

Information of Dead Birds and Dying Birds

Freemont Watson*

Department of Chemistry, Jamia Millia Islamia University, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi, India

DESCRIPTION

The avian scientist occasionally has access to dead or dying birds. If carefully studied, these birds can offer data that is relevant to research on health and disease or of biological significance (such as morphometrics, moult patterns, or DNA samples) (e.g. presence of pathological lesions, toxic residues).

In terms of the latter group, dead or dying birds can be used to

- Determine the cause of illness or death in that person or population—a "diagnostic" investigation or
- Provide information on the general state of health, such as the presence or absence of parasites, underlying pathology, or body condition—a process known as "health monitoring."

Although the two occupations may sound similar, their orientation and values are different. Essentially, diagnosis is a veterinary task that aims to attempt and detect and identify a condition, frequently with an eye towards treatment or control. The goal of health monitoring, on the other hand, is to create a database of variables that may be affecting people's survival or the health of a population without necessarily contributing to clinical sickness or death. Such monitoring is typically a multidisciplinary process that involves input from biologists and other experts in addition to veterinarians (Cooper 1989, 2002), and it is becoming more and more important for conservation initiatives for endangered species (Woodford 2001).

Health and safety of birds

Those doing the studies could be put in danger by dead or dying birds. However, the most significant category of risks are "zoonoses." Sometimes the dangers are physical, such as the risk of injury while collecting live birds or retrieving dead ones from marshes, or chemical, because of contact with formaldehyde. Despite the World Health Organization's (WHO) common definition of these as "diseases and infections that are naturally transmissible between vertebrate animals and humans," there is a tendency to define zoonoses as any disease or infection that humans can contract from animals (for a review of zoonotic infections, see Cooper 1990 and more recent specific publications, relating to "new" hazards like West Nile virus).

Depending on the situation, different precautions should be taken to reduce the transmission of zoonotic illnesses. Before beginning any post-mortem exams or sample collection, the employer may be required by health and safety laws in some countries to produce a risk assessment. The veterinarian or avian biologist who is likely to be involved in such work must adhere to the guidelines and take the necessary safety precautions. Adherence to the same standard of risk assessment and employee protection will probably not be practicable in other nations.

Yet, a scientist engaged in such work, regardless of the nation, has a moral obligation to assistants and other personnel, thus it is advisable to create and abide by a code of conduct aimed at reducing the danger of infection. In the field, where proper facilities for the inspection of birds are infrequently accessible and improvisation is usually required, a similar strategy is typically required.

Information of bird ecology

The individual conducting the postmortem examination should have the intent of observing and documenting. There are obvious risks when attempting to interpret results early on or as the postmortem develops. If a bacteriological study finds that the bird died of an overpowering infection, for example, something that initially could seem to be serious, like injury to a pectoral muscle or a pale liver, may later turn out to be of little concern. Thus it is better to hold off on making any decisions until all testing have been completed. Premature conclusions on the most likely cause of morbidity or death have stymied far too many earlier inquiries into bird mortality. These conclusions were made based on insufficient data.

CONCLUSION

Each of these approaches—as well as others—has its adherents, and which one is used—if any—depends on the protocol being followed. Therefore, it is crucial that some sort of evaluation be done that could help others relate findings from one bird to another. As a result, measurements of the carpus, tarsus, and other bones should be routine, along with computations of body weight, and

Correspondence to: Freemont Watson, Department of Chemistry, Jamia Millia Islamia University, Jamia Nagar, Okhla, New Delhi, India, E-mail: Watsonfree@yahoo.in

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there should be some sort of scoring system for as many of the other factors as feasible, such as the amount of visible fat or the size of the pectoral muscle.