

# NEWS RELEASE



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS KILLS RARE BIRDS AT VIRGINIA ZOO**

NORFOLK, Va. – The Virginia Zoo is deeply saddened to report the death of three 28 day old cassowary chicks. Two were found deceased on the morning of July 17 and a third died later that afternoon despite intensive medical therapy. One of the parent birds has also died but test results have not been completed.

Initial pathology findings suggested a viral disease, so further testing was performed and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) was confirmed as the cause of death on August 4. EEE is a mosquito-borne viral infection that can be fatal in both humans and animals. Because of this, the deaths were reported to the appropriate government agencies including the USDA and the Norfolk Department of Public Health.

The Norfolk Department of Public Health has reported that there have been no Eastern Equine Encephalitis positives in any of the mosquito pools or sentinel chickens in Norfolk.

There have been no published cases of cassowary deaths as a result of EEE and it is widely unknown how pathogenic the disease is to the species. While there is no bird-specific vaccine for EEE, it is common in the zoo community to vaccinate some species of birds with the equine vaccine. The Zoo's remaining cassowary have been vaccinated and future chicks will be vaccinated beginning at two weeks of age.

“While the loss is devastating not only to the Zoo staff and the worldwide cassowary gene pool,” said Greg Bockheim the Zoo’s Executive Director, “it does provide the Zoo with the opportunity to publish observations and test results that will help zoos across the country better care for cassowary.”

Bockheim also said that medical testing of this kind is performed in zoological collections and aids the CDC in identifying and tracking disease that can potentially affect humans. He added that is important for all of us in the community to reduce the pockets of stagnant water in our own yards to prevent the spread of mosquitos.

- more -

# EASTERN EQUINE ENCEPHALITIS KILLS RARE BIRDS AT VIRGINIA ZOO, 2 OF 2

Mosquito control has fogged the neighboring areas of Colonial Place, Riverview, Virginia Place and Lafayette. The Norfolk Department of Public Health Vector Control Division will begin fogging in these areas again; weather permitting, Wednesday morning. Additionally, Vector Control staff will increase mosquito trapping, surveillance and larval treatments.

The Virginia Department of Health recommends the following tips to reduce exposure to mosquitoes:

- Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
- If possible, limit outdoor exposure between dusk and dawn.
- Use insect repellants with DEET according to the manufacturer's directions.
- Turn over or remove containers in your yard where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys.
- Eliminate standing water on tarps or flat roofs.
- Clean out birdbaths, wading pools and swimming pools.
- Clean roof gutters and downspout screens

Norfolk Department of Public Health maintains a hotline during mosquito season that will be updated weekly (with increased frequency as needed) with the listings of dates, times and locations of mosquito fogging in the city. Citizens may access this hotline by calling 757-683-2914, option #4. All spraying is done weather permitting.

For additional information on mosquito control or to report areas of potential mosquito breeding, call the Vector Control Division at (757) 683-2840, week days from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. All other inquiries, including questions about the cassowary, should be directed to the Virginia Zoo.

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*As an accredited Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facility, the Virginia Zoo exhibits more than 400 animals on 53 beautifully landscaped acres. For more than a century, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to education and conservation, and offered a fun-filled day for visitors of any age. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and located at 3500 Granby Street in Norfolk. Daily admission prices are \$11 for adults, \$10 for seniors (age 62 and over) and \$9 for children ages 2-11. Children under 2 admitted free! Visit [www.virginiazoo.org](http://www.virginiazoo.org) or call (757) 441-2374 for more information.*