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Commissioner

## North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

### Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Wild Birds Unlimited Seed Recall and Salmonellosis in Wild Birds in North Carolina

**1. What bird seed is being recalled?**

Wild Birds Unlimited Wildlife Blend and Wild Birds Unlimited Woodpecker Blend bird foods are the only wild-bird seed currently subject to recall. This brand of bird food is sold exclusively at Wild Birds Unlimited Stores. The press release from Wild Birds Unlimited is available online at [http://www.wbu.com/news/pressreleases/2009\\_0311\\_recall.pdf](http://www.wbu.com/news/pressreleases/2009_0311_recall.pdf)

**2. What do I do if I have bird seed that has been recalled?**

- Return unopened containers of recalled bird feed product to place of purchase for disposal.
- Opened containers of recalled product should be sealed, double-bagged and held until day of trash pickup for disposal in the normal manner. The N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is advising consumers to discard the product, avoid touching unsealed product with bare hands and wash their hands thoroughly after touching unsealed product.

**3. Why did the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services test bird seed?**

Many residents of North Carolina have reported finding dead birds around their bird feeders. One of those birds was submitted to the NCDA&CS Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory System to help determine cause of death. Cultures of tissue samples taken from the bird indicated that Salmonella was present and may have contributed to the bird's death. NCDA&CS then obtained unopened samples of bird food from the original source, and these were tested to determine if contamination had occurred during production of the food. Of these samples, Wildlife Blend and Woodpecker Blends referenced in Question 4 tested positive for Salmonella.

**4. What did the testing reveal?**

Test results of bird food from Wild Birds Unlimited, the retail source of the seed in question, indicated that Wild Birds Unlimited Wildlife Blend bird food with the specific manufacturing date code of 81132200 2916 08124 was positive for Salmonella. Also, Wild Birds Unlimited Woodpecker blend sold in 5-pound bags at a North Carolina store was positive for Salmonella. The bird seed Salmonella strain isolated during testing is different from the strain that is implicated in the current peanut product recall. These test results also indicated that the strain of Salmonella in the bird seed is different from the strain found in dead wild birds that have been examined by the NCDA&CS Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory to date.

**5. Are wild birds dying from Salmonella in North Carolina?**

Salmonella has been isolated from several wild birds tested by the NCDA&CS Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. It is important to know that wild birds die every day from a variety of causes. It should not be assumed that every dead bird found died from Salmonella, though it is still important to follow proper sanitation procedures if you must dispose of any dead bird. Outbreaks of Salmonella in wild birds have been documented in previous years throughout the United States. The last major outbreak of Salmonella in North Carolina in wild birds was documented in April 2000. Laboratory tests at that time identified Salmonellosis as the cause of death. Currently, most of the dead birds have been identified as pine siskins (*Carduelis pinus*) or goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*). Pine siskins and goldfinches are closely related and are very common in North Carolina at certain times of the year. Pine siskins are known to spend winters in North Carolina, but return to other parts of the country to breed in the spring. Goldfinches are found year-round in North Carolina.

**Pine Siskin**



**Goldfinch**



**6. Are wild birds being infected at bird feeders?**

To date, there is no clear evidence to suggest that the recalled bird seed is associated with wild bird deaths. However, Salmonella bacteria can be spread through contaminated seed and from other sources at bird feeders. The bird seed can become contaminated when infected birds leave droppings that are ingested by healthy birds. Platform bird feeders are the most common transmission sites. Tubular bird feeders are better at reducing transmission of the Salmonella bacteria, but birds can also be infected by eating spilled seed on the ground that has been contaminated by droppings. Bird feeder maintenance can help to reduce the spread of disease in wild bird populations.

**7. What can I do to prevent birds from getting sick from eating at my bird feeders?**

- Do not feed birds the bird seed that has been recalled. Thoroughly clean all feeders and containers that may have come in contact with the contaminated product.
- Take feeders down for a week if you have found dead birds. Disinfect them before putting them back up.
- Keep feeders clean. Clean feeders outside and not in your kitchen sink.
- Bird feeders should be disinfected at least once a month under normal circumstances and once a week if sick or dead birds have been found. Disinfect feeders by complete immersion in a solution of one part liquid chlorine bleach in nine parts hot water for several minutes. Allow to air dry before putting feeders back up.
- Keep the area around and under the feeder clean. Rake up excess spilled seed and when you clean feeders, pour the leftover cleaning solution onto the spilled-seed areas.
- Provide multiple feeding stations around the yard to disperse bird activity if possible. However, one feeder disinfected regularly is better than several feeders that are not cleaned regularly.
- Move feeders periodically to reduce concentrations of droppings on the ground under feeders.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after cleaning feeders.

**8. Are there any risks to people from handling dead birds or contaminated wild bird seed?**

Salmonella bacteria can affect animals, and there is a risk of infection to people through direct contact with dead or infected birds or contaminated seed and feeders. Therefore, it is critical to wash your hands after having contact with bird feed or any surfaces exposed to these products. Birds, while feeding, may have contaminated the feeder with infectious droppings. No cases of transmission of Salmonella infection to humans from birds or bird feeders have been reported in North Carolina. Salmonella can cause fever, diarrhea (which may be bloody), nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. The illness usually lasts four to seven days. Although most people recover without treatment, severe infections may occur, particularly in young children, frail or elderly people and those with weakened immune systems. Individuals at higher risk for more serious complications should take care to not handle recalled product. Consumers exhibiting gastrointestinal illness after having contact with animals or feed products should contact their healthcare providers.

**9. If the bacteria in the seed are not the same as the bacteria causing the birds to be sick, why is the seed being recalled?**

Testing has found that a specific lot of Wild Birds Unlimited Wildlife Blend bird food is contaminated with Salmonella. Though the strain of Salmonella that has been found is not the strain that usually causes wild birds to get sick, this bacteria still has the potential to cause illness in people and animals.

**10. What do I do if I find dead wild birds in my yard?**

Remember that wild birds die every day for a variety of reasons. Finding one dead bird in your yard does not necessarily mean the bird died from Salmonellosis. If you have questions about dead wild birds, please contact the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission at 919-707-0050.

### **11. How can I dispose of dead wild birds in my yard?**

If you find a dead bird in your yard and you do not want to leave it lying where it is so that natural processes take their course, you can dispose of the bird in one of two ways: 1) bag it and put it in the trash or 2) bury it. If you must handle the dead bird, use these safety precautions:

- Avoid touching the bird with your bare hands.
- If possible, wear disposable protective gloves when picking up and handling. If disposable gloves are not available, a plastic bag can be used as a makeshift glove. When the dead bird has been picked up, the bag can be turned back on itself and tied.
- Place the dead bird in a suitable plastic bag, preferably leak-proof. Care should be taken not to contaminate the outside of the bag.
- Tie the bag and place it in a second plastic bag.
- Remove gloves by turning them inside out and then place them in the second plastic bag. Tie the bag and dispose of it in the normal household refuse bin.
- Hands should then be washed thoroughly with soap and water.
- Alternatively, the dead bird can be buried, but not in a plastic bag. Bury the bird away from public areas and water sources. Cover the site to prevent animals from digging up the carcass.

### **12. Who do I contact for questions concerning wild-bird food?**

The NCDA&CS Food and Drug Protection Division's Feed Section may be contacted at (919) 733-7366.

Thanks to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, N.C. Division of Public Health and the USGS National Wildlife Health Center for information used to answer these questions.

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