

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

La Crosse District
N5727 County Road Z
Onalaska, WI 54650

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Waterfowl Mortality on Pool 8 of the Upper Mississippi River

Several hundred American coot and a smaller number of lesser scaup have died after consuming faucet snails in Pool 8 along the shoreline near Genoa, Wisc. These snails are an exotic species that carry a small intestinal parasite, a flatworm called a trematode. Birds can become infected less than twenty-four hours after consuming snails containing high concentrations of trematodes. Affected birds usually die from blood loss, shock, or a stomach infection within three to eight days.

Outbreaks like these have occurred since 2002 and are a concern to biologists because the refuge is part of the Mississippi Flyway; approximately 40 percent of all North American waterfowl stop, rest, and feed on the refuge. The vast majority of mortalities have occurred on the river between La Crescent, Minnesota and McGregor, Iowa.

Faucet snails are native to Europe and are thought to have been introduced into the Great Lakes in the early 1870s. The exotic snails were first discovered on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in Lake Onalaska, part of the backwaters near La Crosse, Wisconsin.

There have been no reported health risks from handling or consuming waterfowl infected with trematodes. However, LeAnn White of the National Wildlife Health Center stated, "While there is no danger of contracting trematodes, sick birds could have a secondary infection caused by trematodes burrowing into the intestine, which may cause gut contents to leak into the body cavity." Any individuals who may handle sick birds are always cautioned to wear gloves.

For more information, contact the La Crosse District Office at (608) 779-2399 or visit the visitor center, located at N5727 County Road Z, Onalaska, Wisc. Visitor center hours until November 30th are Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. and Saturdays 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. We will be closed on Thanksgiving Day. Please call for winter hours after December 1st.

Additional information may be found on the Refuge webpage at:
http://www.fws.gov/refuge/upper_mississippi_river/

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is the most visited refuge in the United States. The refuge extends 261 miles along the Upper Mississippi River from Wabasha, Minn. to Rock Island, Ill., protecting and preserving habitat for migratory birds, fish, and a variety of other wildlife. This 240,000 acre refuge was established in 1924.

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In addition to being the most visited refuge in the country, the “Upper Miss” Refuge has the added complexity of a major navigation system, including 11 locks and dams, within its boundary. It is also a world-class fish and wildlife area which harbors 306 species of birds; 119 species of fish; more than 300 active bald eagle nests; thousands of heron and egret nests; spectacular concentrations of canvasback ducks, tundra swans, and white pelicans; and several threatened or endangered species.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.