



Mysterious illness affects birds in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia

Audubon partners with local conservation agencies to identify the disease and stop the spread.

For the past several weeks, Audubon and our wildlife partners have been fielding troubling reports of sick and dying birds across the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia areas. To date, there are also reports of sick birds in Delaware, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee according to the [Pennsylvania Game Commission](#). While we aren't yet certain of the potential cause of these reports, we wanted to share details on what is known at this point based on information provided by the [U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center](#).

Currently, symptoms can include *eye swelling, closed, weeping, or crusted eyes, lethargy, eye lesions and neurological signs*. Until we learn more about the cause of the sickness and death, we suggest taking preventative measures to reduce the possibility of the disease spreading among birds congregating around bird feeders. These steps, which are also suggested by the [National Wildlife Health Center](#), include:

- Take down birdfeeders until more is known about the cause and spread of the disease
- Clean birdfeeders and bird baths with a 10% bleach solution
- Avoid handling sick birds, but if necessary, wear disposable gloves
- Keep pets away from birds (good advice under any circumstances)

Won't it cause additional harm to remove birdfeeders that are familiar food sources for backyard birds?

Many of you may have concerns about ensuring birds have access to familiar food sources, including birdfeeders. We understand and want to provide a bit of reassurance that the impacts of these temporary precautions will have minimal impacts on the birds you love. Fortunately, it's the summer breeding season and most bird species are relying on caterpillars and other insects to feed their young, natural food sources that are readily available in nature. Additionally, birds are resilient and crafty creatures who will adapt to changes in food supplies with relative ease, finding new opportunities when familiar options are no longer available. We hope this issue is identified and resolved as soon as possible and you can resume the use of feeders. In the meantime, for the safety of the birds, we encourage everyone to work together and err on the side of caution.

If you find sick or dead birds, we encourage you to submit a report to your state or District wildlife conservation agency. Please find contact information for each state agency below and use the links to submit reports or access more localized updates:

- [District of Columbia Department of Energy and Environment](#)
- [Maryland Department of Natural Resources](#)
- [Pennsylvania Game Commission](#)
- [Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and National Park Service](#)
- [West Virginia Division of Natural Resources](#)

If you are collecting dead birds, please use disposable gloves and place them in a sealed plastic bag after use. If you are disposing of a dead bird, follow the same precautions when placing in your household trash receptacle. For more information, please refer to the [interagency statement from the U.S. Geological Survey and partners investigating the bird mortality event](#).

[*Stay up to date here*](#)

American Goldfinch and House Finch. Photo: Jacki Byers/Great Backyard Bird Count

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