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Media alert from the Media Scanning & Verification Cell, IDSP-NCDC.

Alert ID	Publication Date	Reporting Date	Place Name	News Source/Publication Language
6307	15.09.2021	15.09.2021	Amravati Maharashtra	www.timesofindia.com/English https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/mystery-shrouds-death-of-100-crows-in-chikhaldara/articleshowprint/86212632.cms
Title:	Mystery shrouds death of 100 crows in Chikhaldara in district Amravati, Maharashtra			
Action By CSU, IDSP -NCDC	Information communicated to DSU-Amravati, SSU- Maharashtra			

At a time when the population of crows is declining, over 100 crows were found dead under the jurisdiction of the Chikhaldara Municipal Council (CMC) on Sunday. However, animal husbandry department officials claimed only six crows died.

Vice-president of CMC Abdul Sheikh, who first raised the issue, slammed the animal husbandry doctors for not staying at the headquarters to ensure the number of birds' deaths and solutions thereon. "This is for the first time that such large-scale deaths of crows was reported and people, who came complaining to me, are themselves witnesses," Sheikh said.

"We collected only six crows for sampling while the remaining birds were disposed of in a tractor, a fact not known to the foresters and veterinary staff. The crows were lying dead at various spots near pipal trees where vendors sold mutton and chicken in the open on Sunday," Sheikh told TOI.

"The incident occurred on Sunday and Monday, too, was a holiday. There were no livestock development officers at the veterinary hospital (LDOs). Hence, we handed

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Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), National Centre for Disease Control,
Ministry Of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India

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over the case to the Chikhaldara range forest officer (RFO). I don't know what happened later," Sheikh said.

Crows are listed under Schedule V of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, but have been legally declared as vermin. After vultures vanished, crows have been playing the role of predators and scavengers. They eat practically anything.

Melghat Tiger Reserve (MTR) CCF & field director Jayoti Banerjee said, "I've been told by my RFO at Chikhaldara that pesticide is suspected to be the reason for the death of the birds. It's not bird flu. After the municipal staff handed over the six dead crows to the staff, veterinary doctors collected the samples to know the cause of death. The birds were later buried."

Talking to TOI, Amravati district animal husbandry officer Dr Vijay Rahate denied death of 100 crows. "There were six crows. There is no major reason to worry. I suspect the birds died of food poisoning may be after scavenging on flesh thrown as waste in the area."

"Samples are being sent to the Regional Disease Investigation Laboratory, Pune, for toxicological and bacterial tests. Had it been some epidemic, more crows would have been found dead in the last two days but we have not found a single dead bird. We are keeping a close watch and our staff is alert. Bird flu is also ruled out as the reason for death," said Dr Rahate.

Dr Ajay Poharkar, president, Maharashtra State Veterinary Council (MSVC), said it could also be the West Nile Virus (WNV), which has been detected in several birds, mostly crows and jays. "But unless it's proved scientifically it would not be right to comment. Similar deaths of crows had occurred near Mouda in the summer of 2005," the raptor scientist said.

"I believe the population of crows is declining fast. In Melghat, there are huge trees and hence, the crow population there is in sizeable numbers. The loss of birds is an eye-opener for the forest department which should come with research on the subject," said Dr Poharkar.

Bird expert Nitin Marathe says, "Rapid disappearance of crows is a cause for concern. One of the major reasons for the decline is habitat destruction. Generally, crows prefer strong trees like pipal and banyan for nesting. These trees are being destroyed for road expansion and urbanization. Hence, they are left in very few pockets in the city."

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CAUSE FOR CONCERN

- * On September 12, Chikhaldara Municipal Council vice-president Abdul Sheikh finds over 100 dead crows at separate spots
- * Scared of epidemic, staff disposed of dead birds and kept six for sampling by veterinary doctors
- * District animal husbandry officer Dr Vijay Rahate rules out bird flu
- * Birds may have died of food poisoning
- * Raptor scientist Dr Ajay Poharkar says it could also be West Nile Virus detected in several birds
- * Toxicological samples sent to Regional Disease Investigation Laboratory, Pune

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