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THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Bird flu reported in flock of Whatcom County birds

BY HANNAH EDELMAN
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The Whatcom County Health Department announced Thursday that a die-off of approximately 25 wild birds in the Wisner Lake area tested positive for the avian influenza virus. Avian influenza, also known as bird flu, is spreading among migratory birds, the health department said, and can be spread to backyard flocks.

The confirmation of the cause of the die-off comes as a Grays Harbor County resident preliminarily tested positive for avian influenza, according to the Washington State Department of Health. If confirmed, it will be the first reported human case of bird flu in Washington in 2025.

The source of the potential infection has not yet been determined, and health officials are working to determine possible sources, including contact with wild and domestic birds. Public health disease experts have not identified any risk to the public.

The health department said the individual with the potential infection is an older adult with underlying health conditions. They developed a high fever, confusion and respiratory distress, and were hospitalized earlier this month. They are currently being treated in King County.

WHAT IS AVIAN INFLUENZA?

Avian influenza is a disease caused by viruses that naturally occur in wild aquatic birds. They can infect other bird species and occasionally mammals, including humans. The disease can be deadly to domestic birds like chickens and turkeys.

Most human cases are caused by exposure to sick or infected animals, often those at commercial poultry farms and backyard flocks. These birds have a higher risk of infection in the fall and winter due to exposure to migratory birds who may carry the

SEE BIRD FLU , 3A



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Whatcom County residents with backyard flocks are being encouraged to have their birds tested as state and federal agencies work to stop the spread of bird flu.



RACHEL SHOWALTER The Bellingham Herald

A cyclist bikes down the newly installed bike lane on Holly Street in downtown Bellingham.

Bellingham named in lawsuits over crosswalk, bike lane safety

BY HANNAH EDELMAN
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The city of Bellingham is the subject of two separate lawsuits filed in Whatcom County Superior Court in recent weeks. Both lawsuits are related to injuries sustained in car accidents that plaintiffs allege are related to road conditions in the city.

The first lawsuit, filed by Bellingham resident Donald Scarmuzzi on Oct. 23, states that Scarmuzzi was hit by a car while riding an electric scooter in the bike lane on West Holly Street near Cornwall Avenue on Dec. 24, 2024. The driver of the vehicle, which hit Scarmuzzi while turning into an alleyway, was also named as a defendant in the lawsuit.

Scarmuzzi sustained a “significant injury” to his left leg as a result of the crash, requiring surgery and causing “ongoing pain, suffering, emotional distress, disability, and loss of enjoyment of life,” court documents state.

The lawsuit alleges that the city owed Scarmuzzi “a duty of care to design, inspect, maintain, and ensure the bicycle lane was free from dangerous or hazardous conditions.” He is asking for monetary damages in an amount to be proven at trial.

A second, similar lawsuit was filed by Whatcom County resident Christine Jewett on Nov. 2. Jewett was hit by a car on the night of Jan. 28 while crossing Lafayette Street at the intersection of Eldridge Avenue in a marked crosswalk.



RACHEL SHOWALTER The Bellingham Herald

Crews began installing bike lanes on Holly Street between Ellis and Prospect on May 1, 2024, in downtown Bellingham. The install was part of a trial project designed to make travel in the area safer for people walking and cycling.

The driver, who was named as a defendant in the case, turned left onto Lafayette Street and hit Jewett because, as the lawsuit states the driver said, “there was very little street lighting at that intersection.”

The impact caused Jewett “serious, severe and permanent injuries,” including a full knee dislocation and her shinbone breaking through both sides of her knee joint. She had to have 26 surgical implants including plates, screws and synthetic grafts.

The lawsuit alleges that only one

streetlight was present at the crosswalk where the Washington State Department of Transportation Design Manual says there should be a minimum of two.

Jewett is alleging negligence on the part of both the city and driver, as well as the family member who owned the vehicle. She is asking for general and special damages in amounts to be proven at trial.

Both cases are scheduled to be discussed during executive session at the Bellingham City Council meeting Monday.

Arrested Lynden man was gang member, Border Patrol says

BY HANNAH EDELMAN
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U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) provided an update Thursday on the arrest of a Lynden man who was taken into custody on Oct. 29 at an apartment complex by the Department of Homeland Security.

Jesus Alejandro Lopez Ruiz, 29, was wanted for assault on law enforcement, according to a Whatcom County Sheriff's Office spokesperson. CBP said Ruiz was a member of the Sureño gang and had “a history of criminal activity.”

His arrest followed an “extensive investigation” between Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Enforcement and Removal Operations officers,

Homeland Security Investigations agents and U.S. Border Patrol agents from the Blaine Sector Targeting Unit, according to CBP.

Ruiz was previously arrested for an immigration violation in 2016, CBP said.

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