



## Response to Creekmore's Letter

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## RESPONSE TO LETTER TO THE EDITOR . . .

### Response to Creekmore's Letter

I certainly do not dispute Mr. Creekmore's characterization of the debate over the significance of duck plague in wild waterfowl as "politically charged," or his statement that, "How we as an organization choose to deal with these factors has a direct bearing on the future growth and success of the Wildlife Disease Association." However, it is difficult to respond specifically to his abstract and unsubstantiated charge that my review of *Diseases of Wild Waterfowl*, 2nd Edition, is inappropriate because I used it to air my "personal views" on duck plague, which he claims lack objectivity, distract the reader, do a disservice to Dr. Wobeser and his work, and "undermine the integrity of both the Journal of Wildlife Diseases and the Wildlife Disease Association itself." Nevertheless, because Mr. Creekmore's complaint appears to focus on what he perceives to be the presentation of my "personal views" on duck plague, it may be helpful to examine this allegation in greater detail.

I want to emphasize that duck plague not only is the first disease considered in the book, but its 13 pages of text (pp. 15-27) are equaled only by those for avian cholera (pp. 57-69) and botulism (pp. 149-161). In addition, Dr. Wobeser himself uses duck plague three times in the Introduction to illustrate such concepts as the heterogeneity of waterfowl in their response to diseases (p. 2), the exchange of diseases between wild and domestic waterfowl (p. 6), and "an exaggerated fire-fighting response" to diseases in waterfowl (p. 11). Clearly, therefore, duck plague is an appropriate topic for inclusion in a review of the book.

My first statement dealing with duck plague was a quotation from the book about the potential for the exchange of diseases between wild and domestic waterfowl and the notation that Dr. Wobeser cites duck plague as an example where such exchange occurs. These are not my personal views but statements that are verifiable by reading pp. 5 and 6 of the book. My next comment was that Dr. Louis Leibovitz has pointed out that duck plague serves as an excellent model for the study of the interchange of other diseases among different waterfowl groups—again, not my personal view but a statement that is verifiable by reading Dr. Leibovitz's paper.

Next I cited Dr. Wobeser's comments about the need to begin analyzing the accumulated data on waterfowl diseases. To illustrate Dr. Wobeser's point, I quoted his statement that "a single die-off of about 50,000 birds . . . would

likely be insignificant for the continental Mallard population," and I noted from p. 15 of his book that the total recognized losses of wild waterfowl on North America from duck plague over the past three decades have been fewer than 50,000 birds, about 42,000 of which were mallards. Thus, these loss figures are not my personal views, they are well-documented (Leibovitz, 1968; Friend and Pearson, 1973; Pearson and Cassidy, 1997), and they frequently have been cited by Mr. Creekmore's colleagues at the National Wildlife Health Center (NWHC) (Brand and Docherty, 1984, 1988; Brand, 1987; Friend, 1992; Friend and Cross, 1995). My subsequent statement that nowhere in the book is there the citation of a reference discussing the impact of duck plague on wild waterfowl populations again is not a personal view but a fact that can be verified by reading the book.

In my final comments regarding duck plague, I simply quoted Dr. Wobeser's statement about the usual approach to duck plague epizootics being an example of an "exaggerated fire-fighting response," and I noted that the only citation for control measures in epizootics in urban areas (Nettles and Thorne, 1988) recommends this same kind of response. Finally, I said that the discussion of control measures for duck plague epizootics in wild waterfowl is limited to two sentences with no evaluation of the results. These again are not my personal views but statements verifiable by reading pp. 11 and 27 of the book and the 1988 paper by Nettles and Thorne, the latter of which, their claims of authorship notwithstanding, actually was drafted by the NWHC (Thorne and Nettles, 1987).

Mr. Creekmore's charge that publication of what he claims is a "politically contentious" review "serves to undermine the integrity of both the Journal of Wildlife Diseases and the Wildlife Disease Association" also warrants further examination. In this context, it is important to recognize that it is the NWHC itself which has been principally responsible for politicizing the duck plague issue. In fact, within only 8 yrs after the NWHC was established, duck plague already had become so controversial that, in 1982, the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service appointed a panel of independent experts to examine the issues, including the status of duck plague in wild waterfowl. The Wildlife Disease Association (WDA) selected Dr. Louis Leibovitz, a recognized world authority on duck plague, as its representative on the panel. The Fish and Wildlife Service accepted the panel's report, which concluded that duck plague exists in both captive and wild waterfowl populations and rec-

commended that the Service should recognize that it no longer could be considered an "exotic" disease in North American waterfowl (Beard et al., 1984). Nevertheless, the NWHC has continued to publish statements implying that duck plague is enzootic in captive and feral waterfowl but not in free-flying wild waterfowl (Brand, 1987; Brand and Docherty, 1988; Friend, 1992; Friend and Cross, 1995).

The impact of this politicization of the duck plague issue on the integrity of the WDA is graphically illustrated by the WDA's 1993 Resolution on the Control of Duck Plague, which was drafted by the NWHC and presented to the Council for approval in an attempt to gain endorsement of the NWHC's controversial recommendations for killing captive and feral waterfowl (but not free-flying wild waterfowl) potentially exposed during duck plague epizootics (Barrows, 1994). Despite repeated requests to two WDA presidents for documentation substantiating the resolution (Converse, 1995, 1996, 1997), none was provided, and the Council subsequently was compelled, under threat of litigation, to rescind the resolution (Howerth, 1998). As a result of the Council's being persuaded to adopt the NWHC's politically motivated and scientifically unsound resolution on duck plague, the WDA became embroiled in a controversy that not only tarnished its image, but nearly led to its being cited into court.

Resorting publicly to unsubstantiated allegations and unfounded personal attacks does little to resolve the duck plague controversy, to advance understanding of wildlife diseases, or to promote the integrity of the WDA and the *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*. I would invite and encourage Mr. Creekmore and those who share his views on duck plague instead to present the data and analysis upon which their position is based in a peer-reviewed publication that is available for consideration and discussion in an open and objective manner by all who are concerned about the issues surrounding duck plague.

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