

Another Rabies Case Identified in Illinois

On April 20, 2005, the Illinois Department of Public Health laboratory in Springfield reported that a skunk trapped in LaSalle County had tested rabies positive. The skunk was trapped for surveillance purposes by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Wildlife Services to assist in evaluating skunk rabies in this area of the state. The animal was trapped on April 19 in northwest LaSalle County. The skunk was subdued, had wounds and did not spray when the trap was moved. No human or animal exposures to rabies occurred.

From Jan. 1 to April 21, four rabid animals have been identified in Illinois: a Bureau County cow that had been purchased from LaSalle County, a bat from Hancock County, a bat from Winnebago County and the skunk caught in LaSalle County. Circulation of terrestrial animal rabies determines actions that need to be taken in regards to rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) after bites from domestic animals that escape and cannot be rabies tested or cannot be confined for 10 days. When rabies virus is not circulating in terrestrial animals (such as skunks), rabies PEP is usually not recommended for these types of bites. When rabies virus is circulating in terrestrial animals, rabies PEP may need to be recommended when domestic animals bite persons and cannot be observed or tested.

The identification of a skunk with rabies in LaSalle County close to where a horse (December 2004) and a cow (January 2005) tested positive for rabies is of great concern. This is the first rabid skunk identified in the state in six years.

To avoid exposure to rabies, citizens should avoid contact with wild, unfamiliar or stray animals and report animals that are acting abnormally to their local animal control. If bitten by an animal, citizens should report the bite to animal control and seek medical attention.

Veterinarians in LaSalle, Lee and Bureau counties can assist with rabies prevention activities by encouraging rabies vaccination of pets and valuable livestock and by encouraging their clients not to allow their pets to roam free. In addition, veterinarians in this area of the state, should be alert for animals acting abnormally that might be carrying rabies and submit these animals for rabies testing to the Illinois Departments of Agriculture or Public Health laboratories. Veterinarians and their staff, especially in these three counties, should ensure they are up-to-date on rabies pre-exposure vaccination. Titers should be checked every two years and if the titer is below 1:5 a booster rabies vaccination is needed.

The public health community appreciates the support of USDA in trapping skunks in this area to better evaluate rabies activity.

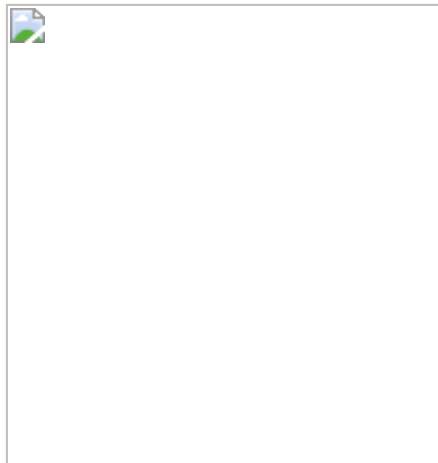


Vaccine Notification Laws Defeated

Controversial bills that would have required veterinarians to disclose vaccine risks to clients were defeated and expired in Maine and Nevada on April 6 and April 15, 2005, respectively. The Maine legislation will not

be formally defeated until the full legislature meets at the end of this month, but the legislation is "virtually dead." If passed, the legislation would have been the first in the nation. According to VMA representatives, such protection already exists in the Veterinary Practice Act. Veterinarians already educate their clients about the pros and cons of vaccines, but do not want to be mandated into a "one-size-fits all approach" to that education.

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About the Photo in This Issue...

What is that large stork-like bird flying over Illinois during the spring and fall migration? If it's huge and the legs and neck are outstretched to the front and back, it is most likely the Sandhill Crane. Cranes can be heard from long distances away, making a clackety-clack and bugling call. You can find Sandhill Cranes throughout most of North America, nesting from the sub-arctic regions of Canada and Alaska, south to the Gulf States.

Sandhill Cranes are one of two crane species found in North America. The other is the Whooping Crane, an endangered species. Unlike its white Whooping Crane cousin, the Sandhill Crane is a tall gray bird. It has a huge wingspan of 6-7 feet. While the birds are tall, they only weigh between 8 and 11 pounds. Adults have yellow eyes, black bills, legs and feet, with a bright red patch on the crest of their head. Males and females look nearly alike. In the spring, they actually "paint" their feathers with mud to camouflage themselves in brown grasses. In the summer, many people confuse them with the Great Blue Heron since they are similar in color and nearly the same size. When you see a large bird in the sky, you'll know it's a Sandhill Crane if the neck is outstretched and the downward flap of the wings is followed by a quick upstroke. The great blue heron has a black eye stripe, flies with their neck folded back, and their wing strokes are even.

In the 1800s, Sandhill Cranes were in trouble. The land they lived on was destroyed by speculators and they were hunted to near extinction. In 1916, the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act was signed, protecting the remaining birds in Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota and Ontario, Canada. Today, the crane population is in good shape, benefiting from habitat restoration projects.

I photographed this Sandhill Crane in Kissimmee, Florida in April 1999.



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