



DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE RESOURCES
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For Immediate Release

July 28, 2021

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UPDATE ON AVIAN MORTALITY EVENT IN NORTHERN/NORTHWESTERN VIRGINIA

In late May, wildlife managers in multiple states, including Virginia, began receiving reports of sick and dying birds that were exhibiting eye issues (swelling, crust discharge, etc.), along with neurological symptoms. Frequently reported species and age classes observed exhibiting these symptoms were young common grackles, blue jays, European starlings, and American robins. Other species of sick songbirds have also been reported but in much lower numbers. No human health or domestic livestock and poultry issues have been reported thus far.

Virginia was one of the first states that received reports of birds displaying eye and neurological signs. As a result, since early June, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), along with other local collaborating organizations, has been documenting dead or sick bird reports and submissions to cooperating wildlife rehabilitation hospitals. From these data, DWR was able to target our response guidance to the areas of Virginia most likely to be affected by this mortality event, which include Alexandria, Arlington, Clarke, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fauquier, Frederick, Loudoun, Manassas, Prince William, Shenandoah, Warren, and Winchester.

Since early June, reports of dead or sick birds from the affected areas submitted via DWR's online form have decreased by 50%. Reports of dead or sick birds submitted to the Animal Rescue League of Arlington (ARLA) have also dropped from an average of 17 reports per day in early June to 1.5 reports per day in July. In the last two weeks, Cooperating wildlife rehabilitation veterinarians in the affected area and ARLA staff have only reported a total of two observations of affected birds.

DWR is working with the various wildlife health labs involved in this investigation, as well as the other states involved in this mortality event. Diagnostic investigations of this nature can be prolonged, due to the wide range of testing possibilities, and because of this no definitive cause(s) of illness or death have been determined at this time. Experts are utilizing all possible diagnostic avenues including toxicology (herbicides, pesticides, etc.), viral, bacterial, and parasitology.

DWR continues to recommend that people discontinue bird feeding in the affected areas until further notice. For the remainder of the state, DWR advises removing bird feeders anytime multiple dead birds are observed on a property over a short period of time. Feeders and bird baths should be disinfected with a 10% bleach solution (one part bleach mixed with nine parts water), rinsed with water, and allowed to air dry. Generally, for the health of wild birds, it is a good practice to disinfect bird feeders and baths at least every two weeks.

If you encounter sick or dead birds, in Virginia, please submit an event report at dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/bird-mortality-reporting-form/. For additional information on this mortality event, please visit dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/2021-bird-mortality-event/.

To dispose of dead birds, place the bird (s) in a plastic bag, seal, and discard with household trash or alternatively bury them at least 3 feet. DWR will continue to update the public on diagnostic results and provide guidance once the mortality event is believed to be concluded.

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