

August 25, 2004

First bird found in Alberta with West Nile virus in 2004

Edmonton... A crow found in Lethbridge has tested positive for West Nile virus. This is the first sign of the virus in a bird in Alberta in 2004, but positive mosquitoes and a horse were identified earlier this month, near Vulcan and Picture Butte.

The bird was detected through Alberta's wild bird surveillance program, which began May 1 this year. As in 2003, the Fish and Wildlife Division of Sustainable Resource Development tests birds of the corvid family (including crows, magpies, blue jays and ravens) for evidence of the virus. In total, 550 birds were tested before this positive case was discovered. (For more testing information, visit http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/public/WNV/evidence_temp2004.html).

"We expected West Nile virus to be detected in birds in Alberta this summer," said Dr. Margo Pybus, Wildlife Disease Specialist, Sustainable Resource Development. "However, it took longer than we thought. It seems there has been much less virus activity this year than last year."

Albertans can take fresh, dead carcasses, particularly crows or magpies, to any Fish and Wildlife office (call 310-0000 toll-free for locations). Dead wildlife should be handled using gloves or doubled plastic bags. Specimens can be placed in a freezer if they can't be brought in right away. If carcasses are dried or old, they can be wrapped in plastic and put into the garbage.

With evidence of the virus mounting in Saskatchewan, Albertans are still advised to take precautions against mosquito bites, especially in the southern areas of the province. Only a small proportion of mosquitoes carry the virus and the risk of infection remains low. But the infection can cause serious illness with severe consequences. People should use an insect repellent containing DEET and wear long sleeves and pants at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. Information on West Nile virus and how to protect yourself and your family is available on the Alberta Health and Wellness website at <http://www.fightthebite.info>.

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