

Wild Bird Feeding and the Current Avian Flu Outbreak

Many TWGC members feed backyard birds. A neighbor asked my opinion about an online news article advising homeowners to remove bird feeders due to the current outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). HPAI is a type A influenza caused by the H5N1 virus spread through contact with the saliva, nasal secretions, and feces of infected birds.

Wild birds that spread HPAI are primarily waterfowl and aquatic/shorebirds. Songbirds are rarely infected by this disease and are more often associated with other viruses. According to the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine, wild birds tend to be highly resistant to this virus, but mortality in commercial and home poultry flocks can exceed 90%. Their site noted that

"according to the USDA, there is no evidence that birdfeeders, or the birds that frequent them, contribute to the spread of HPAI. For more information, please visit the USDA's website."

In an update on 3/24/22, Cornell Wildlife Health Lab concurred saying

"Passerines do not seem susceptible to HPAI and are not thought to play a significant role in spreading this virus. We are not recommending removal of bird feeders at this point."

Care must be taken to protect domestic flocks from mixing with wild flocks, especially from sharing water or feed. Home poultry enthusiasts, raptor and sea bird refuges, and falconers should avoid attracting wild birds to their facilities.

Some secondary news articles suggest that ALL home wild bird feeding be suspended until this outbreak abates but I cannot find support for this in reliable primary sources. I will keep my feeders up since I do not keep poultry, and only perching/songbirds frequent my feeders. **I am following developments on this issue and welcome questions/comments from the membership.**

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Resources:

<https://www.vet.upenn.edu/about/news-room/news-stories/news-story-detail/pathogenic-avian-influenza-h5n1eurasian-variant-has-been-detected-in-domestic-and-wild-birds-in-multiple-states>

<https://cwhl.vet.cornell.edu/article/highly-pathogenic-avian-influenza-update-032422>

<https://henderson.ces.ncsu.edu/2022/02/what-hobbyists-need-to-know-about-avian-influenza-detected-in-nc/>

<https://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/article260409982.html>