairs at the University of Vienna**

In 2024, the Messerli Research Institute once again set new standards with its innovative projects and interdisciplinary approaches. As Vice-Rector for Research and Internationalisation, I look forward to supporting both the institute's continued development and to advancing international collaboration and scientific excellence in the study of human-animal interactions.

Photo: dexknopfdruecker.com



# Editorial

Another eventful year at the Messerli Research Institute lies behind us. 2024 was marked by innovations at the organisational level and far-reaching ideas, whose implementation will sustainably transform and further develop our institute.

First and foremost, the strategy for the expansion of the Messerli Research Institute should be mentioned. This strategy was officially signed by the Messerli Foundation and the partner universities (Vetmeduni, Medical University of Vienna, and University of Vienna) on December 18, 2024. This expansion strategy and the corresponding financial support reflect the great appreciation and trust of the foundation and the partner universities in the work accomplished. In the future, the institute's exchange and interdisciplinary collaboration will be further strengthened through newly appointed professors, a postdoc programme, and an outreach platform. At this point, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the Messerli Foundation. Without its trust and generous support, our commitment to the research and improvement of human-animal relationships would not be possible. Special thanks are due to Dr. Heinz Schweizer, who, with enormous personal commitment, supported the development of the institute. At the end of 2024 he handed over his function of the chairman of the Messerli Foundation's board for the Messerli Research Institute to Prof. Dr. Rudolf Aebersold. We are pleased to include a short conversation with Mr. Schweizer in our annual report, discussing the history of the Messerli Research Institute, the preparations, establishment phase, and an outlook into the future.

Furthermore, we would like to thank the scientific advisory board, which accompanied us under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Peter Sandøe until 2024 and is now being replaced by a new team. The scientific and strategic advice of this committee has been (and continues to be) a great support in continuously improving and developing.

A major change will be the departure of the Comparative Medicine team in 2025, which has significantly contributed to the success of the Messerli Research Institute since its founding, under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Erika Jensen-Jarolim. It is no exaggeration to say that an important, supporting pillar of the Messerli Research Institute will be missed. We would like to explicitly thank the employees of "Comparative Medicine" for their intensive and unwavering commitment. This annual report includes a brief review of the nearly 15 years of successful work by Erika Jensen-Jarolim, her unit and her great team. We wish Erika Jensen-Jarolim and her employees all the best and thank them warmly for the time together. Some of them will continue working at Vetmeduni. Regina Meixner has retired, and we hope she will enjoy her retirement with the same energy she brought to her former workplace.

Also, all the employees of the entire Messerli Research Institute should be thanked at this point, as it is their achievements that are appreciated by the Messerli Foundation. These remarkable achievements from 2024 are briefly summarized at the beginning of this annual report.

In addition to the implementation of our expansion plan for the Messerli Research Institute, we were also occupied with the implementation of the new organisational structure of Vetmeduni in 2024. As part of the Department of Interdisciplinary Life Sciences, the Messerli Research Institute has worked together with the Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology (FIWI) and the Konrad Lorenz Institute for Comparative Behavioral Research (KLIVV) to achieve the common goals of the department. The restructuring also brought about a bundling of administrative resources at the department level. These structural changes were implemented very carefully throughout the department under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Ludwig Huber. We would also like to thank Jennifer Bentlage, the head of the administrative team of the Messerli Research Institute, who, together with Regina Meixner, Eva Schwarzingner, and Hayyel Yun, have been implementing the innovations since 2024.

One of the first ground-breaking steps in the implementation of the plan to expand the Messerli Research Institute in 2024 was the appointment of the new professor for Companion Animal Management. On December 1, 2024, Stefanie Riemer took up this professorship, and we wish her all the best for the realization of the ambitious projects associated with it. In addition, the professorship Veterinary Medical Ethics will start at the beginning of 2025, which will establish a young, innovative field of research at the Veterinary University in a pioneering manner. Svenja Springer has taken on the task of further establishing this area of work. Both professorships underline the continuous development and strategic orientation of our institute to concrete challenges of the human-animal interaction.

We wish the readers of this annual report an enjoyable read with these introductory words. It should be noted that we have changed the structure of the report for loyal companions and, in accordance with the fundamental vision of our institute, have placed a special focus on the interdisciplinary projects at the Messerli Research Institute this year. But not only the research, but also the teaching, changes in the organisation, events, and special highlights of the past year should provide an overview of the successful work of the Messerli Research Institute.

## Herwig Grimm and Zsófia Virányi

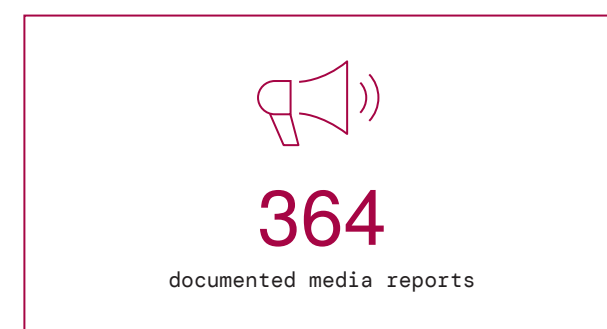
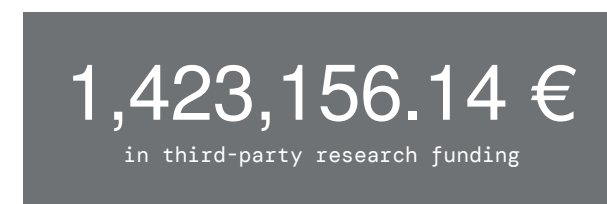
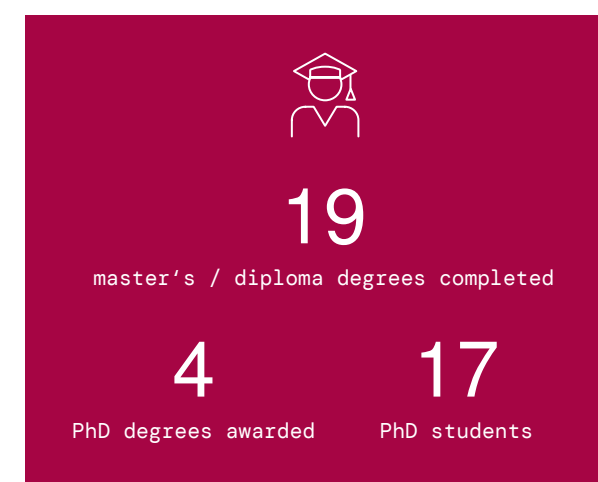
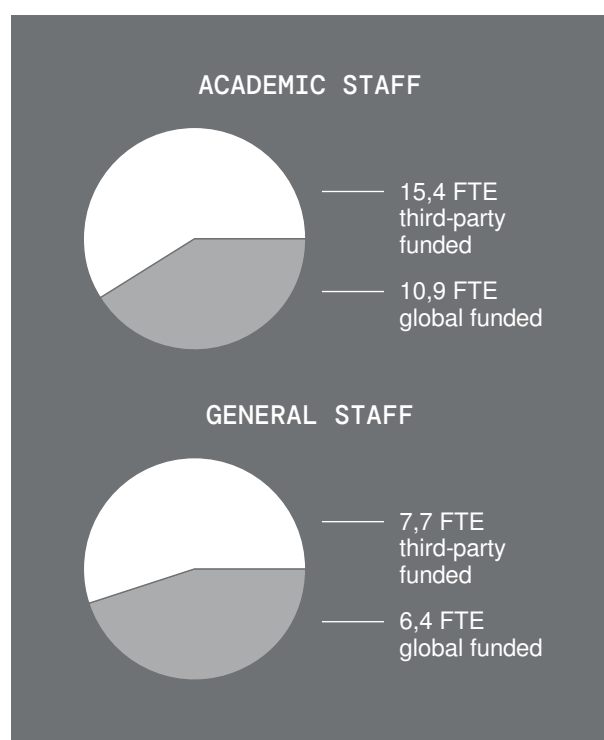
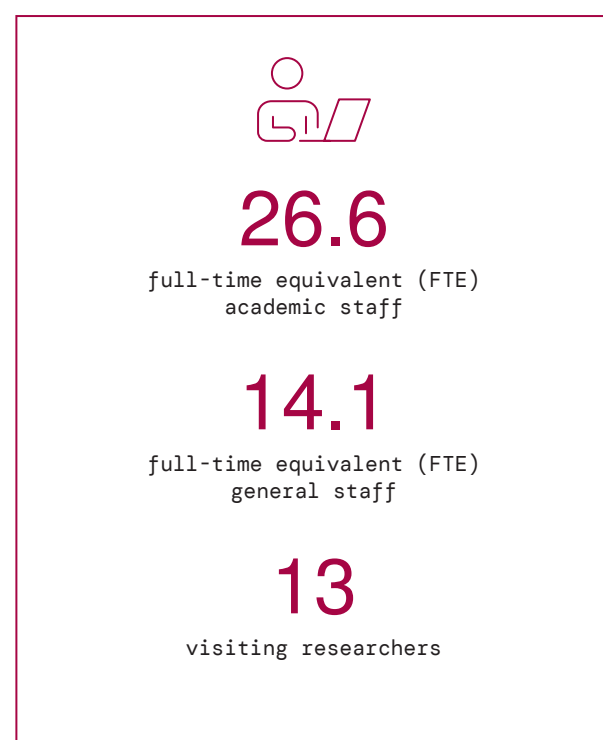
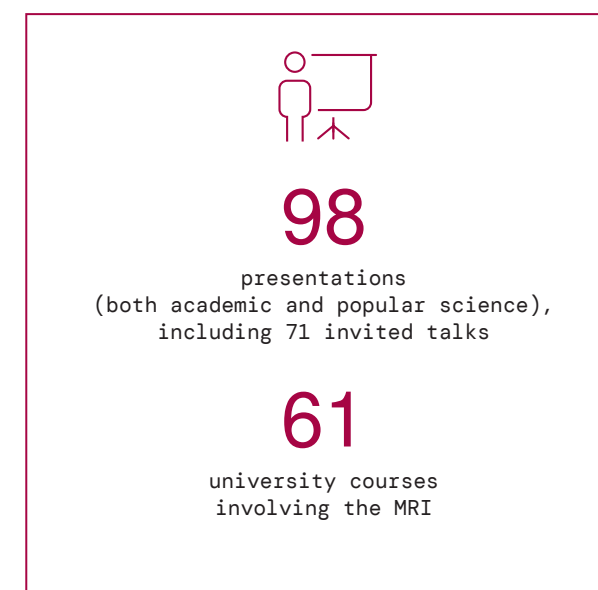
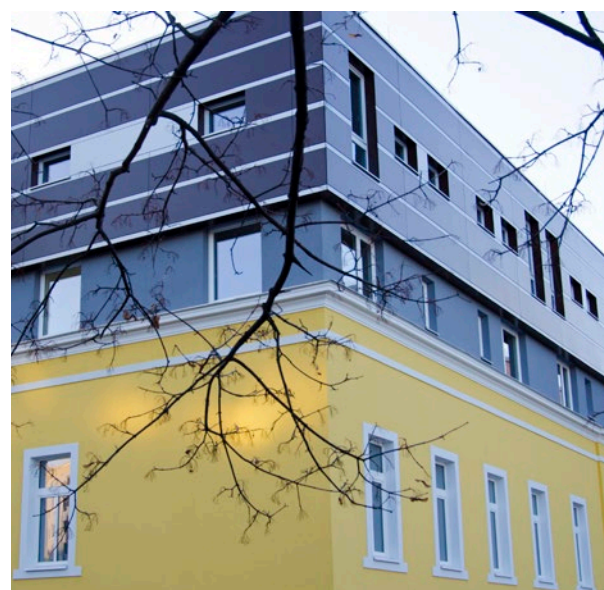
Head and Deputy Head of the Messerli Research Institute



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni



# 2024 in Figures



# The Messerli Research Institute at a glance

The Messerli Research Institute (MRI) was founded in 2010 with the support of the Messerli Foundation (Sörenberg, Switzerland) and under the auspices of the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna in cooperation with the Medical University of Vienna and the University of Vienna. In autumn 2011, the professors of the three units (Comparative Cognition, Comparative Medicine, Ethics and Human-Animal Studies) were appointed. In March 2012, the Institute was finally officially opened. The restructuring of the MRI began with the new organisational plan of the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, which came into effect in 2024. On December 18, 2024, contracts for the expansion were signed by the Messerli Foundation and the three partner universities, which provide for thematic expansion and strengthening of cooperation with the partner universities through five new professorships. The first of these professorships, titled Companion Animal Management, was already filled in 2024; more will follow. In addition, an interdisciplinary postdoc programme and the establishment of an outreach platform are planned. The work of the Messerli Research Institute is based on four cornerstones:

## Research

The Messerli Research Institute is dedicated to research into the human-animal interactions and its foundations in the fields of animal cognition and behaviour, comparative medicine, ethics and human-animal studies.

## Interdisciplinarity

A broad interdisciplinary approach (biology, human medicine, veterinary medicine, philosophy, psychology, law) and a strong international orientation characterise the Institute.

## Teaching

Research results form an integral part of the academic teaching in an interdisciplinary master's programme and courses at the three partner universities and other educational institutes. Together they contribute to providing guidance for the responsible treatment of animals.

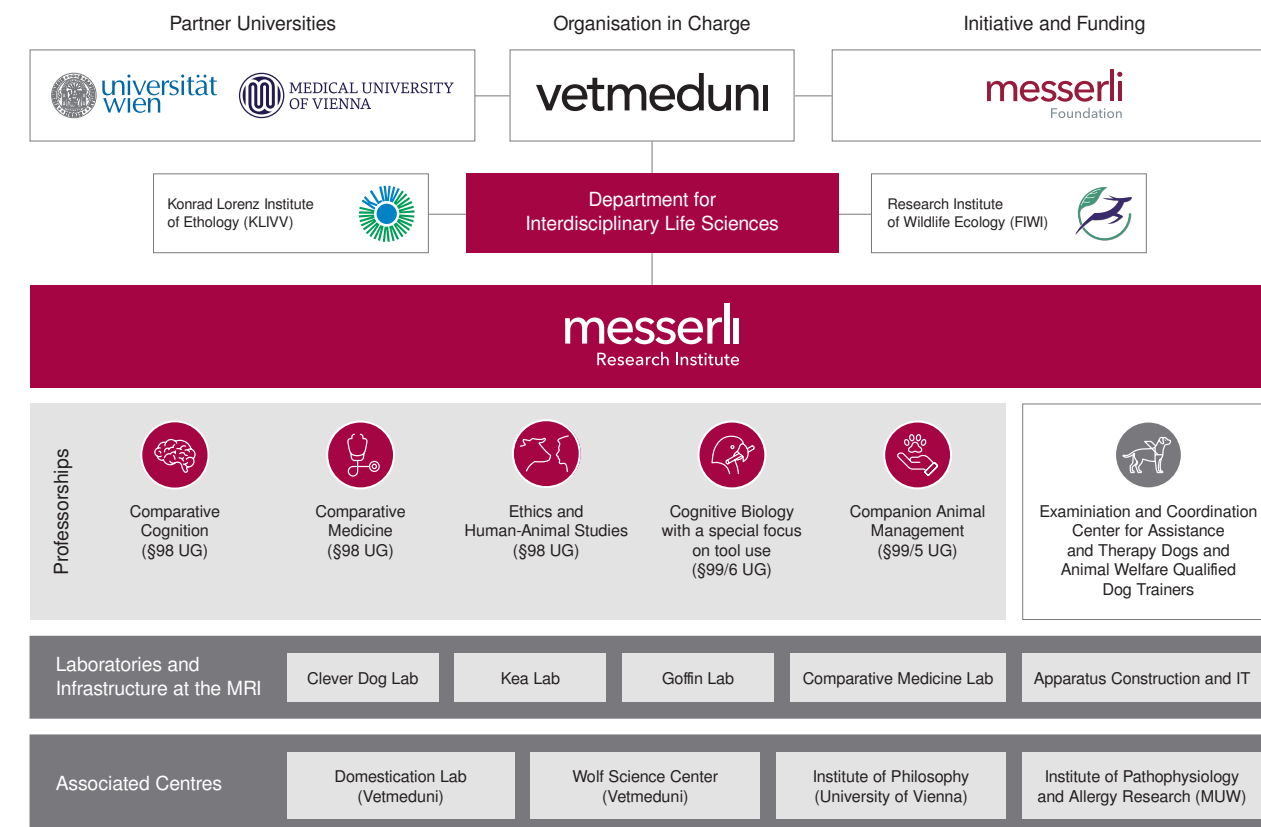
## Knowledge Transfer

A cornerstone of the Messerli Research Institute is to make science-based findings known to the public. In this way, the Institute also takes on the social mission of supporting people in their responsibility towards animals on a scientific basis.



Photo: Michael Bernkopf/Vetmeduni

## The organisational chart



As of January 1, 2024, the new organisational plan of Vetmeduni came into effect. During the reporting year, five professors with their teams worked at the Messerli Research Institute:

- §98 UG Comparative Cognition (Ludwig Huber)
- §98 UG Comparative Medicine (Erika Jensen-Jarolim)
- §98 UG Ethics and Human-Animal Studies (Herwig Grimm)
- §99 UG Cognitive Biology with a special focus on tool use (Alice Auersperg)
- §99 UG Companion Animal Management (Stefanie Riemer)

The first three mentioned §98 UG professorships connect Vetmeduni with the Medical University of Vienna and the University of Vienna through double appointments or assignment agreements.

The MRI is one of the three centres (MRI, KLIVV, FIWI) of the Department for Interdisciplinary Life Sciences at Vetmeduni. Additionally, the MRI oversees the Examination and Coordination Center for Assistance and Therapy Dogs and the coordination office for Animal Welfare Qualified Dog Trainers. The institute is represented externally and organised internally by the centre's management.

Important and long-standing partners include the Centre for Animal Nutrition and Animal Welfare (former Institute for Animal Welfare Science and Animal Husbandry), as well as the Domestication Lab. The institute cooperates with them within the framework of the interdisciplinary master's programme on human-animal interactions. Furthermore, the Messerli Research Institute is connected with partner universities through facilities such as Haidlhof and is associated with centres and organisational units institutionalised there.



## The team



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni

In 2024, 40.4 full-time equivalents (FTEs) worked at the MRI. Of these, 18.6 FTEs were permanently employed, and 21.8 FTEs were financed through third-party funds. The scientific staff accounted for 26.3 FTEs and were supported by general staff comprising 14.1 FTEs. The responsibilities of the general staff include administration, animal care and training, apparatus construction, laboratory management, IT, and more.

The FTEs listed above also include the Examination and Coordination Centre for Assistance and Therapy Dogs and the coordination office for Animal Welfare Qualified Dog Trainers at the MRI.

A significant change for team collaboration in 2024 was the anchoring of administration at the department level and its consolidation into function-specific work areas. Jennifer Bentlage heads the administrative affairs at the MRI. Until 2024, administrative staff were assigned to the three units.

Looking ahead to the near future of the MRI team, a significant change is imminent, as mentioned in the editorial: in 2025, Erika Jensen-Jarolim will leave the MRI to pursue other interests in her so-called “retirement.” We took this opportunity to conduct an interview with her for this annual report and let her speak for herself.

Interview with Erika Jensen-Jarolim

## ” Do good and talk about it!



**For over a decade, you have conducted research and taught at the Messerli Research Institute, significantly shaping this institution. What do you remember most fondly?**

During this time, I learned that an interdisciplinary concept can indeed work, but it takes a long time for it to bear fruit. Now, the harvest is beginning. I am grateful to have met many committed individuals at Messerli, who have their hearts in the right place. Since 2011, we have collectively contributed to making the Messerli Research Institute a competence centre that has become indispensable in the Austrian research landscape.

**Is there a particular moment or success that you are especially proud of?**

There are many moments I wouldn't want to have missed, starting with the pioneering days of setting up our wonderful lab, placing our work in top journals, and most recently, the recognition of our research performance through the Scientist of the Year award for three consecutive years.

**Your research not only makes it into prestigious journals but also frequently into the media. What does it take to successfully communicate science to society?**

This “Third Mission” is personally very important to me, in line with my motto, “Do good and talk about it.” What you need for this are 1) high-quality data, and 2) the talent to explain complex issues simply to engage everyone. We often discuss our health research topics in the context of lifestyle or climate change. We always convey potential solutions as well.

**The Messerli Research Institute is particularly committed to interdisciplinarity. Where do you see special opportunities and challenges here?**

The Messerli idea is good! However, in practical university life, I see, to be honest, more challenges. Universities do not evaluate interdisciplinary collaboration adequately, which is much more demanding than disciplinary work, in their metrics.

**The human-animal relationship is changing. Is this also changing medicine?**

I don't think human medicine is influenced by the change in the human-animal relationship (parenting, etc.), but veterinary medicine is undergoing change: high-tech precision medicine from the human sector will rapidly advance in this context. The question is, who will pay the bill, as not every pet owner can afford the corresponding treatments. It is important that both fields rely solely on evidence-based medicine.

**What advice would you give to young scientists at the beginning of their careers?**

They must follow their interests but also keep in mind that studies are also vocational training, which should enable them to finance their own lives and possibly allow for starting a family.

**Your wishes for the future of the Messerli Research Institute?**

I wish all the best personally and warmly to the companions and people “behind” the Messerli brand.

### In a word:

**Cutting-edge research needs...** financial leeway, knowledge, and innovative ideas.

**Success is for me,...** balancing family and career.

**Good teaching requires...** love for the subject matter and plenty of time.

**I am motivated...** when research results confirm my original visions.

**I am happy...** when knowledge from research is translated to benefit patients.

**About the person:** Erika Jensen-Jarolim was born in Vienna. She is a physician and researcher in the fields of immunology and allergology. From 2011 until recently, she held the joint professorship for Comparative Medicine at the Messerli Research Institute (Vetmeduni) and the Medical University of Vienna. In her applied research, she uses molecular allergy diagnostics. She is active in professional committees, a member of the Collegium Internationale Allergologicum, and co-editor-in-chief of the WAO Journal.

Interview with Heinz Schweizer

## The Foundation Board



**Adrian von Segesser,**  
President of the Messerli Foundation



**Heinz Schweizer,**  
Honorary President of the  
Messerli Foundation



**Rudolf Aebersold**



**Felix Howald**



**Ariane Schweizer Henniges**



**Hansruedi Scherer**

Photos: Messerli Foundation

The prosperity of the institute has become a personal concern for the foundation board members as can also be read in the following interview with Heinz Schweizer. At this point, we would like to thank Mr. Schweizer explicitly once again for his unwavering and personal commitment to the MRI, which has been reflected not least in the strategy for the expansion of the institute.

At the end of 2024, Rudolf Aebersold took over the role of Chairman of the Foundation Board for the Messerli Research Institute from Heinz Schweizer, and we look forward to future collaboration with him. This change also provided an opportunity to look back together with Heinz Schweizer on the institute's beginnings, the years since its founding, and the intensive preparatory work – while also looking ahead. In an interview, he shares his memories and experiences and reflects on successful years.

## ” The Messerli Research Institute is my baby!

### You had the idea of establishing the Messerli Research Institute. How did that come about?

In 1982, as the lawyer for Mrs. Messerli, I established the Messerli Foundation. This foundation supported various animal welfare projects at home and abroad for about 25 years. I felt there was a lack of synergy between the individual projects and often sustainability as well. Based on the idea that we can help animals better if we understand them better, I proposed creating a professorship to give young people the opportunity to research the human-animal relationship on a scientific basis and to publicise the findings. I wanted to do this in Zurich, but there was no interest there. So, in 2009, an international call for applications was issued with 13 applicants. Vienna won. Vienna is my baby.

### What were the biggest challenges in establishing the institute?

Actually, there were no major challenges. From the beginning, I had the impression that we were understood in Vienna. After a few meetings, we agreed on the contract. The agreed organisation and establishment of the institute were carried out by Vienna without any problems in the shortest time possible.

### Mrs. Messerli said: „May the Messerli Research Institute help us better understand animals and thus enable animals to have a better existence.“ In your opinion, is the Messerli Research Institute on the right path to fulfilling this wish?

Definitely.

### Which project is particularly close to your heart? Which research results have surprised or touched you the most?

Ethical questions about the human-animal relationship are particularly interesting to me. Therefore, the work of Herwig Grimm and his team is of decisive importance to me. I was surprised by Ludwig Huber's publication *The Rational Animal*. These are works that, in my opinion, perfectly document the sense and spirit of the Messerli Research Institute.

### Has your work for the foundation and your commitment to the Messerli Research Institute influenced your personal view of the human-animal relationship?

Not really. But the work of the Messerli Research Institute has greatly expanded my horizons on these issues.

### Promoting science, as the Messerli Foundation does, also always means promoting people. What would you like to say to young scientists?

Stay true to science and do not lose the joy and passion, even in times when you do not find the desired, necessary recognition.

### What hope and wishes do you have for the future of the Messerli Research Institute?

Last year, we – the three rectorates and the Messerli Foundation – decided on a new strategy and agreed to supplement the regular professorships of the Messerli Research Institute with four associate professorships, thus significantly expanding the scope of activities. This gives the Messerli Research Institute the opportunity to markedly increase and strengthen its reputation as a centre of excellence, both nationally and internationally. I am convinced that this will succeed, provided there is trust and the will to achieve something special among those involved.

### What do you wish for your successor on the Foundation Council, Rudolf Aebersold?

That he will be received in Vienna with the same friendship, openness, and trust that I have always experienced.

#### In a word:

**Animal welfare is for me...** the duty of every free person.

**When I think of Vienna, I think...** with satisfaction that the Messerli Foundation Council made the right decision to make Vienna its headquarters.

**The work in the Foundation Council has shown me that...** a lot can be achieved with perseverance.

**An animal that particularly fascinates me is...** not a specific one. All living beings fascinate me.

**A living being is a wonder in itself.**

**I look forward to...** a great future for the institute; the foundations for it have been laid.

**About the person:** Heinz Schweizer was born in Zurich in 1938, where he grew up. He studied law and became a business lawyer specialising in intellectual property. He practiced as a lawyer until 20 years ago. Schweizer works for several foundations. In his free time, he enjoys reading, visiting museums, and doing sports.



## The Scientific Advisory Board



**Peter Sandøe**  
(University of Copenhagen, Denmark),  
Chair of the Scientific Advisory Board

Photo: Sandøe



**Sabine Werner**  
(Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich,  
Switzerland)

Photo: ETH Zürich



**Josep Call**  
(University of St. Andrews, Great Britain)

Photo: Call



**Thomas Kündig**  
(University of Zurich, Switzerland)

Photo: Universität Zürich

The Scientific Advisory Board of the Messerli Research Institute (MRI) serves as the external advisory body responsible for ensuring the scientific quality, relevance, and thematic focus of the research. Its primary tasks include the strategic direction of research and the international positioning of the institute.

Peter Sandøe chaired the Scientific Advisory Board in various compositions for over 10 years until the end of 2024. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to him and all members of the Scientific Advisory Board for their foresighted and appreciative support, as well as for their investment of time and expertise. This support has been crucial in continuously reflecting on and adjusting the goals and tasks at the MRI.

The scientific advisory board that supported the MRI until 2024 will be replaced by a new advisory board in 2025.

## Research

### Goals

At the Messerli Research Institute, scientifically based foundations and insights for the coexistence of humans and animals are developed and expanded. Current questions about the diverse human-animal interactions and their foundations are researched here from biological, medical, and ethical perspectives in an interdisciplinary manner.



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni

### Interdisciplinary research

Interdisciplinarity and a high degree of specialisation give the Messerli Research Institute its distinctive profile. Each of the different research disciplines at the Messerli Research Institute work on their own specialised research topics, particularly within the framework of a number of competitively acquired projects, but also cooperate in interdisciplinary research projects between the disciplines as well as externally. The highly successful acquisition of competitively awarded project funds contributes significantly to this research. Interdisciplinary research projects within the institute, Vetmeduni, the universities of Vienna, and with international partners are described in this annual report using selected examples on pages 20-21.

### Cross-university and (inter) national collaboration

The MRI is located at the interface of three Vienna-based universities: the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, the Medical University of Vienna, and the University of Vienna. It integrates the existing expertise of these universities into its work. Conversely, the research findings of the institute also benefit all three universities in research and teaching. This successful collaboration will be expanded over the coming years through the extension plan of the Messerli Research Institute. The MRI is part of a large network with 17 additional national and over 50 international research partners.



Photo: Alice Auerberg/Vetmeduni

### Research in a societal context

Through collaboration with authorities, associations, and other institutions in the field of human-animal relations, the MRI fulfils its societal mandate to inform individuals and organisations on a scientific basis and to support them in their responsibility towards animals.



# The Five Professorships in Focus



## Comparative Cognition

**“Only if we understand animals correctly can we treat them correctly”**

Since his appointment in 2011 as a professor for the scientific foundations of human-animal interactions and animal welfare, Ludwig Huber has led the unit of Comparative Cognition, which includes the Clever Dog Lab, the Kea Lab, the Goffin Lab, and the Kune Kune Laboratory. The research focuses on social, technical, and perceptual intelligence, as well as emotion in a variety of animals (including dogs, pigs, kea, tortoises, and frogs) and essentially has two goals: to deepen knowledge about the behaviour, thinking, and feelings of animals themselves, and to deepen understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and social foundations of their interactions with humans. The research contributes to improving the relationship between humans and animals, particularly in the areas of assistance dogs, behavioural medicine, and species conservation.

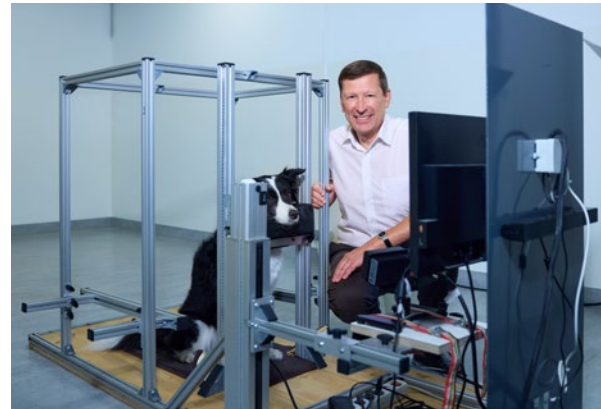


Photo: Johannes Hloch



## Ethics and Human-Animal Studies

**“From Practice to Theory and Back”**

How should we behave towards animals? This question is central to the work of Herwig Grimm and his team. Both the ethical foundations and the practice of morally responsible human-animal interactions play a crucial role. The empirically informed examination of various societal contexts, such as laboratories, agriculture, and veterinary medicine, helps to better understand conflicts and promote an ethically reflective and cooperative coexistence of humans and animals.



Photo: Marco Finsterwald Fotografie



## Comparative Medicine

**“From comparison to holistic understanding and One Health”**

Erika Jensen-Jarolim and her team investigate molecular and pathophysiological differences between various species on an immunological basis to improve diagnostics and therapies for humans and animals. Allergies and cancer are the focus of the research. The team's core competence lies in exploring systemic challenges such as climate change and increasing environmental stress to develop strategies for the prevention and management of these diseases in line with the One Health approach.



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni



## Cognitive Biology with a Special Focus on Tool Use

**“Think like an animal!”**

Alice Auersperg and her team focus their research on how animals find innovative solutions to problems in their physical environment and how they use and make tools. Understanding how animals, both closely and distantly related to us, solve problems raises questions about our “uniqueness” as a species and provides insights into the use of technology. Additionally, learning from animals – by adopting proven solutions from nature – offers great potential to improve human-made machines.



Photo: Heideinde Wanas



## Companion Animal Management

**“Science Meets Practice”**

Stefanie Riemer and her team combine interdisciplinary basic research with applied research on pets. Their research topics range from emotions and communication in dogs to behavioural problems and stress-free veterinary visits, as well as the quality of life of dogs with chronic diseases. By disseminating the results to professionals and laypeople, their work attempts to have a concrete influence on the well-being of our pets.



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni



## Interdisciplinary Activities at the MRI

### Animals, Climate, and Civic Education

Cognition (Ariane Veit)  
Ethics (Judith Benz-Schwarzburg)

The EU project ALICE (*Animals, Climate and Civic Education, 2022–2024*) enabled six organisations from Germany, France, and Austria to develop multimedia teaching materials for students and educators. The focus lay on animal ethics, political and economic contexts, and current findings from behavioural research. In addition, informational events were held. A contribution to the edited volume *Innovationen in der politischen (Weiter-)Bildung* came from A. Veit, J. Benz-Schwarzburg, and R. Kummer.



Photo: privat

A meeting of the ALICE project contributors in Berlin.

### Scientific Collaboration with the Examination and Coordination Office for Assistance and Therapy Dogs

Cognition (Ludwig Huber),  
Veterinary Medicine (Karl Weissenbacher)

Given that questions concerning the well-being of assistance and therapy dogs arise regularly and have been identified as essential by the Examination and Coordination Center, it is only logical that such issues are also addressed within the Messerli Research Institute. In 2024, two diploma theses were successfully completed in the context of this collaboration:

*Determining Cortisol Levels in the Saliva of Guide Dogs to Assess Their Stress Compared to Family Dogs and Other Assistance Dogs*

*Evaluating the Stress Levels of Working Dogs Using Salivary Cortisol in the Context of Their Daily Life Compared to Family Dogs*

### Stray Dogs in Skopje, North Macedonia: Research Exchange

Ethics (Herwig Grimm)  
Animal Behavior (Zsófia Virányi)

In the context of a long-standing cooperation with the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, experts from the Messerli Research Institute in the fields of ethics and behavioural science were invited to Skopje to discuss questions regarding the management of stray dogs. As part of this research exchange, Virányi and Grimm presented scientifically based options for stray dog management and discussed short- and long-term research collaborations. The focus of this interdisciplinary exchange was on understanding the social dynamics and human–animal interactions involving urban and free-ranging dog populations.

## Examples of Interdisciplinary Activities with External Cooperation Partners

### Convergent Evolution of the Social Brain? A Comparative fMRI Approach in Dogs and Humans

Funded by two WWTF projects and led by Ludwig Huber (MRI, Vetmeduni) and Claus Lamm (Psychology, University of Vienna), biologists and psychologists jointly established the research group Comparative Human-Canine Neuroimaging in Vienna. The aim is to investigate the neural foundations of social cognition in dogs and humans. The group conducts comparative studies on emotion discrimination, perspective-taking, as well as face and body perception in both species, by integrating behavioural analyses, eye-tracking, and neuroimaging.

### Qualitative Behavioural Assessment of Dogs in Veterinary Contexts

Stefanie Riemer is working to improve methods for understanding canine emotions, as traditional measures such as behavioural observation or heart rate monitoring can yield ambiguous results in collaboration with a psychologist from the FernUniversität in Hagen and a veterinary medicine expert from Vetmeduni. For example, a calm dog may either be relaxed or feeling helpless. Qualitative Behavioural Assessment (QBA) offers a holistic approach by evaluating emotional states directly. In veterinary examinations, QBA has shown that anxious dogs tend to lower their tails and pull back their ears. Although stress is typically associated with elevated heart rate, fear in the veterinary context often manifests as freezing, accompanied by lower heart rates. Therefore, combining multiple measures is crucial for accurately assessing animal emotions and well-being.

### Leaving Life. Hospice and Palliative Care in Small Animal Practice

In cooperation with veterinarian Shannon Axiak Flammer (University of Bern), Svenja Springer and Christian Dürnberger examine the opportunities and challenges of hospice and palliative care in small animal practice. Their research focuses on how veterinarians experience the shift from “curing” to “caring” for their patients and how this transition affects their professional identity. The project contributes to an empirically grounded veterinary ethics by addressing a largely unexplored area within small animal medicine.

### Contested Moral Framings of the Human-Animal Relationship

Herwig Grimm, Judith Benz-Schwarzburg, Erich Linder, and Konstantin Deininger from the Messerli Research Institute together with Silvia Panizza and Niklas Forsberg from the Centre for Ethics, University of Pardubice (Czech Republic) received funding for a series of workshops in Vienna and Pardubice. Supported by the AKTION programme of the Czech National Agency for International Education and Research, the project explores how agents conceptualize and address moral questions concerning the human–animal relationship. Philosophical and moral-psychological perspectives are brought together to analyse the motivations as well as the ethical, existential, and methodological conditions that shape how we frame our responsibilities toward animals.

### Working Group Ethics in Equine Medicine: Vetmeduni and Gut Aiderbichl

Herwig Grimm and Svenja Springer are part of the working group Ethics in Equine Medicine, supporting clinicians in ethically complex cases. They moderate interdisciplinary group discussions on acute cases and facilitate retrospective case reviews to support clinical teams after challenging situations. Additionally, Svenja Springer, together with Ulrike Auer (Vetmeduni) and Julia Staud (MRI), developed a workflow to help veterinary staff and caregivers at Gut Aiderbichl identify critically ill animal patients and make informed decisions regarding their care, such as palliative treatment options.

### Parrobots 2

Funded by the German Excellence Cluster SCIOI (Science of Intelligence), Alice Auersperg, Theresa Rössler, Jeroen Zewald, and Antonio Osuna-Mascaro from the MRI are collaborating with roboticists from TU Berlin to develop programmable algorithms based on the kinematic problem-solving behaviour of cockatoos.

### European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) MacTooL Task Force (TF)

Rodolfo Bianchini, together with members of the MacTooL TF of the AllergoOncology Working Group (EAACI), systematically investigated the distinctive features of human monocytes and macrophages in allergy and cancer. Employing a scoping review approach and advanced bioinformatics analyses of published experimental data spanning the past 25 years, the team aimed to define immune signatures relevant to both conditions. Key achievements include a curated database integrating macrophage gene expression from major cancer repositories with allergy research, and the development of a user-friendly web application for data exploration and analysis.



Photo: Eva Schwarzlanger/Vetmeduni

3rd MacTooL Task Force hybrid workshop with experts from allergy and cancer research.

### ManyManys: International Research Collaboration in Cognitive Science

ManyManys is a large-scale international research initiative currently involving 121 researchers from over 20 countries. Ludwig Huber is one of its 11 core members. The network brings together psychologists, biologists, ecologists, philosophers, and scientists from related disciplines who collaborate under a Big Team Science model. The central goal is to address the reproducibility crisis in behavioural science. By leveraging the capacity of a globally distributed network, ManyManys aims to achieve unprecedented sample sizes, thereby generating more robust and generalizable results. The initiative is committed to open science practices throughout the entire research cycle to ensure transparency and reproducibility.



## Highlights: New Projects

We are very pleased to report an exceptionally successful year in terms of third-party funding: In total, we secured €1.4 million in funding across 11 ongoing projects – the majority of which stemmed from competitive grant programmes. Despite a highly competitive funding landscape, we successfully launched (approved and/or initiated) five new projects in 2024 alone, which are briefly presented below:

### Canine Theory of Mind?

A key question in the study of canine cognition is how dogs understand humans, given their impressive ability to interact and communicate with us. This three-year project aims to test dogs' ability to take others' perspectives using novel experimental and methodological approaches. In 2024, we demonstrated that dogs can take another's perspective even when they cannot directly see the human they are trying to understand. In one study, the person was not present at the critical moment; in another, the person could only hear, not see.

Project duration: 2024-2027  
Funding organisation and ID: FWF (P36853)  
Project lead: Ludwig Huber



### Overimitation in Dogs: Ontogenetic and Phylogenetic Influences

This project explores dogs' tendency to overimitate – the replication of inefficient or irrelevant human actions. This human-like behaviour appears to be rooted in the unique dog-human relationship rather than cognitive deficits. The aim is to investigate the social causes of overimitation in six steps with two studies per hypothesis:

- H1: Relationship quality affects overimitation.
- H2: Social motivation, not misunderstanding, drives it.
- H3: Evolution and upbringing shape the behavior.

The experienced team uses state-of-the-art techniques such as eye-tracking and fMRI to explore the mechanisms underlying dogs' adaptation to human behaviour.

Project duration: 2024-2027  
Funding organisation and ID: FWF (PAT7848823)  
Project lead: Ludwig Huber

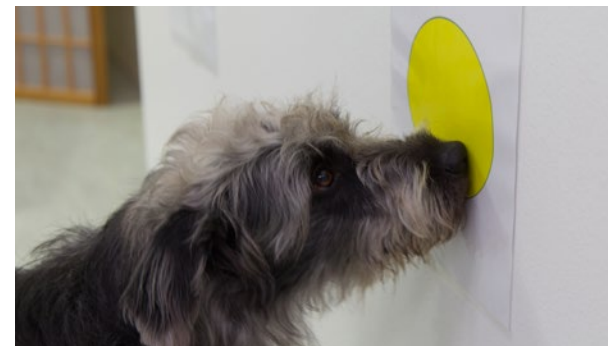


Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni

### Agency, Rationality, and the Epistemic Defeat

ARED explores the relation between belief-revision in adults and young children, questioning if humans are the only rational animals. The project, a collaboration with University of Stirling, combines epistemology, developmental psychology and comparative cognition, and tests for basic reflective thought in young children, pigs and dogs. It further investigates stages from unreflective to reflective beliefs and studies transitions from perceptual to conceptual beliefs. Its findings, if confirming that differences in belief-revision are of degree, not kind, may reshape our views on animal rights, proposing respect for animals as rational agents.

Project duration: 2025-2027  
Funding organisation: UK Research and Innovation  
Project lead at MRI: Zsófia Virányi

### Infants and dogs' perception of causality and animacy

Christoph Völter (MRI) investigates whether dogs and infants aged 6 to 16 months share expectations about physical object interactions in collaboration with developmental psychologists Jonathan Kominsky and Gergely Csibra (Central European University). Both species evolved in a Newtonian world where objects move only when acted upon. The project explores whether dogs and infants are similarly surprised by physically impossible movements and whether they attribute goals or intentions to self-moving objects. Using eye-tracking, the researchers measure gaze patterns and pupil dilation as nonverbal indicators of surprise and arousal.

Project duration: 2024-2027  
Funding organisation and ID: FWF (PAT1931423)  
Project lead: Christoph Völter (MRI) & Jonathan Kominsky (CEU)

### Dexterity in the Object Use of the Goffin's Cockatoo

Understanding animal tool use requires looking beyond primates. Alice Auersperg has shown that Goffin's cockatoos are among the most sophisticated non-primate tool users. Despite lacking natural tool-use behaviours such as nest-building, they spontaneously invent tools in ways similar to primates. Researchers from Vetmeduni and the National University of Singapore are investigating recently discovered tool use in urban cockatoos in Singapore. These birds use two techniques to open hard sea almonds:

1. Drilling a hole and extracting the seed with a wood splinter
2. Stuffing grass into the fruit until it bursts

The project combines behavioural research with material physics to explore the mechanisms behind these rare wild animal technologies.

Project duration: 2025-2028  
Funding organisation and ID: FWF (PAT2728324)  
Project lead: Alice Auersperg

## Highlights: (Inter)national Collaborations

### ManyDogs Project: A Big-Team-Science Approach to Investigating Dog Behavior and Cognition

Despite a significant increase in scientific studies on dogs over the past 20 years, small sample sizes and the diversity of dog breeds limit the interpretability of individual findings on canine cognition and behaviour. To address this, the ManyDogs Project – an international consortium that includes researchers from the MRI – adopts a Big-Team-Science approach in canine behavioural research. Its goals include reproducing key findings, examining breed and cross-cultural differences, achieving methodological consensus, and establishing standards for replication studies. This initiative aims to overcome existing limitations and deepen our understanding of canine behaviour, cognition, and welfare.



### Knowledge in Crisis: Cluster of Excellence

Knowledge is essential for the functioning of any society. From healthcare and environmental challenges to education and politics, we rely on knowledge to solve problems. At the same time, there is growing concern that we are experiencing a knowledge crisis, in which claims to knowledge – especially regarding truth and reality – are increasingly under attack. This project centres on philosophical questions about the relationships between knowledge, truth, science, ethics, and politics. Knowledge in Crisis is a collaboration among

more than 50 philosophers across four Austrian universities. Herwig Grimm is contributing as a key researcher within this Cluster of Excellence.

### Tool Use in Wild Goffin's Cockatoos in Singapore

MRI researchers Alice Auersperg and Theresa Rössler are studying wild-caught cockatoos and their tool-using behaviour in parks throughout the city-state of Singapore to better understand the evolution of natural tool use in collaboration with renowned evolutionary biologist Frank Rheindt of the National University of Singapore. The project is funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and received additional support this year through a newly approved standalone project with a duration of up to three years.

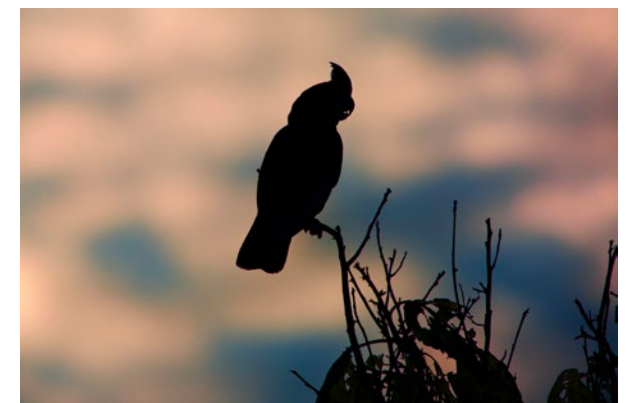


Photo: Alice Auersperg/Vetmeduni

### Iron Homeostasis in Healthy Dogs and Dogs with Atopic Dermatitis

Franziska Roth-Walter and colleagues were the first to demonstrate that dogs with atopic dermatitis (CAD) – a common inflammatory skin condition – suffer from significant iron deficiency despite consuming iron-rich diets. This is likely due to chronic subclinical inflammation impairing the dogs' ability to absorb and utilise iron. The team's detailed study revealed that, unlike healthy dogs, CAD patients not only have depleted iron stores but also show severely disrupted iron metabolism. This dysregulation affects key proteins involved in iron transport and storage and directly correlates with the severity of their atopic symptoms.



PhD Programme and Doctoral Schools

DK Programme Cognition and Communication 2

This FWF-funded doctoral programme (Deputy Spokesperson: Ludwig Huber) fully supports one project (Louise Mackie’s project on overimitation in dogs), and two additional PhD students have been accepted as associate members. Among them, Theresa Rössler successfully defended her dissertation, and Jeroen Zewald continued his research on the innovative soaking behaviour of Goffin’s cockatoos, resulting in two publications in prestigious journals (*Biology Letters* and *Current Biology*). Louise Mackie extended her research on overimitation in dogs to children and planned a study with chimpanzees in a sanctuary in Africa. In total, she published three articles in 2024 alone.



Photo: privat

DK retreat on the Rax: Professors and PhD students supplemented their annual retreat with a trip to the Rax.

Interdisciplinary PhD Programme “One Health” at the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna

In this doctoral programme, Isabella Pali and Rupert Palme jointly supervise their PhD student Simona Winkler, who was chosen in 2023 through an international competitive selection process. Her project, One Health in Allergology, investigates the extent to which specific weaning conditions in calves influence stress levels in cows, and consequently the content and quality of proteins in their milk.

Doctoral Programme in Molecular, Cellular and Clinical Allergology (MCCA)

The MCCA programme has been integrated into the Danube Allergy Research Cluster, allowing Aila Fakhimahmadi to focus her dissertation on mould allergies (*Alternaria alternata*). She gave several poster presentations and talks in 2024 in this context.

Vienna Doctoral School in Philosophy (VDP)

The VDP serves as an international hub for doctoral projects in philosophy and promotes the plurality of philosophical traditions, methods, and perspectives. In 2024, Erich Linder, Micol Volonteri, Konstantin Eckl, and Konstantin Deininger were supervised within the framework of the VDP by Herwig Grimm, who is also a member of the FWF-funded doctoral programme (Doc.funds) Philosophy as Conceptual Engagement at the University of Vienna.

On 8 October 2024, students of the One Health PhD programme at Vetmeduni, along with associated project members, programme leaders, and members of the Advisory and Steering Boards, gathered in the ceremonial hall of the University.



Photo: Dominik Kiss/Vetmeduni

PhD and Doctoral Programme Graduations

Konstantin Deininger

*Approaching Questions in Animal Ethics from Within: Drawing on Cora Diamond’s Moral Philosophy for Animal Ethics*

Konstantin Deininger’s dissertation develops a practice-oriented approach to animal ethics, drawing on the philosophies of Cora Diamond and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Two central contributions to the work were published this year in renowned philosophical journals. The dissertation was submitted to and successfully defended at the University of Vienna.



Lucrezia Lonardo

*Precursors to Human Theory of Mind and Action Understanding Abilities of Dogs (Canis familiaris)*

In 2024, Lucrezia Lonardo completed her PhD journey by defending her thesis. Her work has investigated dogs’ implicit susceptibility to others’ perspectives, using implicit theory of mind tasks, and their ability to predict others’ actions, using eye tracking.



Theresa Rößler

*Innovative Problem-Solving in Goffin’s cockatoos*

Theresa Rößler submitted her PhD Thesis in March 2024 and successfully defended it by the end of May. Afterwards she immediately started as a post-doc in a new project investigating free-ranging Goffin’s cockatoos in Singapore with a special focus on tool use behaviour.



Elisabeth Suwandschieff

*Motor Imitation in Kea (Nestor notabilis) Parrots*

This thesis examined imitative learning in kea using three experiments. Despite kea’s intelligence and social skills, they showed response matching but no clear imitation – highlighting the complexity of studying social learning in this curious species. In 2024, the focus was on the successful completion of the dissertation.



Photos: (1) Chloé Bolton, (2) Karin Bayer/ Vetmeduni, (3) Stefan Schierhuber, (4) Elisabeth Suwandschieff



PhD and Doctoral Students (in alphabetical order)

What was the biggest challenge and/or the most important outcome of your PhD in 2024?

Jennifer Anne Colbourne

Tooling Innovation in Children and Goffin's Cockatoos

I've been focused on publishing two chapters of my thesis on tool use. One is currently in review and the other has been published in *Scientific Reports*. An additional paper from a side project on lateralisation was also published in the *Journal of Comparative Psychology*. Now, the challenge is drawing everything together in my introduction and discussion.



Konstantin Eckl

A Tempered Rationalism for Animal Ethics

In 2024, I began salaried research and shifted my focus from how people conceptualise morality to how bioethicists and animal ethicists should approach moral reasoning in those they seek to persuade. Collaborating with Konstantin Deininger, I published a proposal to balance rational grounding with moral emotions. I am now applying this to debates on animal dignity, where moral feelings often drive condemnation.



Leslie-Ann Eickhoff

Dogs' and Infants' Perception of Causality

My project focuses on whether dogs and infants can perceive causality in launching events and whether they are sensitive to Newtonian constraints of the environment. In 2024, I just started my PhD and therefore focused on planning my first study on causal perception.



Aila Fakhimahadi

When Micronutrients Meet Allergens: The Immunoregulatory Role of Micronutrient-Loaded Alt a 1 in Reducing Allergic Responses

My PhD showed that micronutrient-loaded fungal allergen modulates immune responses and reduces allergic inflammation, offering new paths for safer treatment. The main challenges and outcomes in 2024 included publishing in the prestigious *Allergy* journal, successfully defending my thesis and winning awards for best presentation and publication.



Karoline Gerwisch

Overimitation in Dogs – the Influence of the Relationship Quality

In the first study of my PhD, I explored whether assistance dogs copy more irrelevant actions demonstrated by their human caregivers than family dogs and if so, whether this is linked to relationship quality. A key challenge was conducting the task in participants' homes, but thanks to the support of many caregivers, we made it happen.



Cornelia Habi

Individual Variation and Fitness Consequences of Neophilia in Wild North Island Robins (*Petroica longipes*)

Early this year, I was awarded the Marietta Blau scholarship by the OEAD, and moved to Wellington, New Zealand. I was hosted by Dr. Rachael Shaw at the Victoria University of Wellington and conducted a fieldwork study on the novelty preferences of wild North Island Robins (toutouwai) at the Zealandia Ecosanctuary.



Dominik Hajosi

Apples and Oranges in Animal Research: The Challenges of Harm-Benefit Analysis and the Operationalisation in Transplantation Studies

The goals of my thesis were to investigate the current application of harm-benefit analysis (HBA) in Europe and to develop a structured framework for its consistent and transparent use. A key challenge was addressing the inconsistent implementation of HBA, along with limited and fragmented guidance. I introduced a novel HBA methodology – the compound model – and applied it to a case study involving a large animal model in transplantation research. This work provides a practical tool to support reviewing bodies in navigating complex project evaluations and making sound decisions.



Katherine Harrington

New Frontiers: Innovation, Memory, and Conservation in Wild Caracaras

I published a high-impact paper revealing how striated caracaras, rare island falcons, use long-term memory to solve novel foraging tasks they haven't faced in over a year. I further showed how their play behaviour may support problem-solving abilities, advancing cognitive research while shifting how we think of birds of prey.



Johanna Karg

Stigmatization of a Profession? An Empirically Informed Ethical Analysis of Veterinary Work in Slaughterhouses

The focus of my project is an empirical survey of veterinarians working in slaughterhouses. Developing the interview guide was quite challenging: how can questions be framed in a way that, while addressing uncomfortable experiences, still preserve a good conversational atmosphere? I'm glad that we ultimately started the first interviews with a well-structured and refined guide.





Poppy Lambert

*Comparing Learning with Weight Cues between Birds and Primates*

The focus of 2024 was my research stay at the Living Links centre at Edinburgh Zoo. We replicated a weight discrimination study, which we had already conducted with the Goffin's cockatoos, with the brown capuchin monkeys. Designing a comparative study with weight cues for species with very different body sizes and morphologies was an interesting challenge.



Erich Linder

*The Animal I See, the Person I Am*

My dissertation's focus in 2024 has been on bridging practice-oriented approaches to animal ethics to the work of Christine Korsgaard. It resulted in a constitutivist account in which our treatment of animals is tied to self-understanding, allowing for ethical reflection grounded in our identity, and not just abstract moral theory.



Louise Eleanor Mackie

*Overimitation in Dogs and Humans*

In 2024, we made significant progress in understanding why dogs overimitate (copy irrelevant actions). Our latest publication in Scientific Reports was able to identify two distinct reasons for overimitation in dogs: with possible causal misunderstandings if it occurs before the goal, and also with affiliative motivations if it occurs after the goal.



Gabriella Elena Smith

*Cognitive Underpinnings of Curiosity in Kea Parrots (Nestor notabilis) and Capuchin Monkeys (Sapajus apella)*

A key challenge of my PhD in 2024 was working with a new species, the capuchin monkey, during my Marietta Blau scholarship. At the Living Links Centre, Edinburgh Zoo, I adapted violation-of-expectation and exploration paradigms from my work with kea to further investigate the cognitive bases of animal curiosity.



Ana Tomašić

*Do Dogs Communicate About the Absent: Exploring Their Ability to Use Common Ground*

For my first PhD study, I initially set out to test 60 dogs. However, due to conducting far more pilot tests than expected and a high exclusion rate, I ended up working with 150 dogs! My biggest takeaway? Always be prepared for things to deviate from the plan, stay patient, and have a solid Plan B ready to roll.



Ariane Veit

*Social Learning in Free-Ranging Domestic Pigs*

I investigated the underlying mechanisms by which domestic pigs may take up information from others, by asking four fundamental questions: who learns what and how from whom? In 2024, I submitted my PhD thesis, which will be defended in early 2025.



Micol Volonteri

*Ethical and Epistemological Challenges in Harm-Benefit Analysis and Biomedical Research: Normative Frameworks, Decision-Making, and Public Perceptions*

The main challenges I faced during my PhD in 2024 were undoubtedly the formulation of my research project plan and the activation of a cotutelle agreement between my home university in Milan, Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele, and the University of Vienna. Therefore, I regard the elaboration of a coherent and well-structured research plan – currently attracting interest and eliciting positive feedback – and the beginning of a fruitful collaboration with the University of Vienna and the Messerli Research institute as my most significant achievements in 2024.



Simona Winkler

*One Health in Allergology: Comparing Weaning Conditions of Cattle with beta-lactoglobulin and Binding Partners in milk*

This PhD project investigates how different weaning conditions influence milk composition, including proteins, ligands and cortisol. This year we have tested about 1500 raw milk samples (50%) for cortisol levels and started the establishment of a high-throughput BLG-ELISA test. The organisation of this process and adaption of the protocol has been more challenging than expected and is currently ongoing.



Jeroen Stephan Zewald

*From Combinations to Innovations: How Object Play Helps Cockatoos in Inventing New Solutions*

The year 2024 was a year of hard work, but with good highlights. I travelled to the other side of the world, seeing cities like Leipzig, Zürich and Sydney, for conferences. The year finished with the fun news that my study on food flavouring by cockatoos will be published! I hope next year will allow me to travel far again for a new exciting field study.





# Research Institutions at the MRI



Photo: Johannes Hloch

## Clever Dog Lab (CDL)

In 2024, 16 researchers (9 postdocs and 7 PhD students) and 19 students at the CDL were involved in major research projects and student theses. In a new FWF project on overimitation in dogs, we (Ludwig Huber, Shany Dror, Karoline Gerwisch) developed a new method for administering oxytocin to dogs and investigated the influence of the human-animal relationship and prior experience (Louise Mackie) on this type of imitation. Another FWF project by Huber (with Lucrezia Lonardo) focused on dogs' ability to take human perspectives, combining behavioral tests and eye-tracking. This methodology is also used in the FWF project (Christoph Völter, with Andrea Sommesse and Ana Tomasic) on dogs' abilities to recognize intentions, as well as in another FWF project (Christoph Völter in cooperation with Leslie-Ann Eickhoff, Beyza Gokcen Ciftci, Jonathan Kominsky, and Gergely Csibra, CEU) on the perception of causality and animism in infants and dogs. On the more applied side, we found that the stress levels of assistance dogs are not higher than those of pet dogs.

The CDL also continued to serve as a training centre for dogs (Laura Lausegger and Marion Umek) in the fMRI project (Ludwig Huber, Claus Lamm and Magdalena Boch).

Alongside a publication providing evidence for the communicative function of eye contact with humans in young puppies, Stefanie Riemer focused on various approaches to assessing emotional states in dogs in 2024, ranging from automated facial expression analysis to qualitative behavioural evaluations and associations with quantitative coding and heart rate.

Zsófia Virányi and colleagues examined how dogs, pigs, and 2-year-old children revise their beliefs in the face of counterevidence in collaboration with developmental psychologists and philosophers from the University of Stirling. Two veterinary medicine students demonstrated in their theses that natural indoor decorations can improve working memory in pet dogs, although it may not reduce their impulsivity.



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni

## Haidlhof Research Station

Research at the Kea Lab of the Haidlhof Research Station continued in its established forms – Megan Lamberts' FWF projects and Prof. Andrew Taylor's ERC project on probability (University of Barcelona) – and was further expanded in 2024 regarding methodology (new touchscreen test aviary) and collaborations. Lamberts' FWF projects investigated individual traits predicting innovation tendencies in kea and whether kea use cues such as sounds, size, or volume to infer the weight of novel objects. An IMHA project she supervises examined kea' olfactory abilities, including individual preferences and the use of scents as cues for locating food.

Prof. Malin Newberry (Norwegian Academy of Life Sciences) spent her sabbatical in Vienna, designing and testing techniques to study novelty effects as a component of humour.

Prof. Erik Moorman (University of Groningen) supervised research on entrainment effects in kea using the new touchscreen setup, together with a student from the MeiCogSci programme.



Photo: Anontio Osuna Mascaro/Vetmeduni

## Goffin Labs in Goldegg (Austria) and Tanimbar (Indonesia)

In 2024, research on Goffin cockatoos again highlighted the innovative capacities of this species and provided the first data-based evidence of non-human animals seasoning their food. Further studies on problem-solving mechanisms showed that these birds employ sophisti-

cated optimisation strategies in decision-making, particularly regarding the weight of objects. Additionally, the cockatoos exhibited selective neophobia and hesitation toward objects with certain shapes.

Interdisciplinary research revealed that both children and cockatoos face similar challenges when managing simultaneous tool innovations – especially in tasks requiring the concurrent use of two tools. Collaboration with roboticists in Berlin also advanced the modelling of kinematic aspects of animals' problem-solving behaviour.

Ongoing field research on Goffin cockatoos' tool use in Singapore was expanded by a new FWF-funded project. Moreover, the first study using monitoring platforms for feeding on Tanimbar was published this year, and a successful study on predator recognition (with Ondrej Fiser, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice) was conducted.

# Associated Centres



Photo: Franziska Freudenprung/WSC

## Wolf Science Center (WSC)

Published in Animal Behaviour and Learning & Behaviour, in 2024, in two papers we have compared how fast dogs and wolves can "learn to learn" and how much they can benefit for human presence in stressful situations. Whereas in the second study we found little differences between dog and wolf pups and also in the first study we found that dogs and wolves learnt similarly fast, the first study also showed that dogs are somewhat more flexible in reversing a previously learnt rule than wolves.

Testing the human-raised animals at the Wolf Science Center continued also this year: adopting methods from the Clever Dog Lab, we have investigated whether the wolves and dogs kept in packs in large enclosures respond to human intentional behaviours as sophisticated as pet dogs do.

Finally, the greatest news of the year was that 3 wolf pups joined the WSC population. The two white and one black hairy balls grew very fast into long-legged adolescents, and joined our scientific work in no time. The sad fact that the older animals are getting indeed very old

and some of them can leave us at any time will also contribute to science however. IMHA student Elisabeth Hasewend set out to investigate how these wolves respond to losing their packmate in order to learn about their emotions and welfare in case of death.



Photo: CePii

## Institute of Pathophysiology and Allergy Research (IPA) at the Center for Pathophysiology, Infectiology, and Immunology (CePii), Medical University of Vienna

The affiliation with the Medical University of Vienna is especially important for the Comparative Medicine team due to its bridging role as well as its immunological and allergological research focus. As part of the Institute of Pathophysiology and Allergy Research (IPA), Comparative Medicine is also embedded within the Center for Pathophysiology, Infectiology, and Immunology (CePii). The close connection to the IPA is evident in the fact that Erika Jensen-Jarolim was not only a former institute director but also led IPA Department 1 until 2024.

The field of allergology has not only shaped the IPA but is also firmly integrated into the Messerli Research Institute and interpreted in the context of One Health.

## Institute of Philosophy at the University of Vienna

There is intensive exchange and regular collaboration with the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Vienna, which is institutionalised through a permanent honorary professorship and a work assignment held by Herwig Grimm. This collaboration is especially strong in teaching, cooperation within an FWF-funded doctoral programme (FWF Doc.funds: Philosophy as Conceptual Engagement), the Vienna Doctoral School of Philosophy, and the FWF Cluster of Excellence Knowledge in Crisis. The Institute of Philosophy is large by international standards and can draw on diverse expertise, which benefits the interdisciplinary character of the Messerli Research Institute.



## Cooperation with our Partner Universities

Our collaborations with groups and institutions at our partner universities are numerous, so we can only summarise and list them in table form within the scope of this report:



### University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna

- Animal Care School
- Centre for Veterinary Systems Transformation and Sustainability
- Clinical Centre for Population Medicine in Fish, Pig and Poultry
- Clinical Centre for Small Animal Health and Research
- Centre for Animal Nutrition and Welfare
- Centre of Biological Sciences
- Centre for Food Science and Veterinary Public Health
- Konrad Lorenz Institute of Ethology
- Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology
- Clinical Centre for Ruminant and Camelid Medicine
- Clinical Centre for Equine Health and Research
- VetCore



### University of Vienna

- Cognitive Science Platform
- Department Functional & Evolutionary Ecology
- Department of Behavioural and Cognitive Biology
- Department of Cognition, Emotion and Methods in Psychology, SCAN Unit
- Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology
- Institute of Philosophy



### Medical University of Vienna

- Austrian Pollen Information Service
- Centre for Medical Physics and Biomedical Engineering
- Centre for Pathophysiology, Infectiology and Immunology
- Department of Biomedical Imaging and Image-guided Therapy
- Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- Department of Dermatology
- Department of Otorhinolaryngology
- Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy
- Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Department of Internal Medicine III
- Immunology Research Cluster

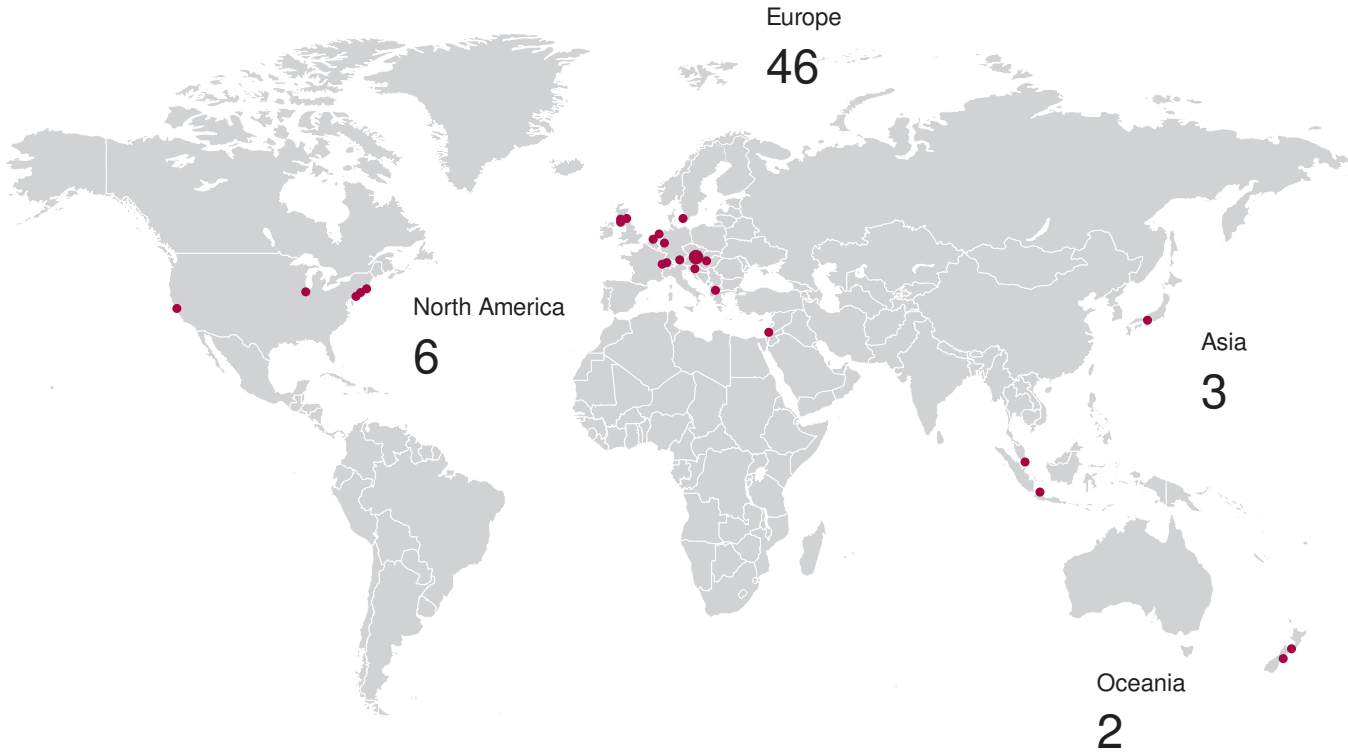


Photo: Niko Havranek

## Other National Research Partners

- Animals as Therapy / Science and Training Center
- Austrian Academy of Sciences
- Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES)
- Catholic Private University Linz
- Center for Health and Bioresources, AIT Austrian Institute of Technology
- Central European University
- Department of Biosciences, University of Salzburg
- Gut Aiderbichl
- Higher Federal Teaching and Research Institute Raumberg-Gumpenstein
- Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences, Krems
- Professional Assistance Network, Vienna
- Schönbrunn Zoo
- University for Continuing Education Krems
- University of Applied Arts Vienna
- University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)
- Vienna University of Technology (TU Wien)
- Wels Zoo

## Overview of our International Research Partners by Continent





# Teaching

## Interdisciplinary Master's Programme in Human–Animal Interactions (IMHAI)



The Interdisciplinary Master's Programme in Human-Animal Interactions (IMHAI) is a research-oriented master's programme that prepares students for an academic career in the field of human-animal interactions. Staff members from the Messerli Research Institute, the Centre for Animal Nutrition and Animal Welfare (former Institute for Animal Welfare Science and Animal Husbandry), and the Domestication Lab teach topics related to human–animal interactions from biological, medical, animal welfare science, and philosophical perspectives. Particular emphasis is placed on interdisciplinary teaching formats.

We were pleased to select the most motivated and best-qualified students from a large number of applicants in 2024. They began their studies in October 2024 and have already shown remarkable interest and commitment to engaging with issues related to human-animal interactions in a scientifically grounded manner.

In March 2024, third-semester students presented their research projects, which they had often initiated themselves and developed in dialogue with researchers at the Messerli Research Institute. Noteworthy is the students' high level of engagement and the fact that their research is often framed by very specific, practice-oriented questions in the field of human–animal interactions.

In 2024 a revision of the IMHAI curriculum was prepared. Adjusting to the extension of the Messerli Research Institute and to accommodate the new expertise added to it, the new curriculum has now a stronger focus on human-animal-environment interactions and their practical aspects. Also, recognizing the potential and value of research projects initiated by the students themselves, the new curriculum aims to accommodate this process and to further support the students in turning their ideas into a well-defined research question. The new curriculum will be taught from October 2025 on.

Even though, after an outstandingly high rate of graduation in 2023, in 2024 Narayan Patal was the only IMHAI student who defended his thesis (titled "Experimental Bias in the Goffin's cockatoo"), we trust that the new curriculum, having selected the most interested student applicants and new processes aiming at encouraging the students to finish their MSc projects within their study time will facilitate a stable and high graduation rate in the future.

The new IMHAI student cohort together with Zsófia Virányi (IMHAI Coordinator).



Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni



The IMHAI students of the first and second study years successfully organised and completed the 2024 symposium.

### IMHAI Symposium

The IMHAI Symposium is the final course of the IMHAI curriculum: the students organise a conference where they present their research to the younger IMHAI generation as well as other students and researchers of the partner universities. This year, after an invited talk by Sophie Veigl, University of Vienna, on topics related to animal ethics, the IMHAI students presented their work in 9 talks and a poster session on 28 June 2024.

Time	Topic
08:30	Door opening
09:00	Welcoming talk
09:15	Guest speaker: Sophie Veigl
09:30	Coffee break
10:00	Taking a break - salivary cortisol, heart rate variability and behaviour in guide dogs after working
10:15	Effect of urbanization on free-ranging wolves in Italy
11:40	Self-recognition of their own body as a physical obstacle in Goffin's cockatoo
12:00	Social transfer of foraging information
12:30	Lunch break
13:00	Poster session
14:30	Curing cancer in dogs: Development and in-vitro testing of carinized checkpoint inhibitors for canine cancer immunotherapy
15:00	Pro-choice without a voice? - Extending arguments from debates on female reproductive autonomy to non-human animals in commercial farming
15:20	Resisting being made voiceless: Reflecting resistance as a form of animal agency to identify disenfranchisement as a moral problem in animal research
15:45	Coffee break
16:10	Are brachycephalic dogs special or the people who like them?
16:30	Stress at work and severity of allergy symptoms: a questionnaire study
16:50	Closing

Photo: Florian Schmidt/Vetmeduni

## Other Teaching Activities and Degrees

Staff at the Messerli Research Institute are also heavily involved in teaching within the veterinary medicine programme at the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna, as well as in various programmes at the two partner universities. Key teaching areas include veterinary ethics, animal ethics, applied ethics, comparative medicine, immunology, allergology, animal behaviour, and cognitive science. These subjects are taught not only in Vienna but across Europe and beyond.

A total of 19 master's and diploma theses were successfully completed under the supervision of Messerli Research Institute staff.



Photo: private

IMHAI students together with Thomas Schobesberger (Federal Ministry, second from right) with Herwig Grimm (first from right) at the ministerial reception on the occasion of the establishment of the Commission on Harmful Breeding Practices.



# Examination and Coordination Centre at the MRI

## Assistance and Therapy Dogs

The Examination and Coordination at the Messerli Research Institute for the implementation of § 39a of the Federal Disability Act is unique at an international level. The leading work in the European standardisation organisation CEN on developing a uniform standard for assistance dogs was successfully continued. The working group Lifelong Wellbeing of Assistance Dogs, led by Karl Weissenbacher, successfully advanced its work during the reporting year; the document has progressed from the new working Item stage and from public consultation to readiness for voting at the European level. At the national standards institute Austrian Standards, Karl Weissenbacher, head of the Examination and Coordination Centre, remains chairman of Committee 196, Technical Aids for People with Disabilities.

Two theses on the stress load of service dogs and guide dogs were completed and presented in the scientific field.

In 2024, 1,390 (+20% vs. 2023) therapy dog teams were tested in 160 (+5% vs. 2023) examination sessions. For assistance dogs, 68 (-1% vs. 2023) team and 34 (+13% vs. 2023) quality tests were conducted.

The Examination and Coordination Centre is contacted regularly for media inquiries (print, online, radio, and TV). Animal welfare ombudspersons, regional governments, and ministries also use the office as a source of information regarding dog-related matters and dog keeping. This is also reflected by the co-optation of Karl Weissenbacher to the permanent working group of the Animal Welfare Council and his appointment to the commission for implementing the ban on cruel breeding by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection.

A media highlight was the campaign Two Legs, Four Paws, and a Grand Adventure, organised together with the training centre Independence Dogs Austria and supported by Nestlé Purina. A group of eight guide dog teams hiked the Camino de Santiago from A Coruña to Santiago de Compostela. The media response was enormous, reaching 26.7 million people via print, TV, and social media. The total media coverage had an advertising value of approximately 265,000 euros.

### Assistance Dogs:

Assistance dogs include:

1. guide dogs
2. signal dogs, especially for people with hearing impairments
3. service dogs for people with mobility disabilities



An assistance dog not only has to be suitable in terms of health and temperament but must also complete specialised training with a positive assessment, which is a prerequisite for registering the dog in the disability pass. The status of an assistance dog can only be maintained through regular continuing education.

### Therapy Dogs:

The therapy dog accompanies its handler in so-called animal-assisted interventions for people of all ages with cognitive, socio-emotional, and motor impairments, behavioural disorders, and special educational needs, as well as in health-promoting, preventive, and rehabilitative measures.

Recognition as a therapy dog must be renewed annually to maintain this status.



Photo: Purina

Karl Weissenbacher and Wolfgang Niegelhell with guide dog Amando on the Way of St James.



Photo: Purina

Team arriving in Santiago de Compostela.

## Animal Welfare Certified Dog Trainer

In 18 (+20% vs. 2023) examination sessions in 2024, a total of 182 (+33% vs. 2023) trainers took the exam, of which 133 (+24% vs. 2023) passed. The number of active animal welfare certified dog trainers now stands at 673. More than 12,500 hours of continuing education were recognised, thereby continuously improving the quality and knowledge level of trainers in Austria.





# Involvement in committees

Staff members of the Messerli Research Institute (MRI) are active in various capacities on committees dealing with issues in human-animal interactions. One key example is the Commission for Harmful Breeding Practices, which includes Herwig Grimm, Svenja Springer and Karl Weissenbacher as members. This commission was established under §44a of the Austrian Animal Welfare Act to provide expert assessments and recommendations for preventing the breeding of animals with traits that cause suffering (known as torture breeding). The commission works based on scientific expertise and supports the implementation of the breeding ban outlined in the Animal Welfare Act.

Only decision-making committees in which MRI staff hold leading positions are listed below, given the large number of such roles. It should be noted that MRI members are also involved in around 60 other committees in various functions and roles.

Scientific Committees and Expert Panels	in a Leadership Role*
Minding Animals Germany: Chairperson	Benz-Schwarzburg, Judith
European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics (EurSafe): Vice President	Grimm, Herwig
Steering Committee of the Swiss National Research Programme 79 Advancing 3Rs – Animals, Research and Society: President	Grimm, Herwig
Supervisory Board Jane Goodall Institute Austria	Huber, Ludwig
Scientific Advisory Board of Schönbrunn Zoo	Huber, Ludwig
ManyDogs 2 Consortium: Leader	Huber, Ludwig
ManyMany: Core Contributor	Huber, Ludwig
Rote Pfote - Cancer Research for Animals: President	Jensen-Jarolim, Erika
ManyBirds: Leader	Lambert, Megan
AMICI, Austrian Microbiome Initiative: Board Member	Roth-Walter, Franziska
EAACI Workgroup Immunomodulation and Nutrition: Secretary General	Roth-Walter, Franziska
Austrian Standards, Komitee 196, Technical Aids for People with Disabilities: Chairman	Weissenbacher, Karl
CEN (Comité Européen de Normalisation, European Committee for Standardization), Working Group 2 Dog Lifetime Welfare: Chairman	Weissenbacher, Karl

In addition, staff members of the Messerli Research Institute are actively involved in leadership roles in committees and collegial bodies of the University of Veterinary Medicine, Vienna.

University committees and collegial bodies	in a Leadership Role*
Selection Committee for the Rectorate of the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna: Deputy Chair	Grimm, Herwig
Senate, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna: Chair	Grimm, Herwig
Messerli Research Institute: Head of Institute	Grimm, Herwig
Head of Department of Interdisciplinary Life Sciences, Vetmeduni	Huber, Ludwig
Curriculum Committee for Equine Sciences, Human-Animal Interaction, Wildlife Management: Chair	Huber, Ludwig
Educational working group at the Vetmeduni EWG 7; Leader	Springer, Svenja
Messerli Research Institute: Deputy Head of Institute	Virányi, Zsófia

\* in alphabetical order

# Awards

At the Science Gala on October 9, 2024, at the ISTA (Institute of Science and Technology, Moonstone Building), **Ludwig Huber** was honoured with one of the two Lower Austria Science Awards for his work in behavioural research at the Haidlhof Research Station in Bad Vöslau (Baden district).



Award recipients Thomas Eiwegger (second from left) and Ludwig Huber (second from right), flanked by Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner (left) and Deputy Governor Joseph Pernkopf (right).

Together with three colleagues from the Domestication Lab, KLIVV, and the University of Vienna, **Zsófia Virányi** was awarded the Recognition Prize of the State of Lower Austria as a member of the Domestication Research Team.

The Italian Society for Ethology (SIE) awarded **Lucrezia Lonardo** the prize for the most innovative publication by a young female researcher in 2023.

**Kimberly Brosche** received the Forster-Steinberg Animal Welfare Prize, a recognition award from the Federal Ministry of Education, for her IMHAI master's thesis on communication between pigs and humans (supervised by Ariane Veit and Zsófia Virányi).



Kimberly Brosche (left) at the award ceremony together with Rector Petra Winter.

The students of the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna elected **Christian Dürnberger** as Teacher of the Year 2024 (1st place in the category non-clinical).



From left to right: Casian Muresan (student representative), Christian Dürnberger, and Vice-Rector for Teaching and Clinical Veterinary Medicine Jürgen Rehage at the award ceremony.

**Aila Fakhimahmadi** received the award for the best presentation at the EAACI Hybrid Congress, June 2024, Valencia (Spain) for: Reduced allergenicity of the mould major allergen Alt a 1 under iron deficiency: Effects on nutritional immunity and immune resilience.

**Jeroen Zewald** received the award for the best presentation at the 3rd Annual PhD Conference – VDS CoBeNe PhD Academy (2024).

**Hanna Mayerhofer** received two poster awards, in Valencia and at the YSA Congress, for her work on a beta-lactoglobulin-based food for special medical purposes (FSMP) for the dietary treatment of atopic dermatitis.



Award winner Hannah Mayerhofer (left) with her colleague Simona Winkler.

Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni

Photo: Dominik Kiss/Vetmeduni

Photo: Aila Fakhimahmadi



# Society & Communication

The Messerli Research Institute (MRI) contributes to promoting scientifically based and ethically responsible treatment of animals in our society. In line with the institute's mission, an important task is to bring knowledge from research into public debate.

## Wildlife Protection on Tanimbar

Since contributing to the protection of wild animals is a core value of the Goffin Lab Tanimbar, we maintain close contact with local officials of the Indonesian Ministry of Conservation. We offer support and knowledge transfer regarding best practices for housing and releasing wild Goffin cockatoos confiscated from illegal wildlife trade and promote exchange within the local indigenous community.



Transport of confiscated Goffin's cockatoos to the temporary and mobile habituation aviary on Tanimbar by local staff of the Indonesian Ministry of Nature Conservation.

## Ethics Workshops with Farmers

As part of the MRI's Third Mission, Christian Dürnberger is committed to knowledge transfer between science/ethics and agricultural practice. He discusses ethical issues in animal husbandry with a focus on animal welfare in workshops with farmers. The aim is to communicate scientific findings clearly and foster open exchange about values and responsibilities in animal husbandry. These events strengthen the dialogue between research and agricultural practice.

## ARED Workshop for Practitioners

The interdisciplinary research project ARED (Agency, Rationality and Epistemic Defeat) organised a second workshop in 2024 where practitioners from Austrian organisations engaging in animal protection, husbandry, training, and animal-assisted therapy had a fruitful knowledge-exchange of knowledge with scientists and philosophers of the ARED project and the MRI. The workshop took place at Gut Aiderbichl in Henndorf and included talks on animal behaviour and cognition research, ethical and legal aspects of animal husbandry and training, tools for assessing animal welfare, and examples of educational materials for adults and children.



Participants and speakers at the ARED Workshop at Gut Aiderbichl.

## Tierschutz macht Schule

The Austrian association *Tierschutz macht Schule* promotes knowledge and awareness of animal welfare, animal ethics, and respectful treatment of animals. The association offers scientifically sound educational programmes to support schools, teachers, and interested parties in teaching children and youth responsible animal care. Herwig Grimm is a member of the scientific advisory board and contributes expertise in ethics and human-animal interaction.



## KYNtegra Symposium

KYNtegra is a symposium focusing on assistance and therapy dogs, their rights, and needs. The symposium has been held successfully for several years on the campus of the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, bringing together scientists, dog trainers, and owners of assistance and therapy dogs.



Major application at the registration of KYNtegra 2024.

## Internationally Established Site for Nature Research on Tanimbar

The Tanimbar Islands feature a rich endemic birdlife, attracting international visitors interested in local flora and fauna, with a particular focus on bird species. Over the years, the Goffin Lab Tanimbar has gained a reputation in the birdwatching community as a prime location for nature observations. We are always happy to share our research findings and the conservation approaches in the region.



Mark O'Hara shows a birdwatcher from Australia the best spots to observe Tanimbar's many endemic birds.

## Science Academy Lower Austria: The Animal and Us

For the first time, Vetmeduni participated in the Science Academy Lower Austria. The course titled The Animal and Us offered young people in Lower Austria the opportunity to learn more about the broad field of veterinary medicine and food safety. Johanna Karg, Judith Benz-Schwarzburg, and Christian Dürnberger each conducted a full-day workshop with the participants on ethical issues surrounding the relationship between humans and animals.



## Dog Trainer Conference

The multi-day conference with high-profile speakers from science, dog training, and veterinary medicine was held for the 10th time at the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna. The target audience is dog trainers seeking further education and networking opportunities.

## English Lessons for Children

As part of their social engagement, Mark O'Hara and Berenika Mioduszezewska regularly give English lessons at a local language school in Indonesia welcoming children from diverse economic backgrounds.



## Public Relations

### Tours at the Clever Dog Lab

The Clever Dog Lab regularly offers tours for groups such as school classes or individual scientists. It is also introduced to students of the master's programmes IMHAI and Precision Animal Health as part of their studies.

### Tours at the Haidlhof Research Station

Once a month, tours are held at the Haidlhof Research Station for interested members of the public. The focus is on kea and the research conducted on them. Additionally, Raoul Schwing and Florian Vogel (head animal keepers at Haidlhof) are regularly involved in teaching at the animal caretaker school, where they teach future animal caretakers how to handle and care for kea.

## Media Coverage

On average, the MRI was mentioned once per day in the media in 2024. In particular, our research findings documenting the cognitive abilities of animals were able to attract a lot of public attention.



Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni



Photo: Karsten Schultz

Kea workshop for animal keepers from Germany and Austria with speakers from the Vetmeduni.

# Infrastructure

The Messerli Library was integrated into the main library on the Vetmeduni campus. This allowed the creation of new workspaces for numerous PhD students in the Messerli building. In 2025 and 2026, the former library will be converted into an attractive workspace for MRI researchers and visiting scientists.



Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni

The new workplaces in the former library.

Markus Fitzka has kept a cargo bike available on the Vetmeduni campus for transporting bulky test equipment since 2024.



Photo: Doza Košak/Vetmeduni

Markus Fitzka on his new cargo bike.

The Clever Dog Lab was integrated into the Vetmeduni's central chip key system.

In the medical lab, some devices were expanded or replaced. A new -80°C freezer, a centrifuge, and a refurbished light source for the TissueFAX were acquired or repaired.

Meetings can be held even more efficiently with the new hybrid system in the conference rooms of the Messerli House.

Fully electric: The new electric shuttle bus of the Vetmeduni reliably transports employees of the university from the train station Bad Vöslau to their workplace at the VetFarm including Haidlhof.



Photo: Ludwig Huber/Vetmeduni

Florian Vogel in front of the new electric shuttle bus for the VetFarm satellite stations.

The West Nile virus affected the Haidlhof and its birds. Thanks to the efforts of Raoul Schwing and Florian Vogel, the aviaries were equipped with mosquito nets, protecting the kea.



Photo: Ludwig Huber/Vetmeduni

A Kea aviary secured with mosquito nets.



# Social Events



Photo: Jennifer Bentlage/Vetmeduni



Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni

At regular intervals, all members of the Department of Interdisciplinary Life Sciences meet. In 2024, the gathering took place at Wilhelminenberg, including a tour of the Research Institute of Wildlife Ecology and the Konrad-Lorenz Institute of Ethology.



Photo: Jennifer Bentlage/Vetmeduni

A successful Christmas party rounded off the year.



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni

The members of the university council together with rector Petra Winter and Matthias Gauly as well as Herwig Grimm as head of senate at the vetmeduni+ party in the Karl-Marx venue.



Photo: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni

As every year, the Messerli Research Institute's performance was evaluated on-site in Vienna by the scientific advisory board. The meeting with the Messerli Foundation, employees, and representatives of partner universities was again a much-appreciated event.



Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni

The Messerli team celebrated Ludwig Huber's milestone birthday. Congratulations!



Photo: Jennifer Bentlage/Vetmeduni



Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni

The Clever Dog Lab team at their pre-Christmas gathering.



Photo: Olivia Auersperg

The Goffin Lab team, led by Alice Auersperg, wraps up the year with a Christmas party.



During cold weather, punch and „Krapfen“ (doughnuts) were served at the year-end gathering.



Photos: Thomas Suchanek/Vetmeduni





Raoul Schwing during his habilitation lecture, which he later celebrated with a very special cake. We wish him all the best!



Photos: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni



Elisabeth Suwandschieff with her supervisor Raoul Schwing after successfully defending her PhD thesis.

Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni



Svenja Springer organised the reading with Elfriede Hammerl about the book: *The Dog is Right!*

Photos: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni



Lucrezia Lonardo with her PhD supervisor Ludwig Huber and her successfully defended thesis.

Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni



Theresa Rössler is celebrated by her colleagues in the Goffin Lab after her PhD defense.

Photo: Olivia Auerberg



Konstantin Deininger celebrated his successful doctoral thesis.

Photo: Jennifer Bentlage/Vetmeduni



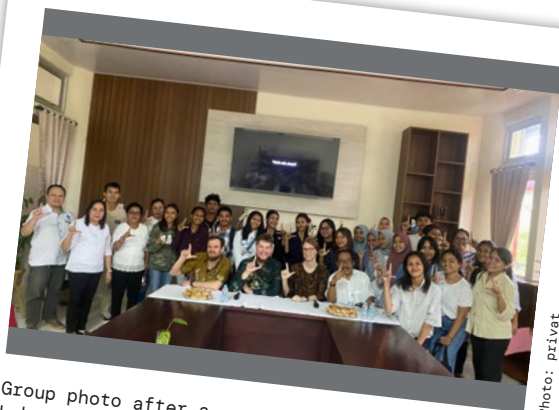
Our longtime employee Regina Meixner, who has been part of our team since the beginning, is retiring. We sincerely thank Regina for her loyal and dedicated work over many years.

Photo: Karin Bayer/Vetmeduni



Irene Pepperberg together with other international scientists at the Messerli Research Institute for a communication workshop with animals.

Photo: Bezenika Mioduszevska/Vetmeduni



Group photo after a guest lecture by the Goffin Lab Tanimbar at Pattimura University in Ambon.

Photo: privat



Prof. Onur Güntürkün (University of Bochum, Department of Biopsychology) visited the Clever Dog Lab with his team.

Photo: privat



Erika Jensen-Jarolim was a faculty member of the Winter School of the Department of Immunology of the European Academy for Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI) and represented the Allergo-Oncology working group in Zakopane, Poland.

Photo: Erika Jensen-Jarolim



The Goffin Lab team's excursion to Affenberg focused not on cockatoos but on Japanese macaques.

Photo: Mark O'Hara/Vetmeduni



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