

TIMES COLONIST

Tuesday, December 13, 2022

Victoria, British Columbia

Sunny breaks. High 4. Low 2. Details, A10

timescolonist.com

ICBC to apply for two-year rate freeze on basic auto insurance, premier says >A4

Search continues for missing woman after vehicle found in Sooke



Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue personnel return to the mobile command base during the search for Melissa McDewitt in the Sooke Potholes area on Monday. McDewitt, a Victoria resident, has been missing since Friday when she was last seen heading to a hiking trail. Story, page A3

DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

Deadly virus taking toll on wild birds

DARRON KLOSTER
Times Colonist

While the highly contagious avian flu has wiped out millions of poultry birds across North America this year, populations of water fowl, raptors and even crows and ravens are also likely seeing untold losses, say wildlife rescue organizations.

"All of the birds we are seeing are in areas where humans find them, but there are much more we probably never see that die in remote areas," said Derek Downs, a bird and wildlife rehabilitator at the North Island Wildlife Recovery Centre in Errington.

"We have definitely seen an uptick in sick birds this year — geese, ducks and swans."

At the Mountain Avian Rescue Centre in the Comox Valley, bird rehabilitator Jyl Andersen



Ducks swim in Goodacre Lake in Beacon Hill Park. The highly contagious H5N1 virus has been spreading rapidly from migratory birds to domestic flocks and wild scavengers such as crows and eagles.

DARREN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

said about 50 birds stricken with the deadly flu virus have been brought into the centre — some in the spring, but most during the fall migration.

That includes geese, swans,

gulls and some eagles brought in from the Comox Valley and Campbell River areas and as far away as Salt Spring Island.

Most die within 24 hours or have to be euthanized.

"We're seeing serious neurological symptoms not caused by trauma or poisons," said Andersen. "They are uncoordinated, have cloudy eyes or discharges from their eyes and they are in a very weakened state."

There's not much we can do for them ... it's very sad because you can see they are suffering."

The highly contagious H5N1 virus has been spreading rapidly from migratory birds to domestic flocks and wild scavengers such as crows and eagles.

The avian flu has wiped out an estimated 50.54 million birds in the United States this year, making it the country's deadliest outbreak in history. The toll of chickens, turkeys and other birds tops the previous record of 50.5 million birds that died in an avian-flu outbreak in 2015.

In Canada, the poultry industry

is also seeing unprecedented death tolls on domestic flocks, with the culling of 4.6 million turkeys, chickens and geese on 220 farms, including 1.2 million culls in B.C. and another 1.1 million in Alberta. Avian flu has hit every province except Prince Edward Island.

As of Monday, B.C. has 60 farms with ongoing cases of avian flu, the highest of any province. The virus was detected in six additional farms in the Fraser Valley over the past three days.

Avian flu is spread through contact with an infected bird or its feces or nasal or mouth secretions. Farm birds that go outside are most at risk because they can come in direct contact with infected wild birds or their feces.

>See AVIAN FLU, A2



Thom Flegel, fiancée Grace McMahon and baby Poppy Jane Phoenix Flegel. VIA THOM FLEGEL

Family welcomes baby in wake of devastating gas station fire in Bowser

JEFF BELL
Times Colonist

Three days after Thom Flegel's family business — Bowser Automotive — went up in flames, his fiancée, Grace McMahon, gave birth to a baby girl.

Undeterred, they called the baby Poppy Jane Phoenix Flegel, determined to see the business rise, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the Dec. 6 fire.

"It's crazy because at about 9:30 on the 6th the fire had started, and on the 9th about 9:50 we were holding baby," Flegel said. "It's the only thing that's kept my hope."

They face many hurdles, however, starting with damage to the trailer the family lived in behind the business, which included an Esso gas station. For

the time being, the new parents and baby are staying in his mother's motor home.

"[The trailer] is going to need to be either repaired or replaced," said Flegel. "The fire department was able to keep it so the fire didn't burn the trailer down."

Boxes of diapers and other baby things are no longer usable, and "years and years of tools" are gone, he said.

Both the trailer and business, which has been in the family for more than 30 years, are insured, but Flegel, 29, said getting the business back to the way it was will take considerably more than they will receive from the insurance.

>See BLAZE, A2

DONATIONS AS OF DECEMBER 12



Easing the load for Bridges for Women participants

>Story and how to donate, A3

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