

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)

The OFWHF investigated a report of bullhead catfish with significant orocutaneous proliferative lesions from a pond in Caldwell, Essex County. Attempts to collect affected fish were not successful, but efforts will continue to obtain affected fish for complete pathological examinations. NJFW Freshwater Fisheries have been contacted to provide assistance.

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 May. In addition to the hepatopathy previously reported in April, additional findings included myxosporean and apicomplexan infections in occasional elvers. Collection of glass eels/elvers and yellow eels will continue in June.

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

White-tailed deer with presumed bacterial pneumonia – Ewing, Mercer County

On May 3rd, Dr. Connelly traveled to a private property where an emaciated young buck had recently died. Necropsy was performed on May 3rd. The buck was in poor body condition. On internal examination, severe bacterial pneumonia was evident throughout all lung lobes. Histopathology is pending.

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

Lead analysis by the New Bolton Center Toxicology Lab, University of Pennsylvania found the levels to be within the presumed normal range for owls. Histopathology is pending.

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: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Outbreak

Testing by NJAHDL found a nonnegative result for avian influenza from a clinical turkey vulture and 2 deceased fish crows found in Ocean County. Confirmatory testing for HPAI by NVSL is pending.

OFWHF collected samples on May 23rd for HPAI testing from two neurologic red fox kits which had died at a local rehab facility. Testing is pending.

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 a physical examination and blood collection for heavy metal analysis from one apparently-healthy bald eagle young in Pennington, Mercer County from an annually monitored nest.

Orphaned Black Bear Release

Dr. Connelly assisted BWM staff with monitoring and subsequent release of 5 orphaned black bear cubs which have spent the past year at a rehabilitation facility. All 5 individuals recovered well from sedation.

Histopathological Examination of Wildlife Cases

Dr. Groff performed microscopic/histopathological examinations, and provided definitive or differential diagnoses for wildlife cases submitted to the Clinton Wildlife Pathology Lab.

Bear Genetic Project

Dr. Groff completed the addition/insertion of the Bear Genetic Project Objective to the Federal Fish & Wildlife Health & Forensics Grant. Approval by the USFWS is pending.

Deer Health Questions

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

- A deer with suspect gas bloat on May 22nd.
- A drooling deer on May 21st.
- A deer with suspect lumpy jaw on May 2nd.
- An emaciated deer on May 1st.

Avian Health Questions

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

- A neurologically inappropriate Canada goose in Jamesburg, Middlesex County on May 10th.
- 2 deceased tree swallows in a nest box in Morristown, Morris County on May 13th.
- 2 deceased American oystercatchers and 1 dead piping plover in Ocean County on May 14th.
- 2 deceased grackles/black birds in Maplewood, Essex County on May 16th.
- 2 deceased American crows on private property in Union, Hunterdon County on May 21st.
 - o Dr. Connelly responded on-site to this call and determined that the birds had died after falling out of their nest.

Miscellaneous Activities

- Dr. Connelly attended the Monthly Animal Health Meeting on May 9th.
- Dr. Connelly attended the inaugural NJ Interagency Call on H5N1 on May 30th.

Non-Project Activities

- Dr. Connelly assisted ENSP staff with performing health checks and disease sampling from over 50 captive eastern box turtles (former confiscations) which are candidates for repatriation.
- The OFWHF as directed by Dr. Groff continued surveillance and subsequent sampling of amphibians for the presence of chytrid fungus and viral pathogens in local populations. Surveillance and sampling will continue in June.