

## 2,000 snow geese die from illness in Idaho wildlife areas

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In this May 9 2005, file photo, shows snow geese and Canada geese preparing to land on marsh at the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge near Merrill, Ore. Wildlife officials say 2,000 migrating snow geese have died in eastern Idaho likely because of avian cholera. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game says staff and volunteers collected the dead birds over the last several days at the Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area near Terreton and the Market Lake Wildlife Management Area near Roberts. (AP Photo/Jeff Barnard, File)

Some 2,000 migrating snow geese have died recently in eastern Idaho,

likely from a disease that comes on quickly and can kill birds in midflight, wildlife officials say.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game says staff and volunteers collected the dead birds over the past several days at wildlife management areas near the towns of Terreton and Roberts.

The cause of death likely was avian cholera, which can cause convulsions and erratic flight, the agency said.

Authorities said the geese, known for their distinctive white bodies and black wingtips, were migrating from the Southwest and Mexico to breeding grounds on Alaska's north coast.

It's unclear where they picked up the bacteria, said Steve Schmidt, a regional Fish and Game supervisor. "Outbreaks of avian cholera have occurred sporadically in the region over the past few decades," he said in a news release.

"The important thing is to quickly collect as many of the carcasses as possible, to prevent other birds from feeding on the infected birds," Schmidt said.

Biologists at the Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area near Terreton said about 20 eagles also were in the area, though it's unclear if they were exposed.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center, avian cholera spreads so quickly in infected birds that some with no previous signs of illness can die while in flight and fall out of the sky.

Health experts say humans are not at a high risk of infection from the bacteria that causes avian cholera.

Schmidt estimated that up to 10,000 snow geese pass through eastern Idaho each March to rest at its wildlife areas. They spend a week or two and make short flights to feed on waste grain in nearby wheat fields before continuing north.

He said Tuesday he had no reports of deaths of other snow geese from similar areas in other states.

Schmidt said among the dead birds was a dead trumpeter swan, which he said likely also died of avian cholera.

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