

OFFICE OF FISH AND WILDLIFE HEALTH AND FORENSICS

MONTHLY REPORT

April 2024

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FISH AND WILDLIFE HEALTH PROJECT (FW-69-R21)

Diagnosis of Diseases in Freshwater Fish (Job F-1)

Hackettstown Hatchery

Approximately 100 northern pike fry from 5 lots that were progeny of wild northern pike were macroscopically screened for incipient deformities or conformational abnormalities. Abnormalities were not definitively observed.

Diagnosis and Research of Diseases in Marine Fish (Job F-2)

Eel Survey

The sampling of glass eels/elvers for the detection of various anguillid pathogens continued during the month of April. Currently, 90 fish of approximately 225 fish have been examined microscopically, whereas 19% had lesions consistent with exposure to an infectious disease agent(s). Screening and collection of glass eels will be continued and supplemented with ancillary diagnostics to obtain a more definitive etiological diagnosis/diagnoses.

Wildlife Disease Surveillance and Investigations (Job W-1) and Wildlife Toxicology (Job W-2)

White-tailed deer with pregnancy-related death – Hackettstown State Fish Hatchery, Warren County

On April 7th, CPO DellaVella contacted Dr. Connelly to state that he had euthanized a lethargic, dehydrated and poorly responsive adult female at the Hackettstown State Fish Hatchery. Necropsy was performed on April 9th, which found significant hemorrhagic fluid within the abdominal cavity and within the reproductive organs. The uterus was distended and had a large dark-red focal area. Two fetuses were present - one of which appeared grossly normal, while the other was multifocally pale-tan to purple. Clinical signs were attributed to the severe internal blood loss. Histopathology is pending.

White-tailed deer – North Hanover, Burlington County

On April 14th, Dr. Connelly instructed Megan Mills and CPO Garofalo to euthanize an emaciated and neurologic yearling buck. Necropsy was performed on April 16th, which found high external and internal parasite burden, severe inner ear infection and dermatitis, and moderate enteritis, typhlitis and jaundice. Testing is ongoing. Histopathology is pending.

Eastern-screech owl with egg-binding – Hillsdale, Bergen County

OFWHF was contacted on April 22nd regarding an eastern screech owl which died shortly after arrival at Franklin Lakes Animal Hospital. The adult female owl was found to be underweight with a moderately prominent keel and poor fat stores. Significant levels of feces stained the vent, legs and distal wings. An egg was readily palpated in the ventral coelomic cavity, and could be visualized just cranial to the cloacal opening. The egg was unable to be manually expressed, and the cloaca needed to be incised to facilitate removal. The obstructed egg was of normal size and weight for this species. Egg-binding is an uncommon finding in wild birds, and predisposing factors are being investigated. The liver was found to be 1/3rd stained with bile. Lead analysis and histopathology is pending.

UPDATE: Mass bird mortality event – Long Beach Island, Ocean County

Testing by NVSL confirmed Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5 2.3.4.4) in all 3 buffleheads submitted for testing. Testing is pending on a turkey vulture and 2 fish crows also from Ocean County that had gross necropsy changes consistent with HPAI.

On March 18th OFWHF received notice of 3 dead buffleheads at Manahawkin WMA. On March 19th, OFWHF was informed of 30+ dead buffleheads in the vicinity of Brant Beach. Carcasses were collected and frozen on March 20th for diagnostics. USDA-WS collected swabs for avian influenza virus testing on March 20th; results pending. Reports of dead sea ducks, as well as at least one gull, continued in the following days. Initially, residents reported a methane smell in the area which was determined to be due to a sewerage gas leak in the vicinity. Cause of death is not yet determined.

Eaglet Health Checks

Dr. Connelly assisted ENSP staff by performing health examinations and blood collection for heavy metal analysis from two apparently healthy bald eagle young at Duke Farms from an annually-monitored nest.

Fisher Project

Dr. Connelly performed necropsies on two roadkill fishers for research sample collection and as a necropsy tutorial for the furbearer team.

Deer Health Questions

The OFWHF was contacted for opinions/advice on deer health issues as follows:

- A deer with a serious injury to the front left leg on April 24th.
- A deer with no fear of humans on April 12th.
- A deer with hair loss and a limp on April 10th.
- An injured deer on April 9th.
- A deer with suspect food impaction on April 1st.

Miscellaneous Activities

- Dr. Connelly attended New Employee Orientation on April 11th.
- Dr. Connelly attended a meeting with the PA Game Commission, Penn State, and Wildlife Futures Program to discuss best practices for mange serology in black bears on April 12th.
- Dr. Connelly attended a virtual Northeast Fish and Wildlife Health Meeting on April 24th.

Non-Project Activities

- Dr. Groff and OFWHF personnel continued non-lethal sampling of amphibians for the detection of various amphibian pathogens of concern and have identified future sites for the sampling of eastern newts.
- Dr. Connelly attended a call to discuss disease in confiscated turtles and guidance for repatriation efforts on April 2nd.
- Dr. Connelly performed a forensic necropsy on a black bear on April 25th.
- Dr. Connelly performed a necropsy on an adult wood turtle on April 30th.