



UNIVERSITIES FEDERATION FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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Media Release

From the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)

5th September, 2007

For Immediate Release:

Continued disease threat to British garden birds

Scientists from the Garden Bird Health Initiative (GBHi) have confirmed that there has been a repeated incidence of high numbers of reported finch mortalities in summer 2007. Postmortem analysis has verified that the cause of death is trichomoniasis, a parasitic infection that resulted in widespread deaths in 2006, peaking in September. The distribution and prevalence of the parasite in the UK finch population is still being investigated and a scientific analysis and publication is being planned for later in the year.

Becki Lawson, a wildlife veterinarian from the Zoological Society of London and coordinator of the project, commented, "The current increase in finch mortalities closely follows the seasonal pattern that was seen last year. Members of the public can help by reporting observations of disease in garden birds through our website (<http://www.ufaw.org.uk/gbhi.php>). It is vitally important to track the spread of this emerging infectious disease of British birds and to closely monitor the range of species that can be affected."

Dr James Kirkwood, Scientific Director of the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, added "These important findings highlight the importance of this garden bird health surveillance programme and the urgent need for further funding to continue the research so that we can understand and tackle emerging threats to wild bird health".

The GBHi emphasizes the need for good practice in feeding techniques for garden birds. Further information about the disease, the Garden Bird Health *initiative* and a reporting form can be found at <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/gbhi.php>.

-Ends-

Media contacts:

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UFAW:

The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW) is an internationally recognised, independent scientific and educational animal welfare charity. It works to improve knowledge and understanding of animals' needs in order to achieve high standards of welfare for farm, companion, research, captive wild animals and those with which we interact in the wild.

UFAW improves animal welfare worldwide through its programme of awards, grants and scholarships; by educational initiatives, especially at university and college level; by providing information in books, videos, reports and in its scientific journal *Animal Welfare*; by providing expert advice to governments and others, including for legislation and 'best practice' guidelines and codes; and by working with animal keepers, scientists, vets, lawyers and all those who care about animals.

SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMAL WELFARE

Chief Executive and Scientific Director: James K Kirkwood BVSc PhD CBiol FIBiol MRCVS

Secretary: Donald C Davidson

Registered Charity No. 207996 (Registered in England) and Company Limited by Guarantee No. 579991



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This work relies on the support of members, subscribers and donors.

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL):

Founded in 1826, the **Zoological Society of London (ZSL)** is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity: our key role is the conservation of animals and their habitats. ZSL runs London Zoo and Whipsnade Wild Animal Park, carries out scientific research in the Institute of Zoology and is actively involved in field conservation in other countries worldwide. www.zsl.org

The Garden Bird Health *initiative* (GBH):

The Garden Bird Health *initiative* was formed through a UFAW project in 2005 by a group of veterinary, ornithological and bird care organisations (see list below):

Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW)
British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)
CJ WildBird Foods Ltd.
Defra Animal Welfare
Cranswick Pet Products
Gardman Ltd.
Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London (ZSL)
Jacobi Jayne and Co
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Scottish Agricultural College (SAC)
University of Liverpool Veterinary School, Department of Veterinary Pathology
University of Sheffield
Wildlife Veterinary Investigation Centre (WVIC)

A major part of this *initiative* is a collaborative 3-year research project involving many of the organisations above. Funding for this research has been generously provided by:

CJ WildBird Foods Ltd.
Gardman Ltd.
Cranswick Pet Products
BirdCare Standards Association
British Veterinary Association: Animal Welfare Foundation
RSPB
UFAW

Finance to support this research program is available until Spring 2008. Fund-raising to support continuation of this study is currently underway. Donations can be made through the UFAW website.

The disease:

Post mortem investigation on the finches has identified necrotic oesophagitis and ingluvitis (disease of the throat and crop) caused by a single cell parasite called *Trichomonas*, which typically affects pigeons and doves in the UK. The parasite was first seen to cause disease in finches in 2005 and is considered to be an emerging infectious disease of British birds. A large number of finch fatalities were reported during the summer of 2006 caused by this parasitic disease.

Transmission of the infection is most likely to be by birds feeding one another with regurgitated food during the breeding season; through food or drinking water contaminated with saliva; or, possibly, from droppings of an infected bird.

The parasite does not affect humans or other mammals such as dogs or cats, although it does have the

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potential to affect captive birds. However, good hygiene precautions, such as avoiding direct handling of sick or dead birds, are recommended as a routine measure.

Further information about good practice when feeding garden birds and minimising the chance of disease transmission can be found at: <http://www.ufaw.org.uk/gbhi.php>, or requested by ringing 01582 831818

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