**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

**We propose to make the first assessment of the extent of malaria infection and possible routes of transmission in Minnesota birds.**

* Avian malaria is a globally-distributed complex of diseases that have critical effects on individual and population health.
* Newly introduced strains of avian malaria have caused rapid declines in resident birds elsewhere (e.g, Hawaii and South America) and novel avian malaria strains could have a similar effect on Minnesota birds.
* We do not know how frequently migratory birds (such as blackbirds, warblers, robins, and sparrows) transmit malaria to resident bird species (such as grouse, pheasants, woodpeckers, chickadees, crows and jays), or if any of the strains that occur have tropical origins.

Our **GOALS** are to:

1. Determine the strains of malaria circulating in Minnesota, and whether they differ between migratory and resident birds.
2. Assess the potential of migratory birds to transmit avian malaria to birds (including game birds) resident in Minnesota.

**Background:**

Avian malaria is common in wild birds, with individual strains having a wide range of effects on survival and reproduction. Introduction of novel malaria strains can have substantial impacts on wild bird populations, especially in resident birds with no prior exposure, as has been seen in the endangered birds of Hawaii. New, highly pathogenic strains appear to be spreading globally with possible impacts for naïve populations such as those found in Minnesota. Our understanding of how malaria is transported during migration in the western hemiphere, and to what extent malaria strains are transmitted between migrant and resident wild bird populations, is poor. To begin to address this knowledge gap, we propose to study avian malaria occurrence and transmission in the wild birds of Minnesota. Currently, it is unknown what Minnesota species harbor malaria, which strains they carry, and whether they are infected locally or on their tropical wintering grounds. By understanding transmission from migrant to resident species pools, we can better understand how malaria is likely to spread or persist, and determine ways to control or lessen the impact of new malarial strains.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

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| **Activity 1:** *Sampling migrant and resident birds for avian malaria.* The objective of this activity is to gather samples of blood to assess the prevalence of avian malaria in migrant and resident birds. Because different species migrate to different ecosystems (i.e., deciduous forest, boreal forest, and grassland) in Minnesota, sampling will take place in each ecosystem along a transect, with a total sample of 1,500 migratory and 1,500 resident birds. We have selected six WMAs along the transect to sample: Kunkel, Gendoro, Sand Prairie, Daniel Shay, Vision and Sedan, although we will adjust sampling in response to constraints and opportunities that arise. Cost per sample is roughly $16. **ENRTF BUDGET: $52,400** |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Capture and sample ≥3000 breeding resident and migrant birds (May-July)* | *August 2022* |

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| **Activity 2:** *Genotyping and prevalence analysis.* The objective of this activity is to genotype samples for malarial strains. Sequencing two genetic markers will identify malarial infections, at a cost of $46 per bird, including materials ($37 per bird) and labor ($10 per bird). Sequencing will provide the data necessary to understand species- and ecosystem-level prevalence as well as detecting transmission among migrant and resident populations. **ENRTF BUDGET: $ 178,300** |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Perform PCR and sequencing for avian malaria strains* | *November 2022* |
| *2. Identification of malaria strains and estimation of infection rates* | *January 2023* |

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| **Activity 3:** *Prevalence and transmission analysis.* Analysis of these data will provide a species- and ecosystem-level picture of malaria prevalence, as well as revealing transmission between migratory and resident populations. We anticipate two peer-reviewed publications from this work, one for species- and ecosystem- level disease prevalence data, and one outlining transmission among species. In addition, these data will be shared with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and a report detailing recommendations for how to approach and manage new disease transmissions will be provided. **ENRTF BUDGET: $85,300** |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Determination of transmission rates between migrant and resident species* | *January 2023* |
| *2. Writing results, submission of papers to peer-reviewed journals, report detailing recommendations to MN DNR* | *June 2023* |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS:**

**A. Partners receiving ENRTF funding**

**N/A**

**B. Partners NOT receiving ENRTF funding**

**N/A**

**IV. LONG-TERM- IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:**

 This project will provide a valuable baseline survey of malarial prevalence in Minnesota’s wild birds. More importantly, this study will provide the first estimate of how frequently malaria strains are transmitted between migrant and resident populations. Results will be shared in the form of peer-reviewed publications, as well as direct reports targeted to appropriate institutions such as the University of Minnesota Veterinary School and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Continuation of this research will be funded by future applications to the NIH, NSF, and other agencies.

**V. TIME LINE REQUIREMENTS:**

This project is time sensitive for the collection during the spring (approximately April 1- June 30). If funded, this project is planned for three years and will commence July 2020.

**VI. SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS:**

**A. Proposal Budget Spreadsheet**

**B. Visual Component or Map**