

OFFICE OF FISH AND WILDLIFE HEALTH AND FORENSICS

MONTHLY REPORT

February 2025

Joseph M. Groff, VMD, PhD, Research Scientist 1

Patrick J. Connelly, DVM, Research Scientist 2

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

The OFWHF welcomes Siena Stucki as the new Biologist Trainee for the laboratory.

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

The OFWHF responded to two fish kills: Pequannock River between the Oak Ridge and Charlottesburg Reservoirs, and Pemberton Lake. Fish could not be collected from the Pequannock River, whereas Gizzard Shad and Sunfish were collected from Pemberton Lake. The cause of death was considered to be due to environmental hypoxia resulting in winter kill.

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

Microscopic examination and the histopathology reports were completed for the juvenile Striped Bass collected from the Delaware River in 2024 by Marine Fisheries.

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

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Surveillance

New Jersey DEP Fish and Wildlife is monitoring highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in wild birds. State officials are working with partners to test suspected cases when warranted and collaborating with municipalities to safely dispose of dead birds. Testing by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory has confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (EA H5) in snow geese in Warren and Salem Counties. As of February 26th, New Jersey Fish & Wildlife has received over 850 reports involving over 2000 sick or dead wild birds during this time. During this resurgence, presumptive positive tests results have been detected in Canada goose, mallard, northern shoveler, northern pintail, mute swan, great black-backed gull, American crow, Cooper's hawk, red-tailed hawk, and bald eagle. Evidence suggests that HPAI is widespread in wild birds in New Jersey and is expected to be present even in areas where there has not been a confirmed positive.

Necropsies

- This month, Dr. Connelly performed necropsies on 1 river otter, 1 bobcat, and 5 bald eagles. Chronic wasting disease samples were collected from 1 clinical wild deer and 8 captive deer.

Miscellaneous Activities

- Dr. Groff completed the pathological examinations/reports for 10 Bobcats, 6 Bald Eagles and 1 Peregrine Falcon.

- Dr. Connelly attended the biweekly NJ Interagency Call on H5N1 on February 6th and 20th.
- Dr. Connelly attended the Animal Health Meeting on February 13th.
- Dr. Connelly attended the HPAI Working Group meeting on February 24th.
- Dr. Connelly attended a regional discussion on rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus on February 5th.

Non-Project Activities

- Dr. Connelly presented on box turtle repatriation efforts on February 13th.