

Waterfowl hunters play a key role in national surveillance efforts.

Avian Influenza Update

Story and Photos
By Roy Domazlicky

In 2006, the Department of Natural Resources teamed with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services Program and wildlife agencies from the other 49 states in a national surveillance effort for highly pathogenic Asian H5N1 avian influenza in wild birds. The objective of this effort was the early detection of the disease should it arrive in North America.

Captured lesser scaup rest while waiting for avian influenza sampling.



DNR utilized three strategies to accomplish its sampling goals: monitoring significant wild bird mortality events, collecting samples from hunter-harvested waterfowl and sampling live-trapped waterfowl. Department biologists exceeded sampling goals by collecting 804 samples from eight species of waterfowl at 22 different sites throughout Illinois. USDA also collected additional bird and environmental samples for testing from different locations within the state.

Fortunately, highly pathogenic Asian H5N1 avian influenza was not discovered in Illinois, and to date has not been found anywhere in North America. However, four samples taken in Illinois did test positive for forms of low-pathogenic avian influenza, but those do not pose a threat to human or wild bird health. There are 144 subtypes of avian influenza and only one—highly pathogenic Asian H5N1—is a concern for human health. Other forms of avian influenza are known to circulate in the wild bird population, and having some birds test positive for low-pathogenic forms was expected.

The avian influenza surveillance project will continue this year. Technical improvements to the sample design

Wildlife biologists apply a legband to a lesser scaup after sampling it for avian influenza along the Mississippi River last spring.

have been made based upon knowledge learned from last year's surveillance. As a result, the sample size has been reduced to 500 which will be taken from five waterfowl species.

Illinois waterfowl hunters were instrumental in the success of the 2006 avian influenza surveillance effort by allowing their birds to be sampled. Without the patience and cooperation of our waterfowl hunters, the surveillance effort would not have been possible. DNR would like to express gratitude to those hunters that took the time to provide samples during the 2006-2007 hunting season. We look forward to your continued cooperation and assistance with this year's sampling efforts.



Roy Domazlicky is the DNR Urban Waterfowl Project Manager and works in the Bartlett office.