



LISTEN TO THE SOUND 2000

Addressing West Nile virus in an ecological way

By Lucy R. Waletzky, M.D. and Frank Gill, Ph.D.

Last fall, emergency spraying of the New York metropolitan area was conducted to reduce the population of mosquitoes affected with the West Nile virus. This year the New York State Department of Health has developed an extensive plan to eliminate mosquito-breeding areas and monitor for the presence of the virus. These measures—which include a much-needed public-education program—may prevent the reoccurrence of the illness in humans. Regardless, widespread aerial spraying should not occur for it can cause more harm than good.

Pesticide use has become a knee-jerk reaction to any insect problem, great or small. We spray for roaches in the kitchen without considering that the same poison may end up in the cutting board. We douse our gardens and lawns with kill-all pesticides that coat our berry bushes and leach into our streams, becoming lethal to birds, butterflies and fish along the way. We put out rat poisons without considering that we may also be poisoning hawks or coyotes (or even house cats) that are rodents' natural predators.

Pesticides are hazardous materials, which can and do harm humans. Long-term health problems can result as pesticides accumulate in the body, gradually increasing our toxic body burden. Scientific and medical studies now link pesticide exposure to illnesses such as cancer. One recent Danish study of 5,000 women, reported in the British medical journal *Lancet*, found that breast cancer was twice as high in women with the highest serum concentrations of dieldrin (a pesticide no longer used in the United States). Although the cumulative effects of malathion (sprayed in New York last fall) are not fully understood, it is reported that the EPA has growing evidence to suggest it is carcinogenic.

Pesticides, stored in body fat, can contaminate a woman's breast milk, which is then passed to her infant. There has been a downward trend in DDT concentrations in breast milk since about 1970 when that pesticide was banned. However, the problem of breast milk contamination by other pesticides still persists. Future mothers are well advised to minimize their pesticide exposure.

Perhaps our greatest warning about pesticides should come, as Rachel Carson pointed out in *Silent Spring* nearly 50 years ago, from birds. Professor David Pimentel, an entomologist at Cornell University, calculated that pesticides kill an estimated 67 million birds in the

United States annually. As indicators of healthy environments, birds provide an early warning of human health damages and other ecosystem disruptions. The fact that pesticides are killing birds should alert us to the toxic nature of these chemicals and the need for citizens to avoid their use and exposure to them.

This spring, the Audubon Society and Cornell will team up on Birdcast, a program that shows homeowners how they can help birds in their migrations north by reducing the use of pesticides. We can find natural and less toxic ways to care for our lawns and gardens, and to get rid of roaches, fleas, moths and rodents. Concerned Long Islanders can follow the examples of their fellow citizens who reside in the six pesticide free municipalities in New York state. And for those who are concerned about how their pesticide use can impact wildlife, *Audubon* magazine has a guide to home pesticides and alternatives in the May/June issue or on www.audubon.org/magazine.

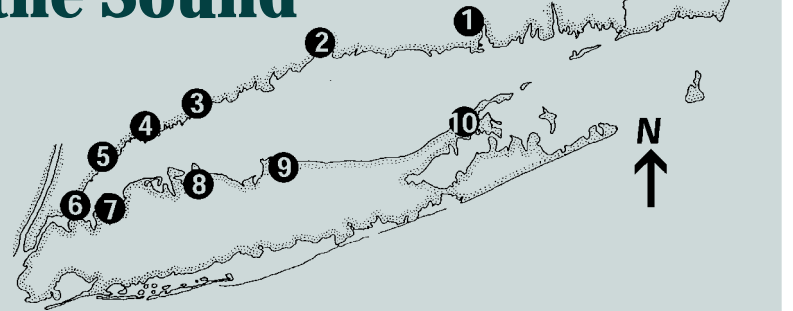
The position of National Audubon Society of New York State is that all efforts should be made by county governments to follow the Health Department's plan. Audubon maintains that if any spraying is done, it should be a last resort measure and must only take place in circumscribed local areas where scientific monitoring reveals large numbers of infected mosquitoes, birds and humans. The risk of contracting West Nile virus is very small, and 85 to 90 percent of those who contract it experience only negligible flu-like symptoms. The risks of massive aerial spraying, which experts say kills a very low percentage of target mosquitoes, far outweigh the benefits when you consider the cumulative effects of a pesticide over a human lifetime.

The threat of the West Nile virus has been addressed by the Health Department's plan. It does not constitute a public health emergency. The images of helicopters and maps showing the possible spread of this disease may provide good six o'clock news material, but add little balance or science to the issue. The effectiveness of widespread aerial spraying has been overstated while the risks have been ignored. With what we know, spraying does not make scientific or common sense: prevention in our own backyards does.

People wishing to learn more about how to reduce the impact of pesticides should contact National Audubon Society, (212) 979-3026; Beyond Pesticides/National Coalition against the Misuse of Pesticides, (202) 543-5450; or Rachel Carson Council, (301) 652-1877.

Lucy R. Waletzky, M.D., serves on the National Audubon Society Board of Directors, and Frank Gill, Ph.D., is director of science for the National Audubon Society.

Speak out for open space on the Sound



Have a voice at the LISTEN TO THE SOUND 2000 hearings

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| 1 Tues. May 30 - 7 p.m.
Essex Town Hall
29 West Ave., Essex, CT | 6 Thurs. June 15 - 7 p.m.
Morris Yacht Club
City Island Ave., City Island, NY |
| 2 Thurs. June 1 - 7 p.m.
Jones Auditorium
CT Agricultural Experiment Station
123 Huntington St., New Haven, CT | 7 Tues. June 20 - 7:30 p.m.
North Hempstead Town Hall
220 Plandome Rd., Manhasset, NY |
| 3 Tues. June 6 - 7:30 p.m.
Maritime Aquarium
10 North Water St., Norwalk, CT | 8 Thurs. June 22 - 7:30 p.m.
Cold Spring Harbor High School
82 Turkey Lane
Cold Spring Harbor, NY |
| 4 Thurs. June 8 - 7:30 p.m.
Cole Auditorium, Greenwich Library
101 E. Putnam Ave., Greenwich, CT | 9 Tues. June 27 - 7 p.m.
Village Hall Court Room
121 West Broadway, Port Jefferson, NY |
| 5 Tues. June 13 - 7:30 p.m.
Court Room
Mamaroneck Town Center
740 West Post Rd., Mamaroneck, NY | 10 Thurs. June 29 - 7 p.m.
Southold Town Hall
53095 Main Rd., Southold, NY |

For more information contact Listen to the Sound 2000, P.O. Box 51, Cos Cob, CT 06807; phone: (203) 629-1248; fax: (203) 622-0016; e-mail: lts2000@mindspring.com

Audubon State Council Resolutions 2000

WETLANDS

Resolutions adopted by the Audubon State Council relating to wetlands are:

- ✓ Support for Clean Water Act in Congress and opposition to onslaught of proposed weakening amendments;
- ✓ Support proposed funding of Hudson River lower estuary programs and for enforcement of the state tidal wetlands law on all tidal portions of the Hudson River;
- ✓ Support for implementation and funding for Long Island Sound Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, including \$200 million under the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act and matching federal funds;
- ✓ Oppose further dumping of contaminated dredge spoils in Long Island Sound and study alternative disposal technologies;
- ✓ Support for public acquisition and protection of key tidal wetland areas in Jamaica Bay buffer zone;
- ✓ Support for long-term protection of the Great Swamp;
- ✓ Support changes to state and federal legislation to reduce the environmental impacts resulting from inappropriate use of personal water craft;
- ✓ Support the completion and implementation of the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Long Island South Shore Estuary;
- ✓ Support acquisition of the Underhill property on Long Island as a federally designated sole-source aquifer;
- ✓ In the New York City watershed, support better protection for small wetlands, strict enforcement of state septic system laws, remapping of larger wetlands, and oppose expansion of Route 120 in the Kensico Reservoir watershed.