

West Nile found in blue jay

By David Lea
SPECIAL TO THE CHAMPION

Halton Region Health Department officials are calling on residents to protect themselves from mosquito bites after a dead blue jay found in Oakville tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV).

The blue jay, which was discovered Monday in the area of Cornwall and Charwell Roads, is the first WNV positive bird found in Halton this year. It likely won't be the last, though. A dead crow that was located Tuesday in the Fourth Line and Rebecca Street area is also expected to test positive for the virus.

The presence of the virus in Halton is nothing new with WNV consistently being found in the region since 2001, said Dr. Monir Taha, associate medical officer of health for Halton Region.

"It's become a predictable annual thing. Typically around the beginning of August we get our first physical detection of WNV," he said.

"We find it first in birds and then usually not too long thereafter the mosquitoes that we've been testing since the beginning of the summer will start to turn positive for WNV too. All this indicates that the amount of WNV that's out there in birds

and mosquitoes is increasing and therefore the chances for people to get sick with WNV increases too."

Taha noted that the record wet summer has been a mixed blessing for WNV. While the excessive rain has provided mosquitoes with plenty of places to breed, Taha said the lack of heat waves has slowed down the virus's growth somewhat.

Because the virus is so weather dependent, Taha said it's difficult to say whether this will be a good or bad year for WNV.

Either way, the Region is taking precautions and residents are advised to do the same.

"We're continuing our control program, which is mainly to prevent mosquitoes from emerging as adult mosquitoes. We have larvicide programs for storm water catch basins, storm water management ponds and other surface waters where mosquito larva are detected," said Taha.

"So, we're continuing that, but people have their own role to play."

Taha noted that people can protect themselves from infected mosquitoes by covering up with white coloured, long-sleeved shirts and pants with tightly woven fabric.

Using an approved insect

repellent, such as one containing DEET is also recommended as is limiting your time outdoors during dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active and likely to bite.

The number of mosquitoes in an area can also be reduced by emptying out water-filled containers where mosquitoes like to breed.

The water in a birdbath, for example, should be changed at least once a week to prevent mosquitoes from making use of it.

While preventing exposure to mosquitoes is important, getting bitten by one, even if it's infected with WNV, isn't necessarily the end of the world.

"Most people actually do very well if they get WNV. They may not even notice that they've caught it at all. Some people just have a mild illness with a bit of fever and then they're perfectly back to normal," said Taha.





So far this year, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is reporting one 'probable/confirmed' human case of WNV in Ontario.

Anyone who would like to report a dead bird or standing water or for more information about WNV can call the Halton Region at (905) 825-6000, toll free 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866), TTY (905) 827-9833 or email wnv@halton.ca.

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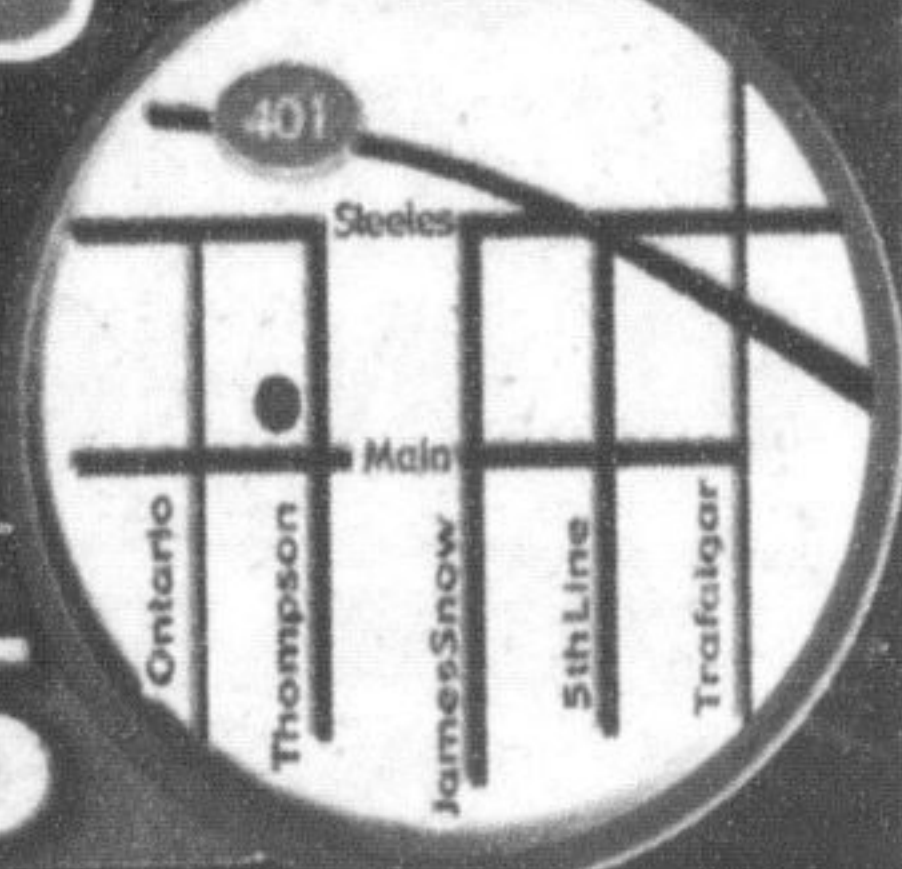
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