

Dear readers,

Below is our second DYK article based on a question sent in by Bill Roberts, who is wondering how the Avian Flu is affecting the birds in our region. I hope this grabs your attention and covers the question.

We love hearing about the topics you are interested in and providing the information, so keep the questions coming! Next up - Monarchs!

Thanks for your interest,
Anne Torrey



Did You Know?

May 2022

"The Avian Flu - An Eagle's Story"

Anne Torrey (Lower Eau Claire Lake)



She is beautiful. With a gleaming white crown and tail feathers, and a wingspan approaching 7 feet, the mature bald eagle soars majestically over the boreal forests of northern Wisconsin. Her eyes sharp, they focus below and move constantly. She is on the hunt. With hungry chicks in the nest, she must locate their first meal of the day. In the distance, as a glimmering patch of blue catches her eye, she ever so slightly changes her trajectory. At 30 miles per hour, it does not take long to reach the water that garners her interest. Gliding gracefully, she lowers herself to the point where she observes clearly the creatures on the water as well as below the surface. Ducks, geese, even a pair of loons drift gracefully along the shoreline of the glistening calm lake. Along the edge of the bay, just where the water deepens sharply, she notices

several large shadows. The decision is made quickly and with a subtle movement her entire body points downward. Wingspan tightening, she reaches a dive speed of close to 100 miles per hour. The wind screams past her, and she never takes her eyes from her prey. Drawing ever nearer, her razor-sharp talons open a split second prior to hitting the water. Just as quickly, they close, and in a violent explosion, she clutches the large fish right at its core. As her catch writhes and twists, trying to escape her grasp, she denies its release and soars skyward heading quickly to her nest where her charges anxiously await their meal.

Settling on the large branch at the edge of her substantial nest, she begins to pass out her prize, filling the eager, open mouths as quickly as they are able to consume each piece. As her babies receive their nourishment, the mother begins to feel tired. Her head is heavy, and she struggles to hold it upright. Dizziness begins to set in, and the exhaustion becomes overwhelming. Unable to focus on the task at hand, she drops what is left of the fish into the nest, where the chicks do their best to feed themselves. Becoming increasingly unsteady, no longer able to lift her head, she attempts to fly to the ground to gain better purchase. The beautiful Bald Eagle keels over the side of the branch, headfirst, no longer able to move her wings. Dropping like a stone, she is dead before hitting the ground. Shortly thereafter, one by one, the next generation of eaglets regurgitate their meals. They too are beginning to feel dizzy, their tiny heads lolling back and forth, unable to lift them even to cry out. Soon after, they as well succumb to the highly contagious, rapidly moving pathogen that has taken the life of their mother. The Avian Flu has wiped out this entire family in a matter of moments.

Similar scenarios have been replayed in one form or another thousands of times this year in the wild raptor population of the eastern US. Most of the information we see on a daily basis espouses concerns for the economic devastation being wrought throughout the poultry industry where they are having to put down farmed chickens and turkeys by the thousands. There is however, grave concern for our wild bird population as well. Raptors, *Bald Eagles in particular*, are at risk of being decimated by this pandemic for which we have no cure. Here in Northwestern Wisconsin, we are seeing the devastation being wrought and our experts are feeling helpless as they watch the disease spread unabated. In a highly emotional conversation with Dr. Kim Amman of the Winged Freedom Raptor Hospital in Spooner, she expressed her deep frustration at their inability to do their work, which is rescuing and caring for these beautiful birds when injured, ill or orphaned. She explained to me how rapidly the virus moves and the fact that the Avian Flu is shed immediately by any bird coming in contact with it, whether it is affected or not. As a result, the clinic has had to refuse their wildlife patients' care (waterfowl, ravens, gulls, owls, eagles) as there is no telling which birds are carrying the pathogen and taking them in could create an environment for potential spread. Dr Amman expressed hope that as the lakes open and the weather warms, the bird population will spread out and the virus will begin to dissipate. In the meantime, she urges us to help slow the spread by minimizing opportunities for birds to congregate. **This means putting away the bird feeders and the bird baths for the time being.** If you see a bird you suspect is infected, please monitor it, call the DNR and if it dies, bury it as quickly as possible. Do not touch it.

The Avian Flu rarely affects humans, although bird-to-human transmission is not unheard of in past pandemics. The Wisconsin DNR released the following Avian Flu information and recommendations here:

This is a crisis of enormous consequence for our wild raptor and waterfowl populations. It is important to be aware of the birds around us and do what we can to minimize opportunities for the pathogen to spread.

It all sounds so familiar, doesn't it.....?

SAVE THE DATE! Rick Peters and Katelyn Juza of WI DNR will make a presentation on **Boating Safety** 10 - 11:30 am, Saturday, June 25th, Tomahawk Park. This all-ages educational event, co-sponsored by the Town of Barnes, will include giveaways, door prizes and a visit by the Town's Ambulance and Fire Engine! Invite your friends and neighbors to attend. **All are welcome!**

Mission: To protect, preserve and improve the environmental and aesthetic qualities of the Eau Claire Lakes Area watershed including the lakes, rivers, shorelands, wetlands, forests and attendant wildlife resources.

BAYFIELD AND DOUGLAS COUNTIES, WI

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