

Avian Pox and Florida Scrub-Jays

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What is avian pox?

Avian pox is a common viral disease of wild birds worldwide. Pox infections have been mild for most songbirds in Florida. However, the mortality rate can be higher for some species, and the virus can indirectly affect survival by reducing body condition and hampering feeding, vision, or breathing. The virus (*Poxvirus avium*) often is transmitted when a mosquito carrying the virus feeds on a bird. The virus remains viable in scabs on infected birds and can be transferred mechanically to other birds.

Has avian pox been seen in Florida scrub-jay populations?

Florida Wildlife Research Institute biologists witnessed an outbreak of pox-

like lesions on Florida scrub-jays in Charlotte County in 2005 (Figure 1), and pox-like lesions were discovered on a Florida scrub-jay in Brevard County in 2009 (Figure 2). Because the virus can be spread through contact with surfaces and equipment, it is important for those handling Florida scrub-jay to be aware of the signs of avian pox and the steps to take to avoid spreading the disease.

What are the signs of avian pox?

The cutaneous form of the disease manifests as wart-like lesions, usually on the unfeathered parts of the body. Lesions often appear on the feet, legs, base of the beak, and around the eyes (Figures 1 and 2). Lesions vary in size depending on the stage and severity of the infection.



Figure 1. Pox-like lesions on juvenile Florida scrub-jays in Charlotte County, FL. Photos by Craig Faulhaber.



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Figure 2. Pox-like lesions on an adult Florida scrub-jay from Brevard County. Photos by Steve McGuffey.

How can I prevent spreading avian pox?

- Avian pox is resistant to drying and will remain viable on contaminated surfaces such as hands, traps, banding equipment, food, perches, and clothing.
- **WASH HANDS** frequently and **WEAR AND CHANGE GLOVES** (latex or nitrile) often or between birds to help prevent spread of the infection.
- **DISINFECT** all surfaces and banding equipment with 10% bleach solution. Iodophor (e.g., povidone iodine) and quaternary ammonium compounds (e.g., Lysol I.C.) are also effective against avian pox.
- **ALLOW SUFFICIENT CONTACT TIME** for disinfectants to kill the virus (at least 10 minutes).
- Having **MORE THAN ONE SET OF EQUIPMENT** would be ideal so that one set can be disinfected while the other set is in use.
- **AVOID CONTACT WITH CLOTHING** and **WASH CLOTHES** after handling infected birds.

Can avian pox be treated?

Currently, there is no treatment for avian pox. There is a vaccine for pet birds and poultry, but there is no practical means to deliver the vaccine to wild birds.

Are there any health concerns for people?

There is no evidence of avian poxvirus infecting humans.

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