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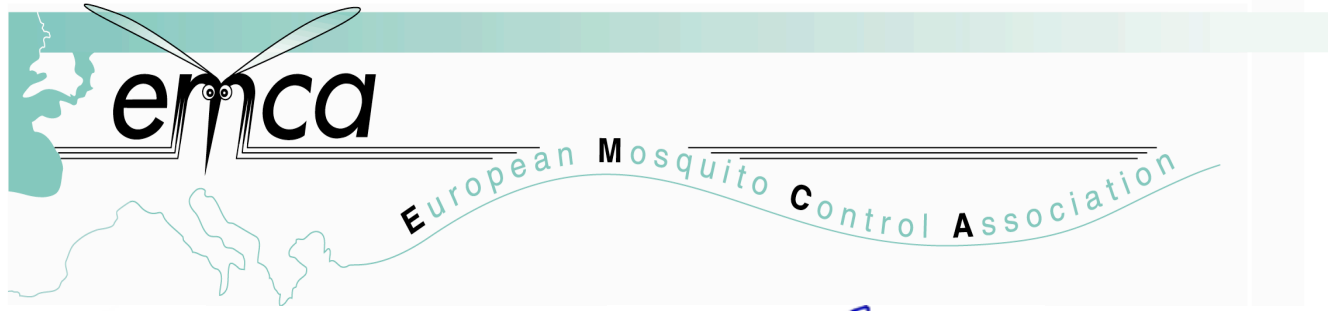
### **Vector-borne epizootic affecting blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) in the Upper and Middle Rhine Valley of Germany**

Over the last two weeks, following a press release, an increasing number of dead blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) were reported to KABS (Kommunale Aktionsgemeinschaft zur Bekaempfung der Schnakenplage e.V.) from Upper Rhine Valley (Mannheim, Karlsruhe). The epizootic seems to have become so serious that in some places the blackbirds were decimated.

At present, the dead birds have been collected for diagnosing the cause of the fatal disease. We strongly suspect that the epizootic is caused by a virus called Usutu (flavivirus). This virus is known to kill birds, especially *Turdus merula*.

The vectors of the virus are ornithophilic mosquitoes such as *Cx. pipiens* and *Cx. torrentium*. In fact, mosquitoes infected with the Usutu virus have been detected in 2010 from the same area (Jöst et al, 2011, *Am. J. Trop. Med. Hyg.*, 85(3), 2011, pp. 551–553). It should be noted that Usutu outbreaks have been recorded in other European countries (Austria, Italy); however, this is the first large scale known outbreak occurring in Germany.

Human cases are very rare, but have been reported. Of course, under the present circumstances this will be subject to an in-depth investigation by epidemiologists in Germany.



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