

Press Release

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State continues work to contain chronic wasting disease, avian influenza and West Nile virus

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources today provided an update on three serious wildlife diseases that are affecting several species.

In late May, the DNR announced confirmation of chronic wasting disease in a free-ranging deer in Ingham County. Less than two weeks later, highly pathogenic avian influenza was detected in three Canada goslings in Macomb County. Most recently, West Nile virus has been found in crows in Ingham County.

Russ Mason, chief of the DNR Wildlife Division, said employees throughout the division have kept a tight focus on the vital tasks at hand.

“Staff members have done an exceptional job putting response plans into action for both chronic wasting disease and avian influenza. Surveillance and containment are top priorities as we work to safeguard the public, domestic poultry and Michigan’s wildlife populations,” Mason said.

“We are grateful, too, for the steadfast commitment and expertise of our partners across the board in managing this effort,” he added. “From the U.S. Department of Agriculture and local county and township officials, to goose contractors and our colleagues at the Michigan departments of Agriculture and Rural Development and Health and Human Services, everyone is doing an outstanding job to support the goals of this important work.”

Following is a brief update (including information to help the public in reporting animal observations) on each wildlife disease:

Chronic wasting disease

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a fatal neurological disease that affects white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk and moose. May 2015 marked the first time the disease had been found in a single free-ranging deer in Michigan. In 2008, a white-tailed deer from a privately owned cervid facility in Kent County tested positive for CWD.

Since finding the disease in a free-ranging deer in May, 135 other deer within the CWD Management Zone have been tested for CWD. No new cases yet have been found, but thousands more will need to be tested before the severity and extent of the disease can accurately be determined.

The DNR continues to ask the public for help in reporting deer that are unusually thin or exhibiting

unusual behavior (for example, acting tame around humans and allowing someone to approach). To report:

- A suspicious-looking deer, call the Report All Poaching hotline at 800-292-7800 or fill out and submit the [online observation report](#) found on the DNR website.
- Road-kills found in the Core CWD Area, call the Wildlife Disease Hotline at 517-614-9602 during office hours. Leave a voicemail with location information and staff will attempt to pick up carcasses on the next open business day.

More information – including [Michigan's CWD surveillance and response plan](#), FAQs and new regulations – is available at www.michigan.gov/cwd.

Avian influenza

In early June, Michigan became the nation's 21st state since 2014 to report a case of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). In the other 20 states, HPAI has been found in captive or free-ranging wild birds, and/or backyard and commercial poultry flocks. Michigan became the sixth state to detect HPAI only in free-ranging birds.

Avian influenza is a virus that affects both free-ranging birds and domestic poultry such as chickens, turkeys, quail and geese. Avian influenza viruses are named based on how lethal they are to domestic chickens: highly pathogenic viruses cause widespread deaths, while low pathogenic viruses do not. Avian influenza has not yet been identified in Michigan's domestic poultry flocks.

Since 2006, nearly 9,000 waterfowl in Michigan have been tested for avian influenza. Thus far, Michigan has a total of four free-ranging Canada goslings and one sub-adult goose – all from Macomb County – confirmed to have been infected with the HPAI H5N2 virus.

With recent avian flu findings, Steve Schmitt, veterinarian in charge of the DNR Wildlife Disease Laboratory, said the relocation of geese has been suspended for this year.

“Each summer, the DNR routinely relocates nuisance Canada geese in southeast Michigan to other parts of the state,” Schmitt explained. “Given these developments, the DNR has stopped all goose relocation activities, except in areas where there is a domestic poultry or public health concern.”

Schmitt said vigilant surveillance and containment continue to be the department's top priorities, with actions that include responding to reports of suspicious dead animals; testing ducks and geese during routine banding, as well as hunter-harvested waterfowl; and employing increased biosecurity measures for anyone who handles waterfowl.

Important points for the public to keep in mind include:

- To date, no highly pathogenic avian influenza infections of humans have been detected in the United States. Avian influenza is not a food safety concern and no birds or bird products infected with HPAI will enter the food chain.
- Birds infected with HPAI may experience difficulty walking, lack of appetite, energy or vocalization, or other neurological symptoms. Sudden death and high death losses are major indicators of HPAI.
- Residents who notice sick or three or more dead free-ranging waterfowl should report it to DNR at 517-336-5030. If a domestic flock is experiencing severe illness or multiple deaths, contact the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development at 800-292-3939 or (for after-hours emergencies) 517-373-0440.

For more information, go to www.michigan.gov/avianinfluenza or www.michigan.gov/aviandiseases.

West Nile virus

Most recently, three American crows in Ingham County tested positive for West Nile virus – the state’s first report this year of the virus. West Nile virus is carried by birds, and has been known to be transmitted from bird to bird only by mosquitoes. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on a bird carrying the virus. The infected mosquito then transmits the virus to another bird through a second bite.

Most birds are relatively resistant to West Nile virus, and serve (as carriers) to maintain the virus in the avian population. Susceptible bird species (crows, ravens, blue jays, hawks or owls) and mammals may be infected with West Nile virus when bitten by a “bridge vector” mosquito (one that feeds on both birds and mammals), which transmits the virus outside of the bird-to-bird cycle. Bridge vector mosquitoes then may transmit the virus to a horse, human or other mammal.

So far in 2015, there have been no confirmed cases of humans being infected with West Nile virus.

The public can help by continuing to observe birds, keeping in mind that:

- The corvid family includes species – American crow, common raven and blue jay – most sensitive to West Nile virus.
- Several of the raptor (hawk and owl) species also can be adversely affected.
- Birds showing neurological signs consistent with West Nile virus may demonstrate an inability to perch, walk or fly, and often are in poor physical condition and dehydrated.

To report birds suspected of being infected with West Nile virus, call the DNR Wildlife Disease Lab at 517-336-5030.

For more information, including precautions to protect against the virus, visit the [West Nile virus section](#) on Michigan’s emerging diseases website.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the state’s natural and cultural resources for current and future generations. For more information, go to www.michigan.gov/dnr.

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