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Subject PRO/AH/EDR> West Nile virus, reptiles, alligators - USA (FL)

WEST NILE VIRUS, REPTILES, ALLIGATORS - USA (FL)

A ProMED-mail post

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[1]

Date: Wed 13 Nov 2002

From: ProMED-mail <promed@promedmail.org>

Source: Florida Times-Union Wed 13 Nov 2002 [edited]

<<http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/apnews/stories/111302/D7N8V8R00.html>>

Florida: West Nile virus identified in alligators for the first time

GAINESVILLE: University of Florida researchers have identified West Nile virus in 3 Florida alligators, the first time the disease has been observed in the North American species. State public health veterinarian Lisa Conti confirmed on Tue 12 Nov 2002 that the three farm-raised alligators tested positive for the illness last month.

Officials at Clabrook Farm Inc. in Orange County said hundreds of alligators being raised there have died suddenly in the last 4 years, and now they suspect West Nile was at least partially to blame. "We thought maybe somebody was poisoning them," farm co-owner Kobi Kagen said. "But it

was not affecting all of the pens. It's strange. It's strange and very sudden."

Kagen said he's aware of many other farms which have experienced similar sudden-death problems with its alligators. It remains unclear what effect, if any, the findings will have on the state's alligator farming industry. Local, state, and federal epidemiologists are continuing their investigation, Conti said.

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[This is the first report of West Nile virus infection in a reptile in the USA. The nature of the diagnostic tests are not stated. Presence of antibody might indicate no more than exposure to the mosquito vector. Isolation of virus from sick animals would be necessary to substantiate any association between West Nile virus infection and disease. - Mod.CP]

[2]

Date: Wed 13 Nov 2002

From: "sgrenard" <sgrenard@si.rr.com>

Source: Reuters News Service, Wed 13 Nov 2002 [edited]

Florida: West Nile virus found in farmed alligators

MIAMI: Epidemiologists found West Nile virus in 3 farm-raised Florida alligators, marking the first time the potentially deadly virus has been found in a US reptile species, health officials said on Wednesday. They also said there was little chance of contracting West Nile disease by eating the meat of an infected alligator because cooking destroys the heat-sensitive virus.

But state officials were still trying to gauge the potential impact on Florida's 21 commercial alligator farms, which produced 25 200 hides and 190 600 pounds (85 770 kg) of meat in 2001. Researchers from the University of Florida confirmed that the virus was present in 3 alligators sent from a commercial farm in central Florida's Orange County, said Lisa Conti, the state's public health veterinarian. The tests were conducted after an unusual spate of deaths at the farm. "We would encourage alligator farmers

that have animals that may act like they have neurological signs to have them tested for West Nile virus infection," Conti said. "We don't know to what extent this would cause large outbreaks of illness or death in these animals."

The virus previously has been found in [humans], birds, horses, and squirrels, but the central Florida case marks the first time it [has been] found in alligators in the United States, state and federal health officials said. "We have a lot to learn about the natural history of West Nile virus in alligators at this point," Conti said. Epidemiologists surmise that the tough-skinned reptiles got the virus the same way humans and other animals do -- from the bite of infected mosquitoes. Asked if humans could contract the virus from the bite of an infected alligator, Conti said, "I think they'd probably be much worse off from the general trauma."

(byline: Jane Sutton)

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Pablo Nart

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