



**Rescue
Rehabilitate
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Avian Influenza Detected in California Wild Birds – Information for San Luis Obispo County

New protocols in place at Pacific Wildlife Care to combat the virus locally

Morro Bay, CA – On July 14, 2022, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Eurasian H5N1 Avian Influenza, or HPAI for short, in wild birds in California. According to CDFW news release, HPAI viruses naturally circulate among waterbirds, but the strain of the virus currently in circulation in the U.S. and Canada has been causing illness and death in a higher diversity of wild bird species than during previous avian influenza outbreaks. The virus also remains highly contagious for domestic poultry.

Pacific Wildlife Care (PWC) is San Luis Obispo County's only licensed rehabilitation center that cares for injured, orphaned, sick, and pollution-damaged birds, land/air mammals, and reptiles/amphibians with the goal of returning animals to the wild. Therefore, we want to alert to the public to new protocols at our wildlife clinic as well as share information about how to reduce the spread of HPAI in SLO County.

At this time, Pacific Wildlife Care will continue to receive animals in need at our wildlife clinic and we will continue to send our trained rescue and transport volunteers to retrieve animals throughout the County. However, protocols may need to change as this disease continues to spread in California.

We have initiated new protocols on site to protect against HPAI entering our facility and, for the time being, all animals admitted for care will be brought first to a tent located outside of the clinic. The tent will serve as a triage area and is reserved for staff wearing appropriate PPE only. The public should not enter the tent. Members of the public who are bringing an animal are asked to place the animal's carrier on a table located outside the tent and then call 805-772-9494 for immediate assistance.

PWC's trained staff will meet animal rescuers outside at the drop-off table to complete the necessary intake forms. An important change in our operation: we will be unable to return individual carriers, boxes, or linens to rescuers as these items are considered fomites and, as such, could transmit the virus. The public is encouraged to use gloves and a mask while handling wildlife and transporting it to PWC during this time.

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To slow the spread of HPAI, discontinue feeding and providing water to wild birds, especially in the vicinity of backyard poultry or other captive birds such as ducks, geese, pigeons, doves, and parrots. According to the CDFW website, increased concentration of wild birds at feeders and bird baths may lead to fecal contamination of the local environment, which may aid in disease transmission. Wild birds should be excluded from entering enclosures for domestic and pet birds, and food and water should not be shared between wild birds and domestic or pet birds.

PWC Executive Director, Christine Johnson, states that “Pacific Wildlife Care will continue to serve SLO County wildlife in need during the HPAI outbreak by utilizing new protocols to keep both wildlife and our staff and volunteers safe.” Johnson further encourages the public to call PWC’s Wildlife Hotline, 805-543-WILD (9453), which operates every day of the year, for further information.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, avian influenza does not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with avian influenza have occurred and more information is available from the CDC.

Here is a list of additional resources regarding HPAI.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/avianflu/index.htm>

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/>

U.S. Department of Agriculture

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/hpai-2022>

American Veterinary Medical Association

<https://www.avma.org/avian-influenza-veterinarians>

About Pacific Wildlife Care

For 38 years, Pacific Wildlife Care (PWC), a 501c3 nonprofit organization based in Morro Bay, has been supporting San Luis Obispo County wildlife through rehabilitation and educational outreach. PWC is San Luis Obispo County's only licensed rehabilitation center that cares for injured, orphaned, sick, and pollution-damaged birds, land/air mammals, and reptiles/amphibians. As wildlife educators and by sharing our experiences, PWC inspires the community to reduce harm to our wild neighbors.

For more information, contact: Christine Johnson, Executive Director, christine@pacificwildlifecare.org, 805-305-3759.

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