



The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.  
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## ***Bird Flu Panic Threatens Cats in Germany and Austria***

MANASQUAN, NJ - The greatest risk to cats in Europe may be the panic that has erupted following announcements that several domestic cats have tested positive in Austria for the dreaded avian influenza virus strain H5N1 and that the first case of a domestic cat who died of bird flu was confirmed in Germany.

On Tuesday, February 28 authorities in Germany reported that the affected cat was found dead on the Baltic island of Ruegen. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 100 wild birds have died on this island since February 14, 2006 when the bird flu outbreak first hit Germany and several were found to be infected with H5N1.

The news of this first case of an infected mammal in the European Union immediately created widespread fear of a possible pandemic spread by cats. Tragically, the reaction of many cat owners has been to relinquish their pets to shelters according to the German Animal Welfare Federation, an umbrella organization with over 500 shelters throughout the country.

Details are not yet known concerning the Austrian cases in the southern state of Styria, but the cats were still alive on March 6, 2006 and there had been dozens of confirmed cases of H5N1 in birds reported recently in this area.

WHO has advised "there is no evidence that domestic cats are a reservoir of the virus". However, experimental studies, published in 2004, did show that domestic cats could be infected when fed infected chicks and that the cats were able to transmit the virus to other cats.

German authorities have ordered pet owners in all states with bird flu to not allow their cats to roam outdoors where they could eat infected birds. Another important precaution is to avoid feeding any uncooked poultry to cats.

The Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA), the largest registry of pedigreed cats in the world, was founded 100 years ago and now has member clubs in the United States, Canada, Japan, Southeast Asia, China, Russia, Europe and other countries. CFA has for many years encouraged all cat owners to responsibly keep their cats indoors or safely confined outdoors. Now, with the evidence that avian flu can infect domestic felines, it is even more imperative to safeguard cats in those parts of the world with avian flu infections – Asia, Europe and Africa.

Worldwide there are millions of freeroaming/feral cats with no owners to take steps to protect them. The risk to these cats is not known but thought to be remote. Ian Jones, Professor at the School of Animal and Microbial Sciences, University of Reading, England has noted that “the infection would have to keep the cat well enough to travel and spread and yet sick enough to maintain high doses of virus so that transmission is achieved.” Cats in a natural environment tend to run off and hide when sick becoming isolated from other cats or humans. So far there are no reports of infected feral cat colonies in any of the countries affected by avian influenza N5N1 since 2003.

The World Health Organization is coordinating the global response to human cases of H5N1 and monitoring the disease, which has caused 94 human deaths in 7 countries since 2003. Most of the human cases have been linked to close contact with infected poultry or other domestic birds. To date no human infection has been associated with exposure to wild birds. There is also no evidence that humans can get bird flu from cats.

For more information and updates on avian influenza and cats see:

World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/en/>

Cornell Feline Health Center <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/fhc/>

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The Cat Fanciers' Association is the world's largest registry of pedigreed cats with more than 2 million registered throughout the world. Formed in 1906 as a nonprofit association of member clubs, the CFA is comprised of more than 650 clubs in North and South America, Europe and Asia. The association's mission is to preserve and promote the pedigreed breeds of cats and to enhance the well being of all cats. For more information on the CFA visit [www.cfa.org](http://www.cfa.org).

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