

Volunteering in Rarotonga



Helper Monica and veterinarians Helen and Dianne outside the Esther Honey clinic in Rarotonga.

The Cook Islands have only one veterinary clinic, based on the island of Rarotonga and staffed by volunteer veterinarians who come from around the world.

Most of the patients of the Esther Honey Foundation are companion animals presented for treatment or neutering, but the volunteers have also treated a variety of livestock and wildlife. The Foundation operates from a small clinic on Rarotonga and relies on donations and contributions of supplies and equipment.

The clinic was founded by an American, Cathy Sue Ragan-Anunsen, in 1994, after a holiday in the Cook Islands when she learned that the country had no veterinary service for its many companion animals. Support also came from other individuals, companies and organisations.

Several New Zealand veterinarians have spent time volunteering at the Esther Honey clinic, and some veterinary practices have assisted by sending veterinary supplies and drugs.

One of the more common conditions requiring treatment is ciguatera poisoning in dogs and cats. Ciguatera affects animals (and humans) after they have eaten fish that contain high levels of ciguatoxin, a toxin believed to be produced by algae (ciguatera dinoflagellates) that live in shallow coral reef areas. The fish are poisonous only when they have accumulated high levels of the toxin, and seldom show visible signs that they are toxic.

If you are interested in volunteering, or would like to help by sending veterinary supplies, or would simply like more information about the Esther Honey Foundation, email frogfarm@aol.com or check the website (www.estherhoney.org).