### **Updated Outbreak Assessment #4**

### Bluetongue virus in Europe

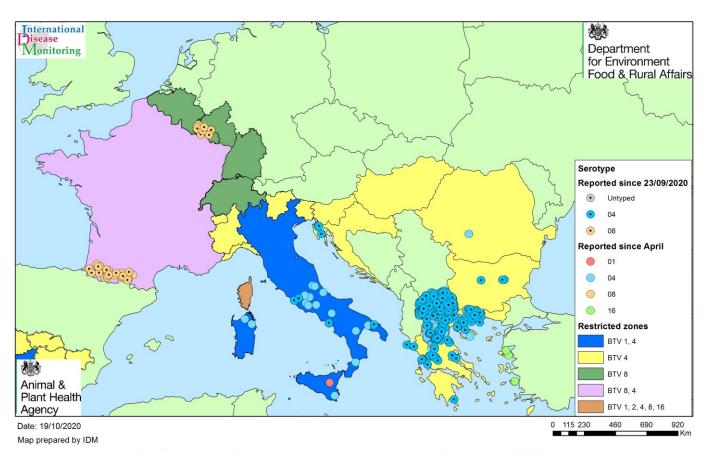
19 October 2020

Ref: VITT/1200 Bluetongue virus in Europe

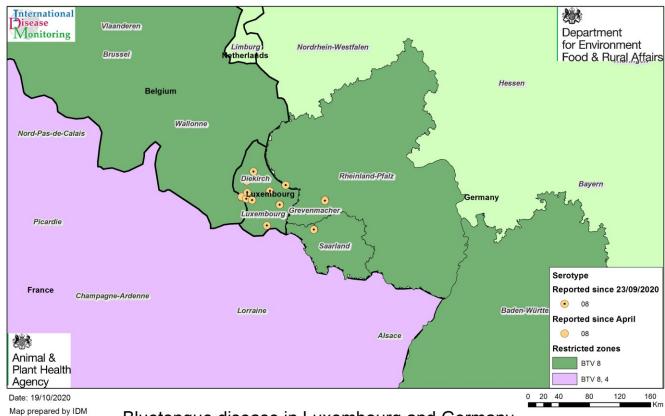
### Disease report

Since our last report on 26 August, **BTV-4** has continued to spread widely across South-East Europe, with several outbreaks being reported in Greece and in the Republic of North Macedonia and continued reports in Italy and Romania. In October, both Bulgaria and Croatia reported cases of **BTV-4** for the first time this year.

**BTV-8** has been reported in SW France and Luxemburg during September and October. On 14 October, two new outbreaks were also reported in cattle in Germany, close to the border with Luxemburg.



Bluetongue disease in Europe: April - October 2020



Bluetongue disease in Luxembourg and Germany April - October 2020

#### Situation assessment

In **France**, 32 new outbreaks of **BTV-8** have been reported via ADNS. Sixteen of these outbreaks have been in cattle and sixteen in sheep. All these reports were confirmed as clinical cases with affected animals showing signs including depression, anorexia, pyrexia, congestion of the mucus membranes and abortion. All reported outbreaks were in the southwest regions of the country (Pyrenees-Atlantique, Ariege, Haute-Pyrenees, and Haute-Garonne), bordering Spain to the south.

In **Luxemburg**, eleven outbreaks of **BTV-8** were reported in cattle during September. It is not clear whether these were clinical cases or following surveillance investigations.

In **Germany**, two outbreaks of **BTV-8** have been reported on 14 October in cattle in two regions, Trier-Saarburg and Merzig-Wadern, both very close to the border with Luxemburg. The last report of BTV-8 prior to this was in February 2020. Badern-Wüttermberg, Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate are all now included in the same restriction zone, for BTV-8, as Belgium, Luxemburg and Switzerland in their entirety (see maps). Again, no information is available as to whether these reports are from clinical cases or from surveillance investigations.

Since our last update on 26 August, 153 new cases of **BTV-4** have been reported in the **Republic of North Macedonia**. All but one (152) of the outbreaks were in sheep flocks, the other being in cattle. These BTV outbreaks have been spreading extensively with a number occurring along the borders with Bulgaria and with Albania, which has yet to report any outbreaks this year. Vaccination is prohibited, so control measures applied are limited to restrictions on movement, and vector surveillance and control.

**Bulgaria** has reported three cases of **BTV-4** in October; two in hunted roe deer (one male and one female) in Sliven, and one in a red deer found dead in Lovech. These are the first new cases here since 2014. All three cases were confirmed following positive testing by PCR at the National Reference Laboratory in Bulgaria.

**Greece** has reported 159 new cases of **BTV-4** following passive surveillance (one in cattle, three in goats and 155 in sheep). Outbreaks continue to be mostly in the northwest neighbouring regions, close to the borders with North Macedonia and Bulgaria. Vaccination is permitted along with other control measures, including movement restrictions of animals, vector control and surveillance.

**Italy** has reported eight new cases of **BTV-4**. Four of these were in sheep, all in the Roma region. The other four were in cattle, in the Brindisi (2), Salerno (1) and Chieti (1) regions.

**Romania** has reported one new outbreak of **BTV-4** in a backyard sheep premises in the southwestern region of Vilcea.

**Croatia** has reported **BTV-4** for the first time since 2017. Four cases have been reported in the Istria region, all in individual cattle which tested positive following active surveillance.

#### Conclusion

The 2020 vector activity season has continued, with suitable temperature and weather conditions over Europe for midge multiplication and virus replication rates. The current risk assessment of BTV-8-infected midges being carried by the wind into southern England from the near-continent, is considered to be LOW. The potential risk pathways for BTV-4 transmission from southern Europe into the UK are limited to importation of infected livestock, rather than windborne incursion of infected midges.

TRACES has not recorded any recent animal movement activity into the UK from BTV-4 affected regions. In October, there were 41 movements of cattle recorded from Germany. The nearest of these to any reported BTV affected areas, was of two cattle at the beginning of October which were brought over for breeding purposes from Fliessen - approximately 75 km north of Merzig-wadern, near the border with Luxemburg.

A small risk of BTV incursion always exists from the illegal movement of infected animals or germplasm. Thus, the risk of introduction of BTV-4 or BTV-8 into the UK is considered to be **LOW** (no change).

Livestock owners and field vets in the UK should note that the BTV-8 strain that reemerged in north-west Europe in 2015, can be spread by trans-placental transmission to cause infection in cattle and sheep foetuses. Bluetongue should therefore be considered in the differential diagnosis when investigating poor fertility and offspring born with congenital brain malformations.

Livestock owners are strongly advised to source replacement stock responsibly and consult with their private veterinarians to put in place controls preventing the introduction of Bluetongue virus. Assurances should be sought from traders to ensure BTV-susceptible animals are fully protected prior to travel. This means that additional guarantees should be obtained certifying that the purchased animals have been correctly vaccinated and/or have built up sufficient immunity to protect them against the relevant BTV serotype infections circulating in their region of origin.

We would also like to remind keepers that if they wish to move show animals to an exhibition held in a BTV Restriction Zone on the continent and then return them back to the UK BTV Free Area, the animals will need to be fully vaccinated *against both virus* serotypes (BTV-4 and BTV-8) prior to entering the Restriction Zone.

We will continue to monitor the current situation.

#### **Authors**

Charlotte Coxon

Josef Bowen

Dr Francesca Gauntlett

Dr Lévon Stephan MRCVS

#### References

All disease reports are available from the OIE WAHIS database.



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