

PRESS RELEASE

Flu in Parrot Imported to the UK Causes Experts to Call for Action to Protect Public and Birds.

As bird flu has now arrived in several European countries appears headed to Africa, a group of leading bird experts and animal welfare organizations urged the EU to take immediate action to reduce the risk of further outbreaks in Europe and identifies simple precautions the public may take regarding avian flu.

Today's report of a recently imported parrot carrying H5 avian flu builds on yesterday announcement directly linking the spread of flu to traded pet birds in Taiwan and Australia. Combined, these reports focus global attention on the overlooked threat that the legal and illegal bird trade presents to health security. The importation of H5N1 infected eagles into Brussels last year was the first clear breach of the EU's flu screen, and the dead parrot in the UK today underscores the recurring nature of this threat from the bird trade.

“That the dead parrot was apparently infected by imported birds from Taiwan reveals just how dangerous this legal trade is now known to be,” said Dr. James Gilardi speaking on behalf of the coalition. He continued, “if this proves to be H5N1, it means that at least one of the Chinese birds was infected, yet authorities only detected the virus after it spread through the quarantine and killed this one parrot. It was sheer luck that they caught it in this one bird, otherwise all the birds would surely have been released and ended up as pets in UK living rooms – not exactly a comforting prospect.”

Avian flu – strain H5N1 – is potentially lethal to humans and can devastate wild bird populations and poultry. Scientists have identified several potential routes by which avian flu might be introduced to and spread through Europe. One of the most controllable of these routes is through the intentional importation of wild birds for pets. It is now well documented that wild birds of several species serve as natural reservoirs of this disease. Although there is some risk of transmission when wild birds come into contact with domesticated poultry flocks, the annual importation of more than one million exotic live birds into the EU significantly increases these risks.

European Ministers continue to meet and discuss how to react to avian flu, but the coalition believes guidance is needed now. Their recommendations with regard to contact with wild birds include:

1. A prohibition on the import of live wild birds for pets;
2. Recommendations to avoid direct contact with wild birds; and
3. A public awareness campaign to educate the public regarding the risks associated with avian flu.

“It would appear that the spread of the virus is outstripping the authorities' ability to adequately address the situation and protect Europeans from this virus. That is why we

have issued these recommendations now, and we hope the EU will respond as a matter of priority,” said Dr. Gilardi.

Our public health and our agricultural sectors are in the hands of authorities who seem unwilling to take even the simplest actions to avoid known threats. One might think anyone could look at a map and the news and recognize that the EU’s continued importation of hundreds of thousands of African birds is now extremely ill-advised yet they continue to suggest that there is no scientific basis for taking such precautions. Let’s hope that today’s outbreak in the UK will serve as a wake up call ...

For further information, contact coalition representative Dr. James Gilardi, Ph.D. at +1 530 756 6340 (8 hours behind GMT), or Shelley Waterland at +44-1403-240-170.

The Expert Group includes:

World Parrot Trust
Born Free Foundation
Born Free USA
International Wildlife Coalition (IWC)
Pro Wildlife

Notes to Editors:

Five Measures the EU Must Take to Address Avian Flu

1. **Prohibit capture, import and export of live wild birds.** Due to widespread and direct contact with the public, the live wild bird trade facilitates the rapid spread of avian-borne disease to trappers, keepers, consumers, airport and customs personnel, and other at risk individuals. Furthermore, mixing of wild birds and captive-bred or domestic birds in the same holding facilities has the potential to spread disease.
2. **Do not introduce culling of wild birds as a method to control avian flu.** Culling of wild birds will not efficiently eradicate the disease and will increase human exposure through direct contact between infected birds and humans.
3. **Prohibit the hunting of wild birds.** Hunting will increase exposure to avian flu through handling dead and wounded birds and their body parts, bringing potentially infected birds directly into European homes.
4. **Encourage those who own healthy, captive, exotic birds, such as private individuals and zoos, to move their birds indoors or under cover.** Advice should also be provided to these facilities on how to properly secure aviaries in order to minimize exposure to wild birds.
5. **Educate the public regarding the risks associated with avian flu and the measures that citizens can take to reduce unnecessary exposure.**

Four Actions YOU Can Take to Avoid Avian Flu

1. **Avoid direct contact with wild birds.** This includes touching wild birds, purchasing wild-caught birds as pets, and hunting wild birds and handling the carcasses. If you find a dead bird or one that appears to be sick, do not approach it or touch it.
2. **Avoid indirect contact with wild birds** such as bathing and swimming in lakes, rivers, and coastal areas with high concentrations of waterfowl.
3. **If you choose to eat turkey, duck, or chicken meat,** be sure to take adequate precautions such as wearing protective gloves and thoroughly cleaning all knives, containers, and cutting surfaces which may have had contact with any uncooked bird meat. In addition, be sure that any poultry is well cooked prior to eating.
4. **If you have captive exotic birds, bring them inside** or otherwise completely isolate them from all wild birds. In addition, have your captive birds tested for avian flu through your local veterinarian and keep detailed records of testing procedures and results.

Ends