

## ***NEWS RELEASE***

*August 19, 2005*

### **First bird found in Alberta with West Nile virus in 2005**

*Edmonton...* A crow collected near Brooks on August 17 has tested positive for West Nile virus. This is the first sign of the virus in a bird in Alberta in 2005.

The bird was detected through Alberta's West Nile virus wild bird surveillance program, which began June 1 this year. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development tests birds, including crows, magpies, blue jays and ravens for evidence of the virus. About 150 birds were tested before this first positive case was discovered.

"Based on evidence from 2004, we weren't sure to what extent West Nile virus would be detected in birds in Alberta this summer," said Dr. Margo Pybus, Provincial Wildlife Disease Specialist, Sustainable Resource Development. "In 2004, a total of 666 birds was tested, but only nine tested positive for the virus. That was a dramatic difference from 2003, when 1,843 birds were tested and 439 were positive."

Two human cases have been reported this year to date in Alberta, but no human cases were reported in 2004. A total of 275 human cases was reported in 2003, and included 48 individuals showing the more serious symptoms associated with West Nile neurological syndrome.

Albertans can take fresh, dead birds, particularly crows or magpies, to any Fish and Wildlife office (call 310-0000 toll-free for locations). Carcasses should be handled using gloves or doubled plastic bags. Specimens can be placed in a freezer if they can't be brought in right away. If carcasses are dried or old, they can be wrapped in plastic and disposed of with household garbage.

Albertans are advised to take precautions against mosquito bites. Only a small proportion of mosquitoes carry the virus and the risk of infection remains low. But the infection can cause serious illness with severe consequences. People should use an insect repellent containing DEET and wear long sleeves and pants at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active. Information on West Nile virus is available on the Alberta Health and Wellness website: <http://www.fightthebite.info>.

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