NWRA Veterinary Committee Statement Regarding the Use of Tamiflu®

Avian influenza is increasingly a significant threat to the health of wild birds, zoo species, poultry, and people around the world. The virus can mutate rapidly and is already showing some resistance to the few drugs available to treat the disease in humans. Because there are so many unknown variables surrounding the spread and mutability of avian influenza, using Tamiflu® (oseltamivir phosphate, Roche Laboratories, Inc., Nutley, NJ) or related drugs in wildlife is, at best, a huge risk. There are several reasons why this is so. First, if and when a highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza (like highly pathogenic H5N1) arrives in the United States, Tamiflu® will be used as the first line of defense for preventing a catastrophic epidemic in humans. Public health professionals that we have consulted have recommended in very strong terms that these drugs NOT be used in wildlife. It has been documented that when this drug is used and then metabolized and excreted by people or other animals, it can persist in the environment for extended periods, leading to the virus acquiring resistance (Singer, et al 2007). Thus, using this medication in wildlife for the prevention of other diseases (like parvovirus, distemper, etc.) might well lead to a highly resistant form of avian influenza in the environment for which there would be no useful treatments should humans become sick. Given this, and concerns about the potential for a world-wide human health crisis surrounding influenza, this committee STRONGLY urges wildlife rehabilitators NOT to use this drug (or other similar drugs) in our wildlife patients.

Singer, A. C., M. A. Nunn, E. A. Gould, and A. C. Johnson. 2007. Potential Risks Associated with the Proposed Widespread Use of Tamiflu. *Environmental Health Perspectives, volume 115, number 1.*