CANADIAN COOPERATIVE WILDLIFE HEALTH CENTRE
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19 January 2010

Louisette Lanteigne
700 Star Flower Ave.
Waterloo Ontario
N2V 2L2

Dear Ms. Lanteigne:

Thank you for your letter outlining your concerns for the protection of bald eagles overwintering on the Grand River in and near Kitchener.

Our organization, the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre (http://www.ccwhc.ca/index.php), provides a diagnostic and surveillance program for health and disease in free-ranging Canadian wildlife. As part of this program, we perform post-mortems on a wide range of wildlife, including bald eagles. One of us (Dr. Doug Campbell) also participates in the Southern Ontario Bald Eagle Recovery Team that monitors the status of bald eagles in this part of the province.

Each year, a small number of bald eagles are submitted for post-mortem from southern Ontario. All are examined with the aim of determining cause of death and the presence of significant and incidental diseases. In cases where the tissue is suitable for examination, the brain is examined histologically for evidence of disease. We are aware of Avian Vacuolar Myelinopathy (AVM) as a new and important disease of bald eagles and coots and have looked for the characteristic lesions whenever possible.

At this time, no cases of AVM have been detected in bald eagles in southern Ontario, and no lesions have been seen that have raised any suspicion of its occurrence here. Granted,

we do not look at large numbers of birds, but we have not received reports from the field describing the occurrence of unusual mortality that would fit with this disease.

AVM has been associated with the spread of an introduced aquatic plant, the macrophyte *Hydrilla verticallata*, and it is thought that the disease itself is caused by a toxin produced by an unidentified species of cyanobacteria that grows on the surface of the plant. *Hydrilla verticallata* was introduced into the southern USA, where it has thrived and spread northward. However, to the best of my knowledge, it has not yet been identified in Ontario.

Bald eagles, as you note, are not numerous in southern Ontario and there is considerable public interest in their health and success. As a result of this, I suspect that if a new disease, such as AVM, were to begin to affect this population and cause disease, our monitoring program would in time obtain evidence of its presence. At the present time, there is no reason to believe that it is present here, but we will continue to monitor for its occurrence, as well as those of a wide variety of other diseases that may affect these birds.

Regards,

Ian K. Barker, DVM, PhD
Director

Doug Campbell DVM, DVSc
Staff Pathologist

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