

Updated Outbreak Assessment #2

High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe

15 August 2024

Disease report

Since our [last outbreak assessment on 17 July 2024](#), there have been no new reports of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5 clade 2.3.3.4b in domestic poultry in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). There have, however, been 3 more HPAI H5 clade 2.3.3.4b events involving “found-dead” wild birds in Great Britain, although all 3 were on islands either far north of mainland Scotland or to the north-west. The first bird found dead and to test positive was a great black-backed gull collected on 15 July 2024, followed by a great skua on 25 July 2024 and a second great skua on the 7 August 2024. The risk of HPAI H5 incursion in wild birds is still considered to be low (rare but does occur).

The risk of HPAI H5 incursion in poultry:

- With stringent biosecurity is assessed as very low (very rare but cannot be excluded) with medium uncertainty
- With non-stringent or suboptimal biosecurity is assessed as low with medium uncertainty

Across Europe, HPAI H5 reports in wild birds have remained few, at between 1 and 4 positive reports per week since week 17 (the end of April) although there was an increase to 9 wild bird cases in week 32 (early August 2024). For wild birds in Europe since 17 July 2024 (to 15 August 2024), there have been 19 HPAI H5N1 events reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). However, of direct relevance to Great Britain, is that these wild bird cases are all in seabirds found along the northern coast of the Continent from Portugal and Spain in the west, along the English Channel through northern France and Belgium and into northern Germany in the east. Since 17 July 2024 (to 15 August 2024), the WOAH has reported 2 outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in domestic poultry in northern Germany and within 1 km of each other, and 1 outbreak of HPAI H5Nx in domestic poultry in France on the north coast of Brittany. There have been no more outbreaks of HPAI H7N5 in north-west Germany since a single report in early July 2024.

There have been no further reports in mammals in Europe.

Situation assessment

Here, an HPAI H5 event refers to a report of HPAI in poultry, or a location with at least one HPAI H5 positive wild bird. Individual HPAI H5 positive wild birds are referred to as cases.

Great Britain

Since our last report, published on 17 July 2024 (to 15 August 2024), there have been no infected premises (IP) confirmed with HPAI H5 in poultry in Great Britain. The last IP was confirmed on 14 February 2024.

Wild birds

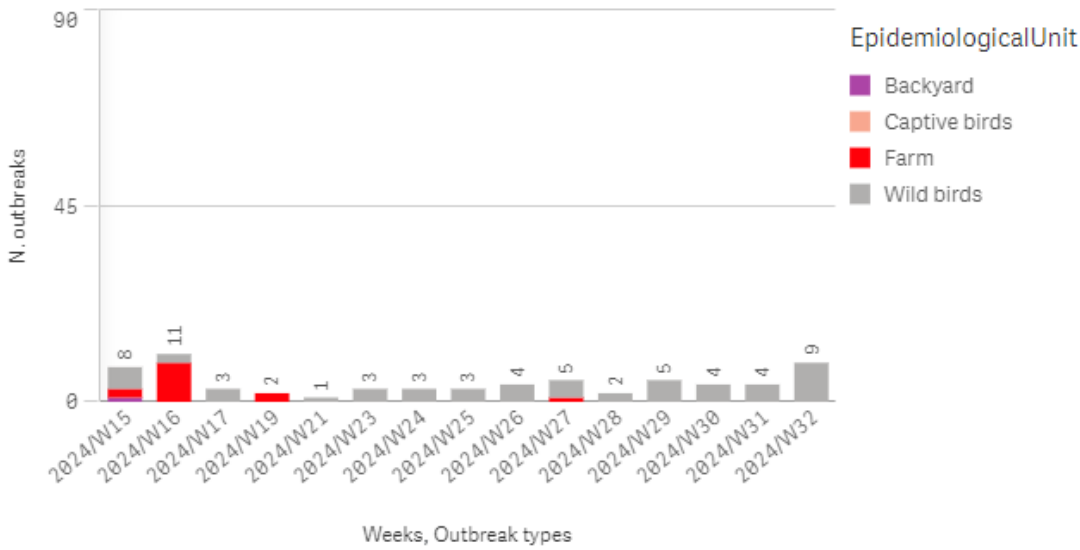
Between 17 July 2024 and 15 August 2024, HPAI H5 has been reported in 3 found-dead wild birds in Great Britain. The first was HPAI H5N5 in a great black-backed gull found on 15 July 2024 (reported on 23 July 2024) on the Isle of Noss in the Shetland Isles in Scotland. The second was HPAI H5N5 in a great skua found on 25 July 2024 (reported on 8 August 2024) on the Fair Isle between the Orkneys and Shetland Isles in Scotland. The third was HPAI H5N5 in a great skua found on 7 August 2024 on the island of Hirta (the main island of the St Kilda archipelago) located west of the Western Isles in north-west Scotland (reported on 15 August 2024). Both species are scavengers and eat chicks of other seabird species. Since 1 May 2024 there have been no wild bird cases in mainland Great Britain. The total number of birds tested during the period from 17 July 2024 to 15 August 2024 was 273. Please note, there is a lag period between found-dead wild bird reporting, collection, sampling, and testing.

It is important to note that these surveillance figures are based on passive surveillance of found dead birds reported to Defra by the general public and as such, may be affected by several factors including frequency of visiting areas with bird populations, the potential for immunity in the wild bird population (which may result in fewer birds developing clinical disease and/or dying with HPAI), sensitivity, as well as the size and location of carcasses, meaning that this wild bird surveillance does not necessarily capture all of the cases that occur. We will continue to monitor the situation closely. For further details, please see the report (updated weekly) on findings of [HPAI in wild birds in Great Britain](#) and [HPAI in wild birds in Northern Ireland](#).

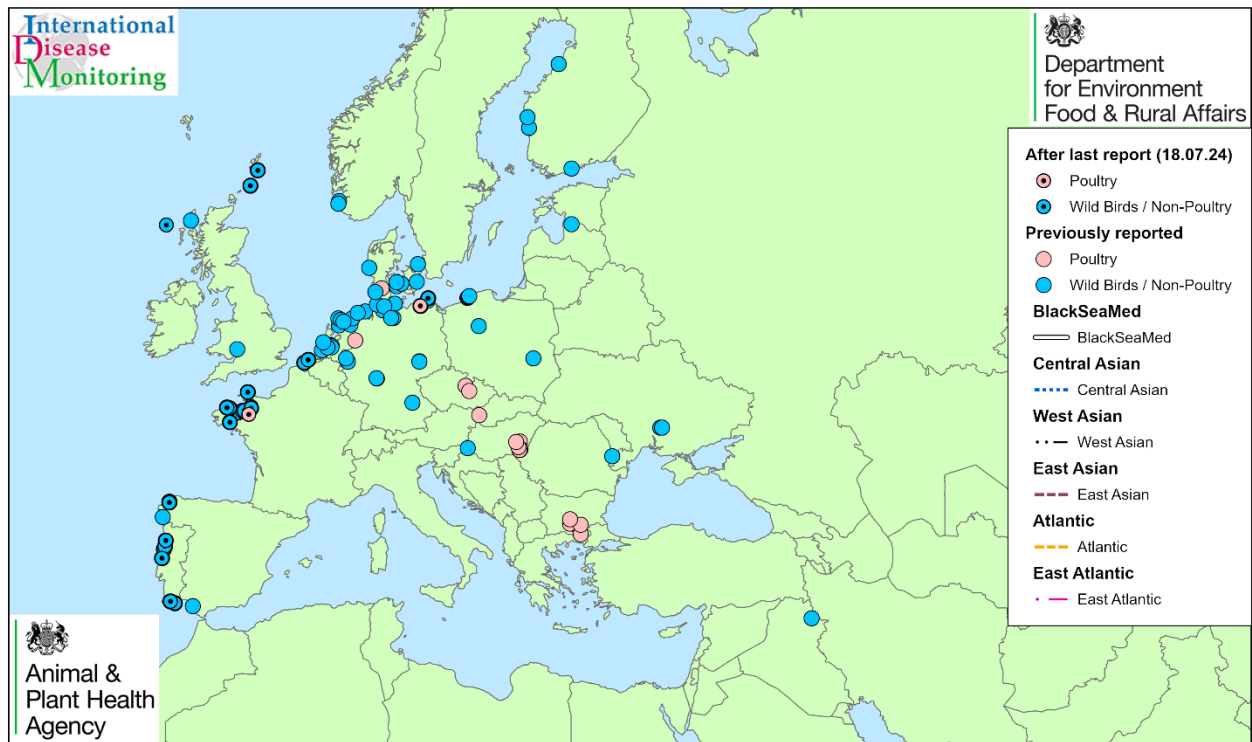
Europe

The number of HPAI positive reports in Europe peaked in mid-February 2024 at 82 reports per week (IZSve 2024). Since that peak, the number of reports steadily decreased to just 3 to 5 per week through June and early July. This level of reporting has continued through July although numbers increased to 9 in the first week of August (Figure 1). The majority of these reports were in wild birds (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Weekly outbreaks of HPAI in poultry and captive birds and cases in wild birds reported across Europe between week 15 (early April 2024) and week 32 (early August 2024) (IZSve, 2024).

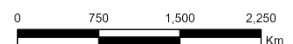


Map 1. Map showing HPAI events in domestic poultry and wild birds in Europe reported by WOAHP between 1 April 2024 and 15 August 2024 (WOAH, 2024).



Map Prepared by IDM
 Date: 19/08/2024
 Absolute Scale: 1:40,000,000

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Poultry, Captive and Wild Birds
 April to August 2024
 Overlay: Migratory Bird Flyways
 (* WOAHP Data Only ** WOAHP Defined)



Between 17 July 2024 and 15 August 2024, there were a total of 21 HPAI H5N1 events reported by WOA in domestic poultry and non-poultry including wild birds across Europe. These all occurred along or near to the coast from southern Portugal and north-west Spain in the west through northern France and Belgium and into northern Germany in the east, with no reports of HPAI H5 from central Spain, central France, central Europe or eastern Europe (Map 1). In total there were 19 reports on WOA in wild birds. These were all seabird species as set out in Table 1, mainly gulls but also another case in a Northern gannet in France following one in our previous update on 17 July 2024. 15 of the 18 wild bird cases were detected since our previous update on the 17 July 2024 with 4 detected prior to the 17 July 2024 (Table 1).

Table 1: Wild bird cases of HPAI H5 in Europe reported on WOA since 17 July 2024 (to 15 August 2024). Number of cases in parentheses.

Country	Detected since 17 July 2024	Detected before 17 July 2024 but not reported in previous outbreak assessment
Belgium	Herring gull (2) in July	0
France	Herring gull (1) in July, Northern gannet (1) in July	Herring gull (4) in July
Germany	Swan (1) in July, Gull unidentified (1) in July, Cormorant (1) in July	0
Portugal	Herring gull (1) in August, Gull unidentified (1) in August, Yellow-legged gull (1) in August, Audouin's gull (2) in July, Lesser black-backed gull (1) in July, Yellow-legged gull (1) in July.	0
Spain	Yellow-legged gull (1) in July	0

Since 17 July 2024, 3 outbreaks in domestic poultry farms of HPAI H5 have been reported in Europe on WOA. Of these, 2 were HPAI H5N1 in northern Germany east of Rostock and within 1 km of each other. One involved 200 cases in a flock of 1,800 ducks and 250 geese and the other had 500 cases in a flock of 5,500 ducks and 350 geese. The third outbreak reported on WOA was HPAI H5Nx in Combourg near St Malo in Brittany in northern France. It was detected on the 7 August 2024 and confirmed on the 12 August

2024 on a farm with 1,200 poultry some of which were free-range birds and included chickens, ducks, geese and guinea fowl (Anon 2024).

There have been no new cases of HPAI reported in mammals in Europe since our previous update on 17 July 2024.

Following the report of HPAI H7N5 in poultry on a farm in north-western Germany for the first time on 3 July 2024 and discussed in our previous update on 17 July 2024, there have been no further outbreaks of HPAI H7N5 detected in Germany or in Europe.

Implications for Great Britain

The detection of 3 cases of HPAI H5N5 in seabirds on islands around northern Scotland in July and August 2024 is consistent with the low (rare but does occur) risk level for HPAI H5 in wild birds in Great Britain. Great skuas breed in colonies on both the Fair Isle and on Hirta, suggesting HPAI H5N5 is circulating in these colonies, although the skuas will now be dispersing at this time of year and flying out to sea heading south to the Biscay. Cases of HPAI H5N5 in wild birds were reported sporadically in Great Britain (7 cases) and in north-western Europe (5 wild bird cases in Germany, 1 raven in Iceland, 1 white-tailed eagle and 2 red foxes in Norway) through the autumn of 2023 and into March 2024 and these 3 new cases confirm it is still circulating in wild birds in Great Britain at least, albeit at low levels. To date (15 August 2024), there have been no outbreaks of HPAI H5N5 reported in poultry in Great Britain or in Europe. Of greater concern to Great Britain is the ongoing spread of HPAI H5N1 in seabirds (mainly gulls but also northern gannets) in Brittany and Normandy along the coast of northern France as described in our previous update on the 17 July 2024. Since then, there have been 6 more seabird cases in northern France with spread east of Calais into Belgium where 2 cases in herring gulls were detected. In addition, there is the first report of an outbreak of HPAI confirmed in poultry in northern Brittany on 15 August 2024 (Anon 2024).

It should be stressed that at this time of year there is no mass migration of wild birds from northern France into southern England. Indeed, the main migration route for wild birds (for example warblers, hirundines and some gull species including lesser black-backed gulls) is now south from Great Britain and into France and then Africa. However, seabirds along the coast of northern Brittany could bring infection into southern England in sporadic random movements of small numbers of birds, particularly now that the virus has spread further east past Calais and into Belgium. The seabird colonies in Great Britain have mostly dispersed by now with many seabirds heading out to sea for the winter thus limiting any spread within the colonies.

Further south-west, there have been 8 cases in gulls along the coast of Portugal and north-west Spain. Although these represent no direct risk to Great Britain especially as some of the gull species involved, notably Audouin's gull and yellow-legged gull are very rare and uncommon respectively in Great Britain, they none the less represent a reservoir

of virus in seabirds in western Europe which has circulated over the summer. While small numbers of yellow-legged gulls may move up from southern Spain and even Italy into the English Channel at this time of year (Olsen 2013), the general movement of gulls at this time of year is south from Great Britain to the Iberian Peninsula where large numbers of lesser black-backed gulls from Great Britain overwinter each year together with a very small number of Herring gulls, the latter mainly along the Biscay coast of Spain (De Juana and Garcia 2015). These gulls then return to their breeding sites in north-west Europe in the spring.

Further east, there have been two poultry outbreaks and more cases of H5N1 in wild water birds in north-east Germany (Map 1) although there have been no further reports of HPAI H5N1 in mute swans on the north coast of Poland. There have also been no further reports since June of HPAI H5N1 in wild geese in north-west Germany near to the border with the Netherlands, although HPAI H5N1 could still be circulating there. The spread and circulation of HPAI in these regions of northern Germany and Poland at this time of year (mid-August) is a concern because migrating ducks, geese and swans could bring the virus back into Great Britain in the autumn from mid-September onwards. Wader species are already flying into Great Britain from northern Europe (Iceland and Scandinavia) and the Baltic states through August and could come through these areas.

While the risk of HPAI H5 in wild birds in Great Britain is still low, the presence of HPAI H5 in wild birds in northern Europe presents a pathway to Great Britain with the risk increasing from next month as migratory ducks, geese and swans begin to arrive from north-eastern Europe.

Conclusion

Since our last assessment on 17 July 2024, there have been 3 cases of HPAI H5N5 reported in wild birds on islands to the north and north-west of mainland Scotland with no cases of HPAI H5 reported on mainland Great Britain since 1 May 2024. The risk of HPAI H5 in wild birds in Great Britain is still assessed to be low. Small numbers of wild bird cases, all seabird species including gulls and gannets, continue to be reported each week in Europe with an increase in the first week of August. Of particular concern to Great Britain is the location of the cases of HPAI H5N1 in herring gulls and gannets along the north coast of Belgium and of Brittany and Normandy in France. Although the spread of HPAI H5N1 in gulls east of Calais has brought the virus closer to southern England, the dispersal of seabirds from their breeding colonies at this time of year may serve to reduce this risk to Great Britain. However, there is always the possibility of random movements of birds across the English Channel. The continuing presence of HPAI H5N1 in northern Germany and possibly still in northern Poland may present a risk to Great Britain in the coming weeks as migratory ducks, geese and swans begin to arrive in Great Britain, depending on the degree to which HPAI H5N1 circulates in the Netherlands and Germany.

Small numbers of outbreaks of HPAI in domestic poultry have been reported recently in northern Europe with 1 in north Brittany in free-range poultry and 2 in ducks and geese in north-east Germany. There have been no outbreaks of HPAI H5 in domestic poultry in Great Britain since February 2024. The main route of exposure to poultry would be through wild birds for which the risk is low. The risk of infection of poultry in Great Britain with stringent biosecurity is still considered to be very low with medium uncertainty. The risk to poultry where biosecurity is non-stringent and there are biosecurity breaches is still low with medium uncertainty. Here we consider stringent biosecurity to be the highest standards of biosecurity, which are applied by premises in the poultry compartments scheme including air and door locks, shower in – shower out facilities and pristine areas in the poultry sheds as defined [previously in the scientific opinion on the incursion of HPAI H5N1 into housed or not housed poultry flocks and captive birds](#). The medium uncertainties in the poultry risk levels reflect our uncertainty in the low risk to wild birds currently with H5N1 in wild birds in northern France, Belgium and north Germany.

We are continuing to closely monitor the situation in Europe and to review the risk.

It is particularly important that stringent adherence to good biosecurity practices is maintained, particularly in the coming weeks as wader bird species and then migratory ducks, geese and swans begin to arrive in Great Britain for the autumn and winter.

Advice for working with birds

Reinforcement of good biosecurity awareness behaviours and practices should be frequently communicated to all personnel working with birds.

Any lapse of these measures could still result in disease being introduced to poultry and captive birds.

This could be by direct or indirect contact with wild birds.

Direct contact includes wild birds getting into housing or onto the range

Indirect contact with wild birds includes faecal contamination of:

- feed
- water
- bedding
- equipment
- vermin
- clothing (including footwear of people in contact with infected birds or contaminated environment including flood water)

Special consideration should be made when bringing in equipment and materials, especially bedding and outer packages which may have become contaminated following environmental exposure whilst stored outside.

If you keep poultry (including game birds or as pets), you should follow our [biosecurity best practice advice](#) on GOV.UK.

Remain vigilant for any signs of disease in your flock and report any suspicious clinical signs of avian influenza to the Animal and Plant Health Agency. Contact

- 03000 200 301 in England
- 0300 303 8268 in Wales
- your [local field services office in Scotland](#)

Further guidance about avian influenza, including updated biosecurity advice for poultry keepers in:

- [England is available on GOV.UK](#)
- Wales is available on the [Welsh Government's website](#)
- Scotland is available on the [Scottish Government's website](#)
- Northern Ireland is available on [DAERA's website](#)

The WOA, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) International Reference Laboratory and the UK National Reference Laboratory at Weybridge have the necessary diagnostic capability for strains of avian influenza virus, whether of low or high pathogenicity, and continually monitor changes in the virus on a wide scale, whilst utilising global networks to gain early insights into epidemiological trends and potential emergence of new genotypes which might change the risk profile.

We will continue to report on any updates to the situation in Europe and, in particular, any changes in disease distribution or wild bird movements which may increase the risk to the UK.

In England, Scotland and Wales, any findings of the following dead wild birds found at the same location at the same time should be reported online (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-dead-wild-birds>) or to the Defra wild bird helpline on 03459 33 55 77:

- 1 or more dead birds of prey (such as an owl, hawk or buzzard)
- 1 or more dead swans, goose or duck
- 1 or more dead gulls
- 5 or more dead wild birds of any species (not including gulls)

It is advisable that you do not touch these birds.

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References

All outbreaks and cases were taken from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Please note that changes in format and level of detail are due to the change of data source for this report, from EU's Animal Disease Notification System (ADNS) to World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

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