

AG NOTES
By John Teague
UT/TSU Extension
December 6, 2022

POULTRY NOTICE

The Tennessee State Veterinarian is issuing an alert for domesticated bird owners who also engage in bird hunting. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is prevalent in wild birds and is endangering backyard and commercial flocks in Tennessee.

“HPAI detections among domesticated birds and wild birds have been on the rise.” Tennessee State Veterinarian Dr. Samantha Beaty said. “We want to alert bird hunters that the risk of bringing this disease to their flock is extremely high. The good news is that owners can drastically reduce the risk by continually practicing biosecurity and avoiding contact between wild and domesticated birds, alive or dead.”

Dr. Beaty recommends that backyard flock owners wash their hands before and after interacting with domesticated birds and dedicate a pair of shoes to only be worn in coops or poultry houses. Those shoes should be cleaned with a 10 percent bleach solution after every visit. Likewise, clothing and shoes used for hunting should not be worn around domesticated birds. The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) advises hunters to dress game birds in the field when possible. Remains can be buried at the harvest site or double bagged and disposed with normal household waste.

“It does take effort to sustain biosecurity practices but it’s well worth it,” Dr. Beaty continued. “Flock owners must be persistent in their efforts to keep birds healthy. If birds appear ill or there’s a spike in unexpected deaths, bird owners should notify our office right away.”

HPAI is a highly transmissible disease known to be deadly for domesticated fowl. Fowl can be exposed to HPAI through human interactions and through contact with wild birds. This year, cases in Tennessee have sickened domesticated chickens, geese, and ducks in Obion, Tipton, Bledsoe, and Davidson Counties. According to TWRA, there have been 28 confirmed cases of HPAI in wild birds, including 26 ducks, a Canada goose, and a bald eagle.

Although HPAI does not pose a food safety risk, no infected poultry is allowed to enter the food supply. Poultry and eggs are safe to eat when handled and cooked properly. The risk of human infection with avian influenza during poultry outbreaks is very low. In fact, no transmission to humans was reported during the outbreak that affected commercial poultry farms in Tennessee in 2017.

If producers experience poultry deaths, disposal of any remnants of those farm animal carcasses should be done according to the Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s Policy Concerning the Disposal of Dead Farm Animals. Rules for lawful disposal and options for dealing with dead farm animals can be found online at www.tn.gov/agriculture/businesses/animals/animal-health/mortalities/animal-disposal.html.

Sick or dead wild birds can be reported to TWRA at www.tn.gov/twra/sick-birds.html. Nationally, sick or dead farm birds can be reported to USDA at 1-866-536-7593 or in Tennessee to the State Veterinarian’s office at 615-837-5120. Find more biosecurity tips and HPAI resources online at www.tn.gov/agriculture/businesses/animals/animal-health/avian-influenza.html.

SNAKES

I don't like 'em. Don't care what they do for a living (mice, etc.), but I don't like 'em. Never could see too well as a child, and in the mountains of East Tennessee, that was a bit of a disadvantage when it came to snakes.

So, when I get a contact about snakes in or under the house from someone who is concerned, I understand their anxiety. I want to help and be sure we are correct in our information.

I had a call about not one but two snakes captured on the glue boards in the house. There was also some work being done under the house and there was evidence of skins, etc. The important thing here was to identify them and make a recommendation for elimination from the house but just shy of blowing up the house or burning it to the ground! Seriously, we wanted to just get them out and keep them out. Hard to do sometimes, especially when they are looking for a place to hibernate.

I have attached a picture of one of them. At first glance and looking up references, the thought of copperhead comes to mind. Not good! But I forwarded these photos to my friend at TWRA, Larry Thurston, and he identified it as a rat or corn snake. I remembered that we had another of these back earlier in the year, this one was hiding under the siding of a house but with part of it showing through a crack.

With big relief, I reported back to the owner and they were very happy that at least this one was a non-venomous creature. As to a recommendation, I suggested she take this up with her exterminator. I'm sure there will be sealing and covering and a lot of other exclusion tactics used here.



SHEEP AND GOAT SALE

The dates for the United Producers Sheep and Goat Sales for December have been changed just a bit. They will be held on December 12 and 19. Help get that word around.