



Avian influenza (bird flu)

Avian influenza is a virus that mainly affects birds. Migratory birds, especially water birds, carry different strains of the virus along their migration routes. Thankfully, the risk to human health from avian flu is very low, but members of the public should avoid touching sick or dead wild birds.

This spring/summer we are concerned about the current H5N1 strain of avian flu in Scotland and its potential impact on wild bird populations. Avian influenza is a virus that mainly affects birds. Migratory birds, especially water birds, can carry the virus along their migration routes. The outbreak seriously impacted wintering waterfowl during the last two winters and devastated seabird populations last spring and summer. Tragically, this disease could be with us for some time to come.

Thankfully, the risk to human health from avian flu is very low, but members of the public should avoid touching sick or dead wild birds.

Avian flu is the latest and most devastating indication of how biodiversity loss makes our wildlife increasingly vulnerable. NatureScot is leading a task force, and together with expert partners, we are working at pace to understand and take action to make bird populations – and our biodiversity – more robust. As wintering geese begin to arrive in Scotland, NatureScot is monitoring the populations for signs of avian influenza using a network of staff and volunteers. We have been in contact with colleagues in Iceland and Norway to identify cases within the populations either breeding or passing through on migration and will carry out early counts of barnacle geese at key sites on the west and north coast of Scotland to inform management decisions.

Report all sightings of sick or dead birds to [DEFRA's online reporting system](#) so that we can build a better picture of how the virus moves between places and species. Members of the public should avoid touching sick or dead wild birds. Visitors to sites where wild birds like geese congregate are encouraged to keep dogs on a lead to avoid them touching or picking up dead birds. More detailed information is available on the [Scottish Government's website](#)

Find out more

- [NatureScot Scientific Advisory Committee Sub-Group on Avian Influenza Report on the H5N1 outbreak in wild birds 2020-2023](#)

Related news releases:

- [Significant Scottish report on avian flu released today \(11 April 2023\)](#)
- [Preparations underway for seabird return \(29 March 2023\)](#)
- [Public asked for help as Moray avian flu cases increase \(29 November 2022\)](#)
- [Avian flu vigilance remains high \(26 October 2022\)](#)
- [Isle of May NNR to re-open as seabirds leave \(5 August 2022\)](#)
- [NatureScot advises Mousa public landings stop \(29 July 2022\)](#)
- [NatureScot advises public landings to stop on 23 islands \(21 July 2022\)](#)
- [Avian flu task force announced \(14 July 2022\)](#)

Scottish Avian Flu - Wild Bird Task Force

Terms of Reference

Purpose: to co-ordinate activity to monitor and minimise the impact of HPAI on wild bird populations in Scotland, taking account of the statement by the CMS Task Force on Avian Influenza.[1]

Role:

- Efficient and focused network to allow two-way flow of information, provide an efficient exchange on relevant policy decisions across Scottish Government, ensure effective linkages across administrations and stakeholder organisations.
- Co-ordinate monitoring and surveillance of HPAI impacts on wild bird populations in Scotland, supported by an efficient testing mechanism/network.
- Provide a mechanism to learn from and share approaches with other countries tackling HPAI in wild birds.
- Provide advice to the public and stakeholders on biosecurity and managing interactions with affected and 'at risk' populations.
- Establish research and monitoring required to understand transmission pathways and long-term impacts on populations, including poultry and captive birds.
- Identify mitigation measures to reduce severity of future outbreaks and aid recovery of wild birds.
- Provide coordination for external engagement; specifically, the establishment and servicing of an associated HPAI stakeholder network to ensure efficient and focused two way flow of information and sharing of updated guidance and advice.

Expected Outputs

- Publication of authoritative advice on issues above
- Co-ordinated communications and agreed key messages
- An action plan, detailing roles, responsibilities and actions in response to future HPAI outbreaks.
- A recovery plan providing guidance on measures to promote wild bird recovery

Responsibilities of members:

To work collaboratively, share information, and seek to achieve common positions and approaches to collectively address Avian Flu in wild birds in Scotland.

Membership (organisation):

- NatureScot (Chair)
- NatureScot (Minutes)
- NatureScot
- SG Wildlife Management
- SG Animal Health (Disease Control)
- SG Animal Health (Animal Diseases)
- Marine Scotland (Policy)
- Marine Scotland (Science)
- APHA
- JNCC
- SoCOEHS
- SSPCA
- BTO
- RSPB

Flexibility will remain to set up sub-groups which may include other organisations. These may include groups considering testing and monitoring and all aspects of carcass removal.

A wider network of stakeholders will be established for wider communication and collaborative work.

The membership and ToR will be reviewed after in October.

Chair: NatureScot

NatureScot

27 July 2022

[1] the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds statement on: H5N1 HPAI in poultry and wild birds