



# Instructions for the Submission of Dead Birds for West Nile Virus Surveillance

(Revised March 2009)

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

## 1) Bird species to submit to DHEC Bureau of Laboratories:

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- a) Dead crows (American Crows and Fish crows). An American Crow is 17 to 21 inches long and all black. A grackle, which is not being tested, is similar looking to a crow, but is only 11 to 13 inches long, has a head with a green or purple iridescent sheen, and the rest of the body is black or brown.
  - b) Dead blue jays. A Blue Jay ranges in size from 9 to 12 inches. It is bright blue on top and whitish gray on the belly and chin. It has a gray-blue crest on its head, and its wings and tail are bright sky-blue with heavy black barring. It also has a black collar or "necklace" across the throat and continuing around the head. Its bill, legs, feet, and eyes are black.

## 2) Bird species to submit to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR):

- a) Eagles. Contact Charlotte Hope at 843-303-2097. Eagles will be submitted for WNV testing to the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study at the University of Georgia's College of Veterinary Medicine in Athens. Please ask DNR to fax the Bureau of Labs a copy of the dead bird submission sheet so that we may keep track of the birds being tested.
- b) Raptor Die-offs. DNR requests that raptors (hawks, falcons, vultures, and owls) be submitted only if unusual die-offs occur. If an unusual number of dead raptors start appearing, you are requested to call Charlotte Hope (843-303-2097).

## 3) Other bird species:

- a) Suspected WNV-infected birds other than Blue Jays and Crows may be accepted from veterinarians affiliated with facilities such as zoos, raptor rehabilitation centers, etc.
  - b) DNR and Clemson University Veterinary Diagnostic Center are interested in testing other bird species for unexplained die-offs. See the bottom of these instructions for how to handle these birds.
    - i) DNR is testing dead birds found at inland lakes and ponds in the state for a disease called AVM.
    - ii) Clemson University Veterinary Diagnostic Center will investigate unexplained bird die-offs in flocks being raised for agribusiness purposes.
- 4) Submit only freshly dead wild birds that show no visible evidence of physical trauma. (No decaying birds as evidenced by missing eyes, discernible odor, skin discoloration, feathers or skin that easily rubs off, or presence of maggots; no road kills; no gunshot wounds; no bludgeoned birds.)
  - 5) Commonly reported clinical signs in ill birds have included: weakness, lethargy, shaking, seizures, inability to walk/fly/perch, blindness, and lack of fear of humans (i.e., are easily approached).
  - 6) Birds may be submitted from **March 16 to November 30**. The local county environmental health office will determine if birds qualify for testing.
  - 7) **Dead birds should not be handled with bare hands.** Birds should be picked up with doubled bags that have been turned inside out. The doubled bag then should be inverted, sealed, and placed on ice or kept cool until the bird can be refrigerated. **We encourage the use of clear plastic or Ziploc® -type bags so that the bird can be seen through the bags.**

## Instructions for Submission of Dead Birds for West Nile Virus Surveillance (continued)

- 8) Submission of dead birds to DHEC for West Nile virus testing:
  - a) Use "[SCDHEC Dead Bird Submission and Reporting Sheet for West Nile Virus \(pdf\)](#)," to submit dead birds.
    - i) **A bird will not be tested if its physical location is unknown.** If no street address is available, provide directions to the dead bird site. If necessary, draw a map on the back of the form indicating distances from nearby road intersections.
    - ii) NOTE: The "boxed" areas on the Submission Sheet will be completed at the SCDHEC Bureau of Laboratories.
  - b) A dead bird should be placed on ice or kept cool until it can be refrigerated. If the carcass can not be shipped within 24-36 hours of collection, the carcass should be frozen until shipment.
  - c) Take the bird to your local [county environmental health department](#) who then will submit it to DHEC's Bureau of Laboratories for testing.
- 9) Reporting of results:
  - a) Lab testing for WNV will be conducted at the Bureau of Laboratories and will take less than two weeks to complete.
  - b) Results will be reported to the local health department via fax or E-mail.
  - c) Local county environmental health departments will notify you of the results.
- 10) Other Bird Species:
  - a) For unexplained bird die-offs in flocks being raised for agribusiness purposes, (i.e., chickens, turkeys, quail, pheasants, ducks, geese, or emus), owners or farmers should contact the Field Veterinarians at the Clemson University Livestock-Poultry Health Programs (CULPH) in Columbia, SC; telephone (803) 788-2260.
  - b) The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is studying birds at any inland lakes or ponds for Avian Vacuolar Myelinopathy (AVM). Symptomatic or dead **bald eagles and waterfowl, especially American coots**, found at inland lakes or ponds should be reported to DNR, particularly during the months October to February. Symptoms of AVM include difficulty flying, swimming, walking, or exhibiting other signs of incoordination. In addition to having the dead birds tested for AVM, DNR also will arrange to have the birds tested for West Nile virus and will inform DHEC of the test results. Birds should be kept cold on gel ice packs, but they **can not be frozen**. Should you receive a report from the public, refer the caller to Charlotte Hope at DNR (843-303-2097) or to Dr. John Fisher at the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) (706-542-1741).