

Bird mortality reports

With the rapid approach of fall migration, residents around local lakes should be on the lookout for dead birds. In the fall of 2021 Beaverhill Lake experienced a large die-off of water birds. Hundreds of dead birds were found along the shoreline of the lake.

The cause, was identified as an outbreak of botulism, due to the high temperatures experienced and the amount of organic materials built up in the lake. Sadly, botulism outbreaks are naturally occurring in conditions such as shallow large water bodies like Beaverhill Lake. Once the outbreak started, it grew exponentially as water birds began to die in the water and their bodies continued to fuel the outbreak. The Beaverhill Bird Observatory was made aware of it by visitors and the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Service was notified. Botulism impacted numerous waterbird species including; ducks, geese, grebes, shorebirds, gulls and the birds of prey that ate them.

With the recent hot summer and continuing decline in the depth of Cooking Lake local researchers are concerned with the possibility of a similar outbreak here.

If members of the public find dead birds, they should reported. There are a couple of different possible causes for bird mortality. If the dead bird is located around a waterbody, then botulism or avian influenza can be suspected. If dead or sick birds are seen in the area, you can report this sighting to the AB Government toll free at 310-0000 and to the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative ([Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative](#)). Cases of Avian influenza have been reported in Alberta, as well as other provinces in 2022.

If there are sick birds still alive in the area, members of the public can contact WildNorth, Northern Alberta's Wildlife Rehabilitation centre, located in Edmonton to provide them assistance.

The Alberta Government advises *"As a general guideline, members of the public should avoid handling live or dead wild birds. If handling can't be avoided, wear disposable gloves, place a plastic bag over your hand before picking up the dead bird, or shuffle the dead bird into a box or container without touching it (for example, use a stick to move the bird). Wash your hands with soap and water, and disinfect using alcohol, diluted bleach, or commercial disinfectants any surface that has come in contact with dead birds."*

Healthy flying waterfowl are unlikely to be infected with avian influenzas that pose any risk to hunters. To date, no person has been infected with avian influenza directly from wild birds.

Information from the Alberta Government, Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative and the Beaver Hill Lake Observatory