

## Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you haven't already heard about it you soon will. It's called highly pathogenic avian influenza or HPAI or sometimes just avian influenza or avian flu. It seems that every few years somewhere in the world there is an outbreak of avian influenza. Like all viral diseases there are many different strains of it. Some are considered low pathogenic because they do not spread rapidly. The current one is a highly pathogenic one and it has now been found in Kansas.

The current round of HPAI was first found in South Carolina in mid-January in wild waterfowl. HPAI can infect many species of wild birds and domestic fowl as well. It is contagious and can be spread easily amongst wild birds by contact with other infected birds or ingestion of infected food or water. Although extremely rare, it can be transmitted to humans and other mammals.

USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) are currently checking both wild birds and domestic birds all across the central and northeastern part of the US for HPAI. It has basically been found all up and down the Atlantic Coast and then from Tennessee west to Kansas and north to South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Michigan. By the time you read this it won't surprise me if it's been confirmed in North Dakota and Minnesota as well.

The first detection in Kansas was from Snow Geese at Cheyenne Bottoms in Barton County on March 8<sup>th</sup> and then on March 12<sup>th</sup> it was confirmed in a backyard poultry flock in Franklin County. It is generally felt that the disease is spread by the wild birds and then casually picked up by backyard flocks from any one of a number of ways. One of the problems is that some birds can have the virus and never show symptoms. Other birds will have all sorts of symptoms (list to follow). Then some birds are fine today and dead tomorrow from it.

If you have a backyard poultry flock (including chickens, ducks, geese, etc.) keep visitors away from your flock and try to keep wild birds from mingling with them, especially wild waterfowl. Then look for symptoms in individual birds. These symptoms include: coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, and other signs of respiratory distress; lack of energy and appetite; decreased water consumption; decreased egg production and/or soft-shelled, misshapen eggs; incoordination; and diarrhea. Avian influenza can also cause sudden death in birds even if they aren't showing other symptoms. If you notice these in your flock, please call the Kansas Department of Agriculture Division of Animal Health at 833-765-2006.

So far, HPAI has not been found in songbirds, but they are not immune - just harder to find potential fatalities. Remember many things can cause songbirds to die in or around your house, many of which are not diseases at all. If you find a dead songbird, do not call me or anyone else at this time. If that changes, I will let you all know. But to be on the safe side do not handle the bird. The best thing to do is to turn a plastic bag inside out and use it like a glove to pick it up, then seal the bag inside and simply dispose of it in the trash. Do not let pets like dogs or cats get to it.

Avian influenza is in the state and will likely be present through early summer. While it is a very low risk to humans, it is best to proceed with caution. If you have domestic poultry, keep a close eye on them and contact authorities if they are not acting "right". For more information, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/2p926bnn>