

**Study on Neurologic Disease in Coots**  
*SCWDS Briefs*, October 1998, 14.3

SCWDS is conducting a study of the epidemiology of the Coot and Eagle Brain Lesion Syndrome (CEBLS) in American coots during the current migratory and wintering season. CEBLS was first recognized in the winter of 1994-1995 at DeGray Lake, Arkansas, as a fatal neurologic disease in 28 bald eagles. Two years later, an additional 26 bald eagles died in the same area (see SCWDS BRIEFS Vol. 12, No. 4). In both instances, death was due to damage characterized by vacuolization of the myelin of the central nervous system. The cause of CEBLS remains undetermined despite extensive diagnostic investigations by many laboratories.

American coots with clinical signs and brain lesions identical to those seen in eagles were detected at DeGray Lake a few weeks before the onset of the second eagle die-off in 1996. It was hypothesized that eagles became exposed to CEBLS by ingesting CEBLS-affected coots, although independent exposure of both species has not been ruled out. Field investigations at DeGray Lake in 1996 also revealed brain lesions in coots that appeared clinically normal. In December 1997, affected coots were identified at lakes in Georgia and North Carolina; these observations markedly expanded the range of a disease once thought confined to a single lake in Arkansas (see SCWDS BRIEFS, Vol. 13, No. 4).

In order to determine the geographic distribution of CEBLS in coots, SCWDS and other organizations currently are conducting an epidemiologic study. Field investigators will survey for CEBLS-affected coots at several lakes throughout the southeastern United States. In addition, we are seeking the help of biologists, waterfowl hunters, fishermen, and others who observe coots that have difficulty flying, swimming, or walking. Clinically affected coots are best detected by observing their flight behavior, particularly when they are flushed by passing boats. Coots that are unable to fly or are very wobbly in flight may have CEBLS. If you observe such birds, please contact David Gregory or John Fischer at SCWDS (706-542-1741). Observations of sick or dead bald eagles should be reported to the above number or to the National Wildlife Health Center at 608-270-2400. (Prepared by Dr. John Fischer)