

Sick birds making their way to South Lake Tahoe

By Cheryl Millham

About the third week in March, we started receiving dead adult Pine Siskins at an alarming rate. The first thing we thought about was West Nile virus (WNV), so we started giving out that phone number (877.WNV.BIRD). It is a toll free number and, if the lab is interested, they would give instructions on how to handle the carcass. Remember: Humans cannot contract WNV from the dead bird. The only way to contract WNV is if a mosquito bites the sick or dead bird, then bites you.



At this time of year, mosquitoes are not yet present at our altitude. Walk around your house and empty any containers that are filled with standing melted snow water which mosquitoes will breed in.

Because of this die out of the Pine Siskins, I called our California Fish and Game biologist – who is also in charge of all of the wildlife rehab centers in the state – to report this situation. I was told by her to call Avian Disease Specialist Krysta Rodgers and report the die off to her, which I did.

I found out that some recently deceased Pine Siskin carcasses were sent to the lab and salmonella was the culprit. In my conversation with Rodgers, the Pine Siskins that were tested were from Placerville, which were on their way up to Lake Tahoe for the summer.

I told Rodgers that we are above the 6,000 foot elevation and still have snow with freezing weather, so I didn't think salmonella was here yet and that Placerville is at about 2,000 feet.

She agreed with me that these birds are exposed at lower elevations where salmonella is present. When the birds arrive at Tahoe, they are met with snow, cold and no food. In that weakened condition, they die.

Krysta asked me to inform the community, especially those who feed the Pine Siskins, do not put out the yellow socks, filled with Nyjer seed, until, at least May 1. This way, the sick birds will not be spreading germs on the yellow socks and, maybe, with some luck, we can stop the Salmonella die out.

As always, should you have any questions on this, or any matter dealing with wildlife, please feel free to contact us at (530) 577.2273.

Have a great summer.

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