

Monitoring West Nile Virus In Dead Birds

Dead bird tracking is one way to evaluate the potential for West Nile virus (WNV) activity throughout St. Joseph County. Crows, blue jays, and raptors (birds of prey such as hawks and owls) are highly sensitive to the virus and provide an early warning system for detecting WNV in a given area. If you find one of the birds listed above, please contact the Health Department at (574) 235-9721 with the date and address where the bird was found. This information will be compiled and compared to the patterns of disease in previous years.

Dead birds should be disposed of as follows:

- As with all dead animals, do not handle the carcass. Use disposable gloves or a plastic bag turned inside out over your hand to bag the bird and dispose of it in an outdoor trash can.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water.

Examples of wild birds that if found dead can be reported to the Health Department from May - October:

American Crow

Corvus brachyrhynchos

Identification Tips:

- Length: 16-18 inches
- Wingspan: 39 inches
- Weight: 1 lb
- Entirely black plumage
- Squared-off tail
- Short tail, broad wings
- Very common in urban and agricultural areas



Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Identification Tips:

- Length: 11 inches
- Wingspan: 16 inches
- Weight: 3 ounces
- Black sturdy bill
- Blue crest and upper parts
- Black eyeline and breastband
- Bright blue wings with black bars and white patches
- Long blue tail with black bars and white corners
- Migrates during the day in small flocks



Broad-winged hawk

Buteo platypterus

Identification Tips:

- Length: 13 inches
- Wingspan: 33 inches
- Sexes similar
- Short, dark, hooked beak
- Medium-sized, broad-winged, broad-tailed hawk
- Short, broad wings somewhat pointed at the tip



Photographs courtesy USGS National Wildlife Health Center