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Press release

Bird flu outbreak at Zoo Berlin

Waterbird tests positive | Zoo Berlin closed to visitors

With the spread of avian influenza across Central Europe in recent years, some time ago Zoo and Tierpark Berlin began randomly testing deceased birds for the disease, also known as avian flu or bird flu. A hamerkop – a medium-sized wading bird – at Zoo Berlin that died on November 13 was shown to have been carrying the virus. The Landeslabor Berlin-Brandenburg (LLBB) reported the positive result, which was then confirmed by the National Reference Laboratory for Avian Influenza. A team of experts including veterinarians, curators, keepers and the Zoological Director of Zoo Berlin promptly initiated emergency measures. In consultation with the local authorities, the decision was made to immediately close Zoo Berlin to visitors.

“We have reacted quickly and introduced extensive quarantine measures. Almost all our birds – including the penguins – have now been moved to their indoor habitats or aviaries,” said Christian Kern, Zoological Director of Zoo and Tierpark Berlin. “Fortunately, no other birds have as yet displayed symptoms of the disease. However, all the birds will be tested for the virus.” Other birds that could have been exposed to the virus include several Abdim’s storks, Australian pelicans and crowned cranes. Staff entrusted with caring for the birds are now wearing protective clothing to prevent the spread of the virus. The local veterinary authority ordered all the birds to be kept indoors for the foreseeable future. A risk analysis has also been initiated of the overall situation at Zoo Berlin, involving various external experts.

A representative of the Berlin Senate Department for the Environment, Urban Mobility, Consumer Protection and Climate Action reported that very few humans have as yet been infected with the H5N1 virus. “However, there is a risk of the virus infecting other bird populations. It was therefore important to take the immediate step of closing the entire zoo grounds as a precautionary measure until we have a better overview of the situation. Our primary goal is to prevent the spread of avian influenza.”

Other German zoos and animal parks in Greifswald, Karlsruhe, Rostock, Heidelberg and the Main Valley have also been hit with cases of avian flu. As a precautionary measure, Tierpark Berlin has also begun moving most of its birds into indoor habitats.