

UPDATES: Quail is linked to West Nile virus

By Jerry Lackey

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SAN ANGELO, Texas — A quail loaded with high levels of the antibody that fights West Nile virus was discovered recently by researchers with a conservation alliance based at Texas Tech University in Lubbock.

The Quail-Tech Alliance, a partnership between Texas Tech's natural resources management department and Quail First, a Dallas-based nonprofit quail conservation organization, captured the small bird, known as a scaled or blue quail, in Potter County.

"The high level of detectable antibody is indicative not only of a possible current infection but to past viral exposure," said Kristyn Urban, a doctoral research assistant from the university's Institute of Environmental and Human Health. "The presence of antibodies to West Nile virus suggests that quail might show resistance to this virus or perhaps be another host to the life cycle of the virus."

The presence of the West Nile virus could adversely affect the bird's response to more common illnesses, changes in environment, food shortages and natural predators, said Anna Gibson, also a doctoral research assistant from the disease surveillance team.

Sportsmen concerned the birds in their area may be infected with West Nile should wear gloves when handling game and follow other food-handling procedures as prescribed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

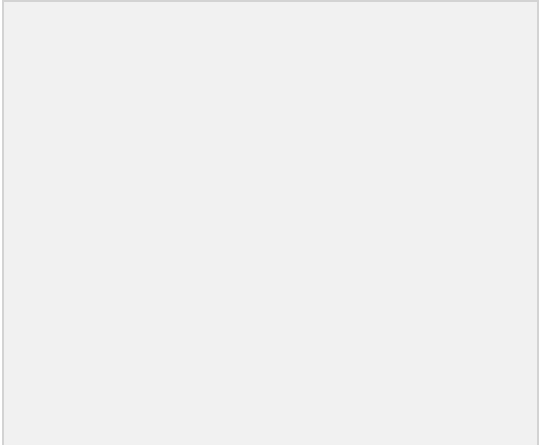
West Nile virus was first detected and reported from birds and mosquitoes in West Texas during summer 2002.

Sign-up under way for USDA program

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is accepting applications from Texas agricultural landowners for the next Conservation Stewardship Program.

The ranking period cutoff date for producer applications in the program has been extended to Jan. 7.

"CSP supports ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing



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payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources,” said Don Gohmert, NRCS state conservationist for Texas.

Congress limited enrollment for CSP nationally at 12.7 million acres per year. Applicants will be ranked on state-identified primary resourced concerns, which in Texas are water quantity, soil erosion, plant health and condition, water quality and animal health.

Potential applicants are encouraged to use the CSP self-screening checklist to determine if the new program is suitable for their operation. The checklist highlights basic information about CSP eligibility requirements, contact obligations and potential payments.

It is available from local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offices or on the NRCS website at nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_esp/csp.html.

Pecan crop expected to be good this year

The Texas pecan harvest under way is forecast as an excellent off-year yield, said Jose Peña, an economist with Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center in Uvalde.

“The pecan harvest in Texas began recently and continues to gain momentum, and it is an above-average crop throughout the pecan belt this year,” he said.

The Department of Agriculture estimates the nation’s pecan crop at 271.3 million pounds, 20.5 million pounds lower than the 292 million pounds produced last year. “Together with the estimates of ‘carry-in’ pecan supplies at about 92 million pounds, this would make the estimate of available pecans at about 363.3 million pounds,” Pena said.

The 2010 Texas pecan crop is estimated at 70 million pounds, up 10 million from last year.

“The rains last fall actually had a somewhat negative impact on pecan quality last year, but having the moisture in the soil really helped this year’s pecan production, contributing to positive growing conditions this fall,” Pena said.

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