

## ***Horse Identified with Rabies in LaSalle County***

***(jointly issued by Dr. Colleen O'Keefe – Illinois Department of Agriculture and Dr. Connie Austin – Illinois Department of Public Health)***

On December 10, 2004, the Illinois Department of Agriculture laboratory in Galesburg reported that a horse from Earlville in LaSalle County tested positive for rabies. On December 4, the animal developed onset of anorexia and severe constipation. The horse was euthanized and due to the severe constipation, the veterinarian arranged for rabies testing. We are fortunate that this astute veterinarian recognized the need for rabies testing and arranged for this testing to take place. Without this testing, persons exposed to the horse would not have received needed rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP). The LaSalle County Health Department identified 11 persons requiring rabies PEP after this exposure including members of the owner's family and the veterinary staff who attended the animal.

It was not possible to identify the possible source of rabies for this horse through history taking as there were no recognized bites to the horse. The owners did report seeing a skunk around the stable during daylight hours. Animals in contact with the rabid animal will be managed appropriately by the attending veterinarian, local animal control and the Illinois Department of Agriculture. This horse is the first terrestrial mammal since 1998 to have developed rabies in the state. Specimens from the horse brain were sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for rabies variant typing. CDC confirmed the rabies positive result on the horse and began sequencing the virus to identify the rabies variant. On December 27, the Illinois Department of Public Health was informed by CDC that the strain of rabies detected in the horse was the north-central skunk strain. Earlville is in northern LaSalle County and close to Lee and DeKalb counties. We will request that the local animal control and public health agencies and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources enhance surveillance for rabies in skunks in this three county area to better evaluate how extensively rabies virus is circulating in skunks in this area of the state.

Veterinarians in this area of the state in particular should consider the diagnosis of rabies in animals with consistent symptoms and arrange for testing as needed. They should also encourage rabies vaccination of dogs, cats and ferrets and consider vaccination of valuable livestock and horses. If veterinarians in this three county area hear reports of skunks acting abnormally they should report this to their local animal control agencies. This is also a good opportunity for veterinarians to review the rabies pre-exposure vaccination status of the staff in their clinic. Rabies PEP for those with appropriate pre-exposure rabies vaccination is far simpler than rabies PEP for those who have not previously received rabies vaccination.

When submitting brains for rabies testing please be sure to refrigerate, NOT freeze the brain and provide the entire brain for testing. To call a brain negative for rabies, three different parts of the brain must be tested negative. Within Illinois, five laboratories perform the rabies test on animal brains. These include three public health laboratories and two agriculture laboratories.

In Illinois through December 21, 2004, 50 bats have been identified with rabies in addition to this horse. This is the largest number of bat rabies cases identified in a one-year period in the state. The reason for this higher number is unknown but may be related to increased testing.

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## ***Proposed Regulation from the Illinois Racing Board***

The ILLINOIS RACING BOARD has proposed an amendment for "Medication" (11 Ill Adm Code 603) to increase the maximum allowable intravenous dose of furosemide administered by a veterinarian during the pre-race period from 250 to 500 milligrams, with the test level not exceeding 100 nanograms per milliliter of serum or plasma. A first-time fine level of \$250 is added rather than the current written warning, and subsequent fine and suspension levels are modified. The rulemaking also decreases from 9 days to 7 the time that a horse placed on the furosemide list must wait following its certification date before participating in a qualifying race.

*Questions/requests for copies/comments are open until 1/31/2005:  
Send to Mickey Ezzo, Illinois Racing Board, 100 West Randolph, Suite 7-701, Chicago, IL 60601 or call (312) 814-5017.*

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## ***About the Bird in This Issue...***

Like the common House Sparrow ("English Sparrow"), the **Eurasian Tree Sparrow** is not native to the United States. Both species originated in Europe or Asia and are in the family of birds known as weavers, which is unrelated to our native sparrows.

In the 19th century, south St. Louis was the home of many European immigrants who wanted to see familiar birds from their homeland. So, on April 25 of 1870, twelve Eurasian Tree Sparrows were released in Lafayette Park in south St. Louis. Numbers of other European birds were also released (European Goldfinches, Eurasian Bullfinches, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, and Linnets), but only the Eurasian Tree Sparrow successfully established a breeding population.

The invasion of the more aggressive House Sparrow in 1878 began to push the Eurasian Tree Sparrow from its established nesting areas. Expansion of the city also caused the Eurasian Tree Sparrow to spread, for it prefers suburban areas and open country. Today, there are still individuals in the city and a fair number in the suburbs. Most of the range expansion, however, has been to the north, along the Illinois River to at least Mason County, Illinois, and along the Mississippi River to southern

Iowa. The largest population of Eurasian Tree Sparrows seems to be along the east side of the Illinois River north of the village of Meredosia (Cass County).

The expansion of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow has been very limited and large number of bird "listers" travel from all over North America to Illinois, Iowa and Missouri in search of this species.

This individual was photographed in Rochester, IL during the Spring of 2004.

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