

# Songbirds dying near Antrim

## County bird feeders

BY LINDA GALLAGHER

**BELLAIRE**—Recent reports of a number of birds found dead in a large area of Antrim County ranging from Elk Rapids to Ellsworth are probably a result of salmonella after an usually large migration of songbirds from the Arctic into the area last fall, area biologists said last week.

Several birds have been found

Tom Cooley. "But we've also had reports of dead redpolls, goldfinches, chickadees, and mourning doves, anything that spent a lot of time around bird feeders this winter."

Salmonella, the same type of bacteria that has received headlines recently for poisoning food, is believed to be the culprit, Cooley said. "Salmonella is always an issue around heavily

Anyone who has seen any evidence of salmonella poisoning in their feeders is advised to thoroughly clean both the feeders and the area surrounding their feeders, the biologist said.

Cleaning is best accomplished by dismantling feeders and scrubbing them with hot water and a 10 percent bleach solution, he said. "Be sure to thoroughly rinse them."

The entire area around the feeder should be raked well and all detritus placed in a sealed garbage bag or burned.

Although for the health and well-being of all birds it is best not to feed at all during the warmer months, anyone who chooses to do so should move their feeders to another location periodically or place the feed on the ground in another location. If bird die-offs continue, residents should completely stop feeding and wait a few weeks before resuming, said Cooley, who works in the DNR's wildlife disease lab near East Lansing.

Salmonella problems tend to become less severe as winter gives way to spring and summer, he said. "But much of that is probably due to the fact that fewer people feed the birds during the spring and summer, and the really large number of songbirds, like pine siskins, migrate back to their native breeding areas in Canada."



dead for no apparent reason near bird feeders kept filled all winter in Bellaire, Central Lake, and Elk Rapids.

Most were believed to be pine siskins, which migrated into northern Michigan last fall in huge numbers as the prospect of a particularly severe winter became reality, said Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Pathologist Biologist

used bird feeders, but it seemed to be particularly bad this year," he said.

Winter stress makes songbirds, especially the smaller species, weaker and more susceptible to the bacteria, Cooley said, which is quickly spread to other birds at the feeders. Droppings from infected birds mix with seeds at feeders, leading to more sick birds.