

# Thousands Of Birds Drop Dead Over Oz - For 3 Weeks

From Patricia Doyle, PhD

From ProMED-mail

Source: Fox News.com (edited)

1-11-7

Thousands of birds have fallen from the skies over Esperance, Australia, and no one knows why. Is it an illness, toxins or a natural phenomenon? A string of necropsies in Perth have shed no light on the mystery. All the residents of flood-devastated Esperance know is that their "dawn chorus" of singing birds is missing.

The main casualties are wattle birds, yellow-throated miners, New Holland honeyeaters and singing honeyeaters, although some dead crows, hawks and pigeons have also been found. Wildlife officers are baffled by the "catastrophic" event, which the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) said began well before last week's freak storm.

On Monday [8 Jan 2007], Esperance, 450 miles southeast of Perth, was declared a natural disaster zone. District nature conservation coordinator Mike Fitzgerald said the 1st reports of birds dropping dead in people's yards came in 3 weeks ago. More than 500 deaths had since been notified. But the calls stopped suddenly last week, reportedly because no birds were left. "It's very substantial. We estimate several thousand birds are dead, although we don't have a clear number because of the large areas of bushland," Fitzgerald said.

Birds Australia, the nation's main bird conservation group, said it had not heard of a similar occurrence. "Not on that scale, and all at the same time, and also the fact that it's several different species," chief executive Graeme Hamilton said. "You'd have to call that a most unusual event and one that we'd all have to be concerned about." He expected birds would return to the area once the problem -- natural or man-made phenomenon -- was fixed but said it was vital the cause was identified. The Department of Agriculture and Food, which conducted the necropsies, has almost ruled out an infectious process.

Acting chief veterinary officer Fiona Sunderman said toxins were the most likely cause but that the deaths could be due to anything from

toxic algae to chemicals and pesticides. Sunderman said there were no leads yet on which of the potentially hundreds of toxins might be responsible. Some birds were seen convulsing as they died. Michelle Crisp was one of the 1st to contact the DEC after finding dozens of dead birds on her property one morning. She told The Australian she normally had hundreds of birds in her yard but that she and a neighbor counted 80 dead birds in one day. "It went to the point where we had nothing, not a bird," she said. "It was like a moonscape, just horrible. But the frightening thing for us, we didn't find any more birds after that. We literally didn't have any birds left to die."

--

ProMED-mail

It would be helpful to know what the necropsy results are, what toxicology tests have been run, and whether a screening for insecticides, organophosphates and/or avicides has been done. Although they claim to rule out infectious disease, one wonders what tests have been done.

The article here does not give us enough information to speculate but does mention that this die-off has been occurring for approximately 3 weeks. Therefore, it is likely that we can rule out storms, as pointed out in the article. With so many species involved over a large area, it is possible to rule out avicides, or certainly put them farther down on a differential diagnosis list. But otherwise, we are no closer to understanding the cause.

If there is any more information from an authoritative source available, we would appreciate hearing it.

Photos of New Holland honeyeaters can be found at  
<http://birdsinbackyards.net/finder/display.cfm?id=12>

Photos of yellow throated minors can be found at:  
<http://rocklin.smugmug.com/keyword/jun/1/77589889>

Photos of wattle birds can be found at:  
[http://www.amonline.net.au/factsheets/little\\_wattlebird.htm](http://www.amonline.net.au/factsheets/little_wattlebird.htm)

Photos of singing honeyeaters can be found at:  
<http://birdsinbackyards.net/finder/display.cfm?id=289> - Mod.TG

Patricia A. Doyle DVM, PhD  
Bus Admin, Tropical Agricultural Economics  
Univ of West Indies

Please visit my "Emerging Diseases" message board at:

<http://www.emergingdisease.org/phpbb/index.php>

Also my new website:

<http://drpdoyle.tripod.com/>

Zhan le Devlesa tai sastimasa

Go with God and in Good Health

[Disclaimer](#)

[Email This Article](#)

---

**[MainPage](#)**

<http://www.rense.com>

**[This Site Served by TheHostPros](#)**