

# **DEADLY NEWCASTLE DISEASE DISCOVERED IN PARROTS AND OTHER BIRDS IMPORTED FROM PAKISTAN TO ITALY**

**4000 BIRDS DESTROYED 20TH FEBRUARY,  
INTERNATIONAL AUTHORITIES NOT YET NOTIFIED.**

*(WPT Press Release, 29 February 2004)*

[Italian Version](#) | [Spanish Version](#)

According to the OIE, the World Organization for Animal Health, Italy's Health Ministry has not reported that a deadly avian virus, Exotic Newcastle Disease (END), entered Italy earlier this month in a shipment of wild and captive parrots, and other caged birds. In addition, the World Parrot Trust, an international parrot conservation organization, discovered that several regional Italian Veterinary districts were not yet informed of the presence of the virus on Italian soil.

END is among the most infectious and deadly of all avian viruses and can have significant economic impacts on the poultry industry, as have recent outbreaks of avian flu in Asia and the USA. The virus is spread by direct contact with infected birds or inhalation of infectious particles. Attempts to contain END outbreaks often involve halting regional and international trade in birds and bird products as well as the destruction of millions of captive birds. In 2003, an END outbreak starting in southern California spread as far east as Texas before being contained nearly a year later at a cost of over 160 million dollars to US taxpayers. Although the disease causes flu-like symptoms in humans, outbreaks of the disease in birds are rarely considered a significant human health risk.

The shipment of parrots, lovebirds, and finches imported from Pakistan to Italy tested positive on 16 February 2004 for Exotic Newcastle Disease. After learning of the presence of END in an EU country, the World Parrot Trust immediately investigated the report and confirmed with the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie laboratory in Legnaro, Italy that the samples tested positive for END. The laboratory confirmed that they faxed the results to the Italian Health Ministry as required by law, and multiple independent sources now confirm that some 4000 birds from the shipment were destroyed in Naples on 20 February.

A full week after the birds were destroyed, the World Parrot Trust discovered that federal veterinarians in at least three importing regions of Italy as well as the OIE centered in Paris, had not yet been notified. Newcastle disease is one of only fifteen diseases categorized as an "A List" reportable animal disease by the OIE: notification within 24 hours of detection is a requirement of Italy, Pakistan, and all 165 OIE member countries.

Pakistan is a major exporter of wild birds to the EU, sending tens of thousands of parrots and other birds destined for European pet markets each year, particularly to Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. For CITES listed species alone, between 1997-2001 the EU imported a total of 617,591 parrots and 2,480,186 non-parrots, primarily for the pet trade.

It appears that infected consignment in Naples was not alone; additional birds from this shipment were destined for another facility in Emilia Romagna, Italy. As of 27 February, the local veterinary authority confirmed by telephone that they had not yet heard of the Newcastle disease in Naples. It remains unknown whether a single EU veterinary authority has yet been alerted of the presence of END in Italy.

"We're deeply concerned about the serious disease risks caused by importing hundreds of thousands of wild birds into the EU each year," stated the World Parrot Trust's director, Dr. James Gilardi. "It is alarming to see the 80 year old early warning system of the OIE so blatantly breached. Secrecy is the greatest ally of these dreaded diseases and threatens millions of birds in Europe, and especially the multi-billion Euro poultry industry. With the planned EU expansion in May, such flawed protections will surely go from bad to worse."

"To protect the EU from these ever-present disease risks, we join a growing number of concerned organizations in calling for a permanent halt to the importation of all wild birds into the European Union," continued Gilardi, "why take these unnecessary risks?"

The director of the International Zoo Veterinary Group in the UK, Dr. Andrew Greenwood, commented that, "the fact that it has been nearly two weeks since the disease was detected and the proper reporting procedures have not been followed is a very serious issue. It is likely that birds from the same source have been sent to other EU countries, yet the veterinary officers at those ports of entry remain unaware that they may be handling this deadly disease."

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