Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Updated Outbreak Assessment #7

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

18 March 2025

Disease report

Since our previous outbreak assessment on 18 December 2024 (HPAI in Europe #6) there have been 34 reports of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5 clade 2.3.4.4b in domestic poultry in Great Britain. All reports have been confirmed as HPAI H5N1.

There has also been a marked increase in the number of cases of HPAI H5 clade 2.3.4.4b events involving “found-dead” wild birds in Great Britain with 456 since 1 October 2024. Of these, 372 have been confirmed as HPAI H5N1, 64 as HPAI H5N5 and 20 as HPAI H5Nx (see Map 1 for wild bird cases collected since 1 October 2024). At the species level, there has been a notable increase in the number of cases in gulls in Great Britain in February. The wild bird risk level across Great Britain is maintained at very high.

The risk level for HPAI H5 incursion in poultry:

- With stringent biosecurity is maintained at medium but now with high uncertainty (as the risk may be nearer to low) and
- With non-stringent or suboptimal biosecurity is maintained at high but now with low uncertainty (as we are more confident the risk is not very high).

Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in poultry have continued across Europe with 200 reported between 18 December 2024 and 18 March 2025. Poland, Germany, Hungary and Italy reported 27 or more outbreaks. Wild bird reports have also increased in Europe with 469 reports between 18 December 2024 and 18 March 2025. The Wadden Sea area of northern Europe was particularly badly affected with 146 wild bird cases of H5N1 in the Netherlands, 123 cases of H5N1 in Germany (and one case of H5N5), 41 cases in Italy and 23 H5N1 cases in Poland. HPAI H5N5 is also ongoing in wild birds in Iceland.

There have been 12 reports of HPAI H5 in mammals in Europe including both H5N5 and H5N1.

Situation assessment

Here, an HPAI H5Nx event refers to a report of HPAI in poultry, or a location with at least one HPAI H5Nx positive wild bird. Individual HPAI H5Nx positive wild birds are referred to as cases.

Great Britain

Poultry Infected Premises

Since our last outbreak assessment on 18 December 2024 (to 18 March 2025) there have been 34 Infected Premises (IPs) confirmed with HPAI H5N1 in poultry. These have been reported in a mixture of backyard and commercial premises housing poultry, single species and mixed species holdings. The majority of these were in Jan (12) and Feb (13) with lower numbers observed in Dec (5) and March (4). See map 1 for approximate locations.

All poultry on the infected premises are humanely culled and a 3 km protection zone and 10 km surveillance zone are put in place surrounding the premises. For updates on the latest situation in England please see Gov.uk.

Wild birds

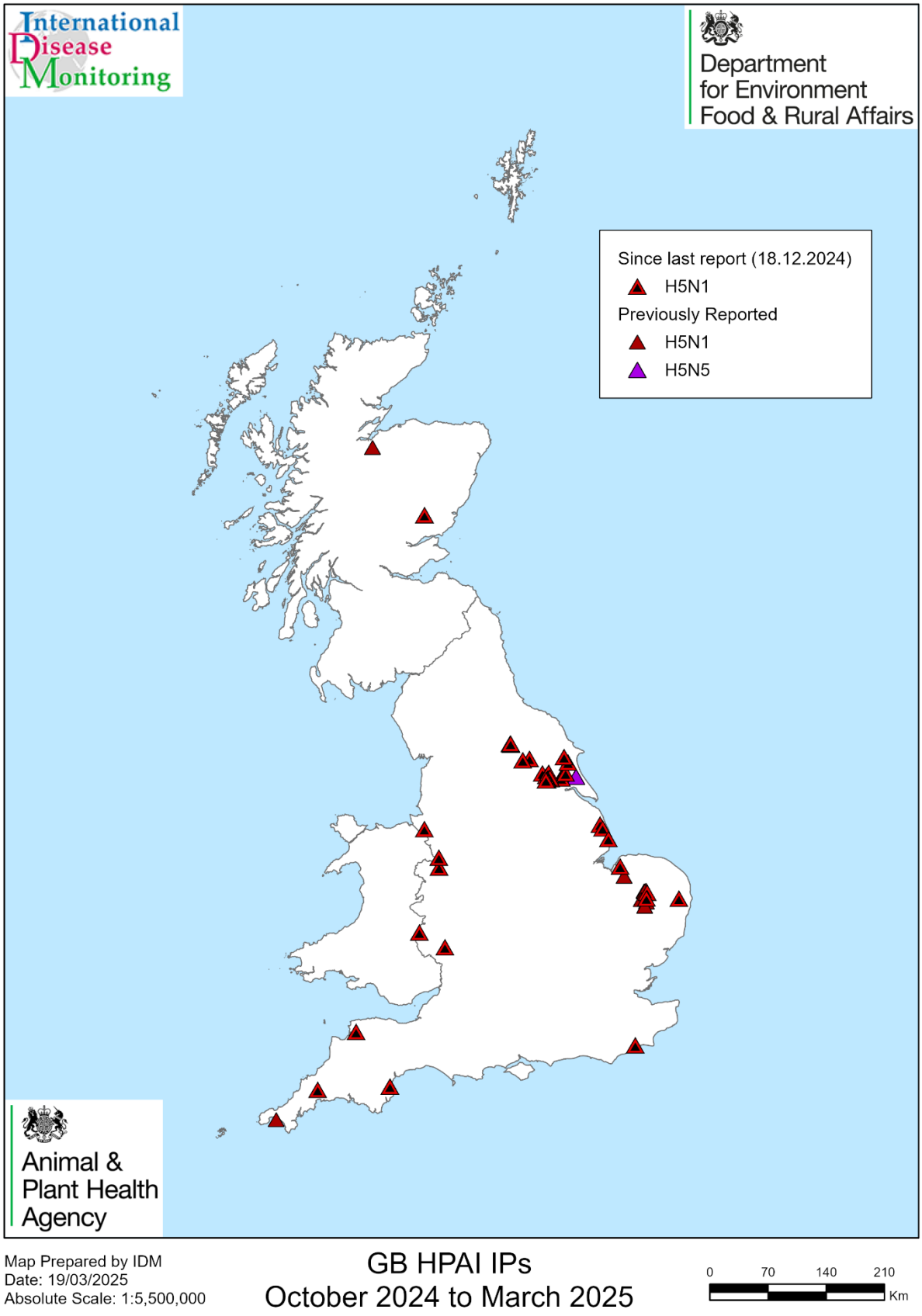
Between 18 December 2024 and 18 March 2025, HPAI H5 has been detected in 375 found-dead wild birds in 187 separate locations in Great Britain, including 40 wild bird species (data available https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/avian-influenza-in-wild-birds) across 67 counties. Wild bird cases since 18 December have been reported at both coastal and inland locations across Great Britain (Map 2). The majority of the findings were in England (252), with 115 in Scotland and 8 in Wales.

It should be noted that there is a variable lag period between the collection of found-dead wild birds to sampling, testing, and the reporting of results.

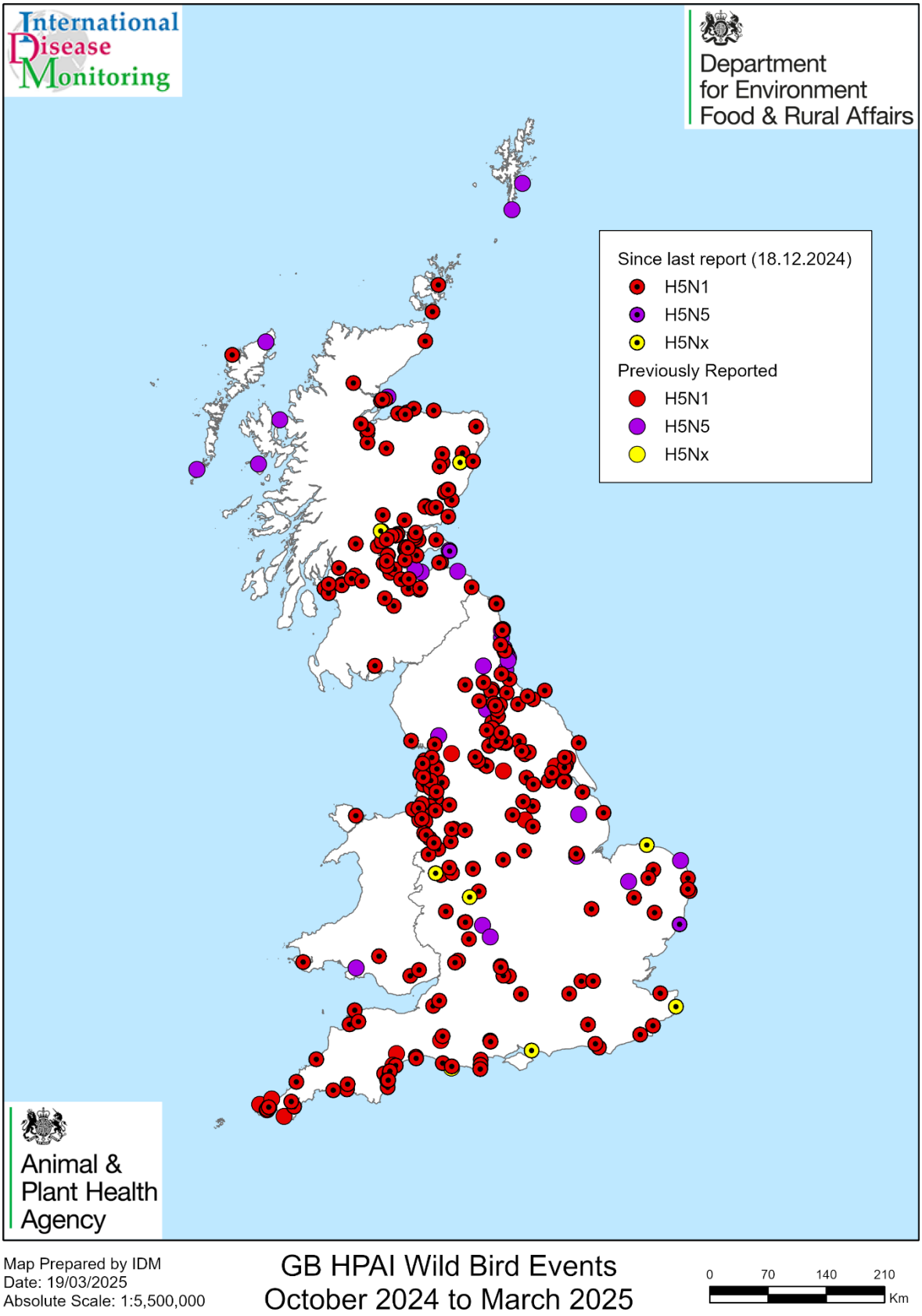
It is important to note that these surveillance figures for Great Britain are based on passive surveillance of found dead birds reported to Defra by the general public and as such, may be affected by several factors including frequency of visitors accessing areas with bird populations, the potential for immunity in the wild bird population (which may result in fewer birds developing clinical disease and or dying with HPAI), variable surveillance system sensitivity, as well as the size, location and accessibility 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.

Non-avian wildlife

Since 18 December, there have been three positive HPAI H5 detections in non-avian wildlife in Great Britain. One event involved a Red Fox in Highland, Scotland that tested positive for HPAIV H5N1 and the other involved 2 Grey seals in Norfolk, England. These tested positive for HPAI H5N5. For further details and for previously reported detections in non-avian wildlife, please see the report on findings of HPAI in non-avian wildlife in Great Britain.



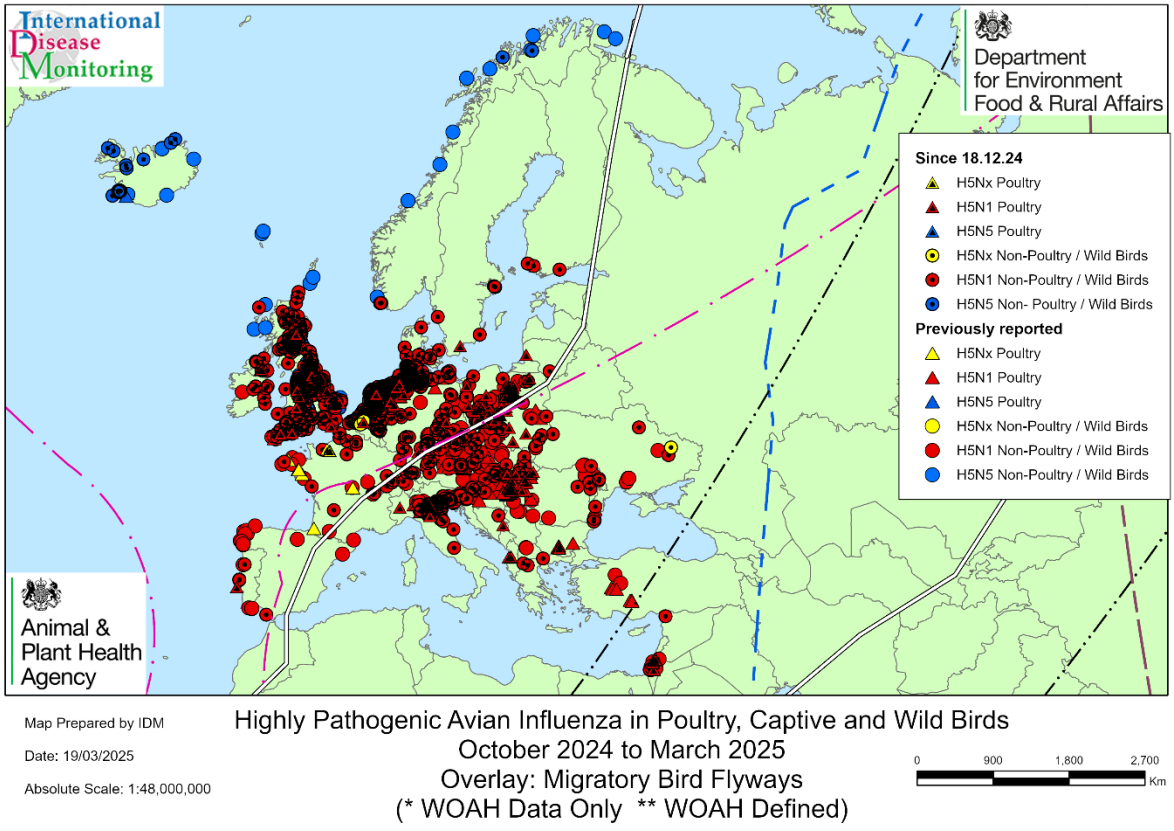
Map 1. IPs for HPAI H5Nx across Great Britain from 1 October 2024 to 18 March 2025. Discussed in body of report.



Map 2. Wild bird positive events for HPAI reports across Great Britain from 1 October 2024 to 18 March 2025. Discussed in body of report.

Europe

Map 3 shows the HPAI H5 reports across Europe from 1 October 2024, with the reports since our previous assessment on 18 December 2024 discerned with dotted centres. Reports of HPAI H5N5 since our previous assessment have been localised to Iceland and the extreme north of Norway. HPAI H5N1 has continued in the Wadden Sea area around Denmark and northern Germany into the Netherlands, and there have been a few wild bird cases ongoing in northern France. The Iberian Pennisula and central France have been largely unaffected. However, central Europe and northern Italy have reported mutliple detections, with Hungary and Poland particularly badly affected. Since our previous report there have been a few wild bird detections in southern Norway, Sweden and Finland.



Map 3. Map showing HPAI events in domestic poultry and wild birds in Europe reported by WOAH between 19 December 2024 and 18 March 2025 (WOAH, 2025) cases and outbreaks are observed across Europe, as described in the main body of this report.

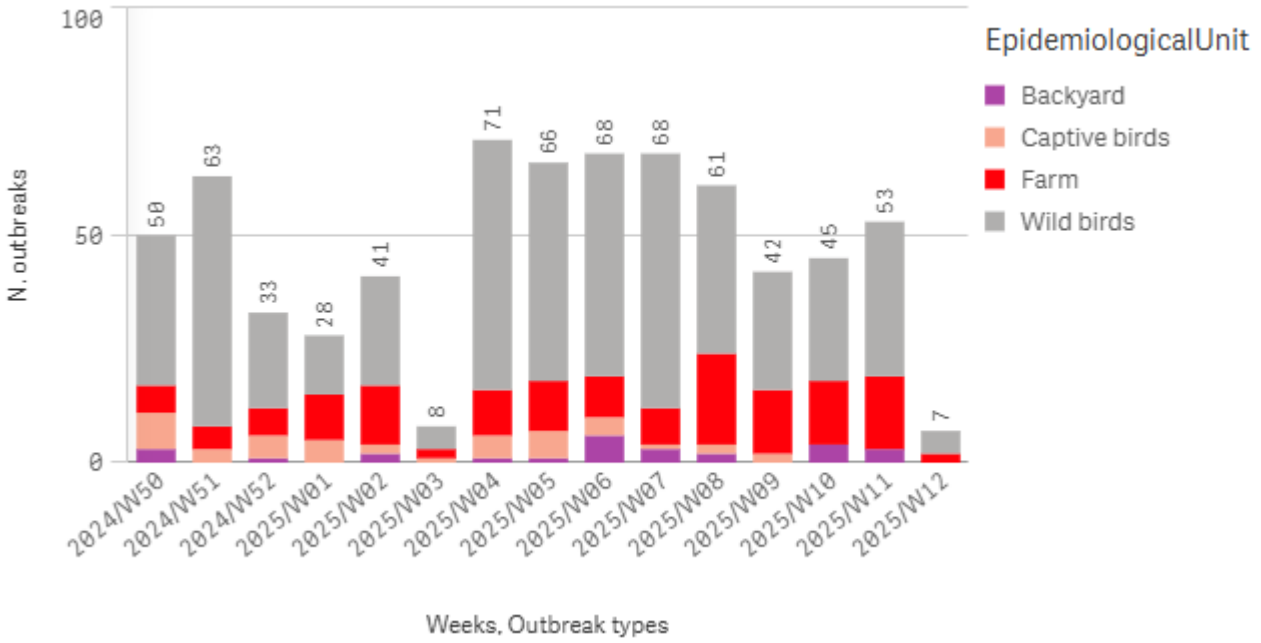


Figure 1: Weekly numbers of HPAI H5 positive reports in Europe according to data from IZSVe (2025). Shows between 60 to 71 positive reports per week from late January through to end of February with signs of a decrease in early March as discussed in text below.

The total positive HPAI reports per week according to IZSVe (2025) remained high at between 61 and 71 per week from late January through February after appearing to fall through December and into early January (Figure 1). Around two-thirds of the reports were due to wild bird cases which increased markedly at the end of January, with poultry farm outbreaks increasing at the end of February. It is noted that in the first two weeks of March there appears to be the start of a fall in wild bird cases in Europe.

Between 19 December 2024 and 18 March 2025, there were a total of 669 HPAI H5 events reported by WOAH in domestic poultry, captive birds and non-poultry including wild birds across Europe. In total, there were 469 reports on WOAH in wild birds and 200 poultry outbreaks. The poultry outbreaks recorded in each country on WOAH are set out in Table 1. Most of the poultry outbreaks were in Poland, Italy, Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic, with fewer than 10 in each of the Netherlands, France and Belgium.

Table 1: Poultry outbreaks reported on WOAH from 18 December 2024 to 18 March 2025.

Country	December 2024	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	Total
Albania	1	1	0	1	3
Austria	0	1	0	0	1
Belgium	0	4	3	1	8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	1	0	1

Country	December 2024	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	Total
Bulgaria	0	0	3	0	3
Czech Republic	7	3	5	0	15
France	3	1	0	0	4
Germany	7	10	8	2	27
Hungary	0	7	12	13	32
Italy	10	21	0	0	31
Lithuania	0	1	0	0	1
Moldova	1	0	1	1	3
Netherlands	0	1	1	0	2
Poland	6	17	24	10	57
Portugal	0	5	0	0	5
Romania	0	0	0	2	2
Slovakia	0	1	0	0	1
Sweden	0	0	1	0	1
Ukraine	1	0	1	1	3
Total	36	73	60	31	200

The wild bird cases of HPAI H5 in Europe according to WOAH were seen mainly in gulls, geese, swans and raptors. There were 74 detections in raptor species including 41 cases in common buzzards. While raptor cases were relatively constant over January and February, goose and swan cases almost halved between January and February, while gull cases fell three-fold according to WOAH data.

Wild bird cases positive for HPAI H5 reported on WOAH since our previous update on 18 December 2024 are presented in Table 2 according to country. In total there were 469 cases of HPAI H5. Of these, 451 cases were H5N1 and 18 were H5N5. While the Netherlands reported relatively few poultry outbreaks, it detected the highest number of wild bird cases of H5N1 at 146, almost half of which were in January. The low number of poultry outbreaks may be because poultry owners in the Netherlands have been obliged to keep poultry indoors and shield them since 20 November 2024 (Letter to the House of Representatives to establish national obligation to keep poultry indoors and shield | Parliamentary Paper | Rijksoverheid.nl). A pilot vaccination of poultry against HPAI has started in the Netherlands in March 2025 (Start pilot vaccination of poultry against bird flu | News item | Rijksoverheid.nl).

The pilot will run until the beginning of 2027 and will start at 1 poultry farm. Chicks are vaccinated in the hatchery and placed as laying hens on a laying farm. The eggs are to be sold exclusively within the Netherlands, so third country trade is not affected. After a successful first phase of the field trial, plans are in place to make large-scale vaccination possible (Start pilot vaccination of poultry against bird flu | News item | Rijksoverheid.nl). Over half of the wild bird cases in the Netherlands were geese, with raptors and gulls accounting for much of the rest (Presentation - HPAI in the Netherlands).

Poland which reported some 48 poultry outbreaks on WOAH, only detected 23 wild bird cases of H5N1. There have been 32 outbreaks so far in 2025 with 8 contact farms where poultry were culled (Presentation - HPAI in Poland).

Germany reported 123 cases of H5N1 in wild birds on WOAH of which over half were in January (Table 2). However, according to the Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCoPAFF) meeting (Presentation - HPAI in Germany), the level of HPAI cases in wild birds in Germany almost doubled in February compared to January with mainly geese affected. The genotype is HPAI H5N1 2.3.4.4b DI with no deviations in wild birds or poultry in Germany since the summer (Presentation - HPAI in Germany). In addition, Germany reported on WOAH one case of HPAI H5N5 in a gull species from December suggesting that H5N5 has been circulating in the Wadden Sea area albeit at low levels following cases in gulls and auks earlier in 2024.

Belgium reported an increase in wild bird cases in February (Table 2. There have been five captive bird outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in Belgium in January and February through a farm livestock exhibition involving more than 250 exhibitors (mainly ornamental birds). Birds in three of those outbreaks died without any clinical signs (Presentation - HPAI in Belgium). Since 6 February 2025 there has been a ban on gatherings of captive birds in Belgium (Presentation - HPAI in Belgium). An outbreak in 90,000 laying hens in Sint-Gillis-Waas in Belgium also had high mortality with 600 birds dead in a short time but no clinical signs. The source was considered likely to be wild birds and there was no link to the farm exhibition.

Iceland reported an increase in H5N5 cases in wild birds with 17 in total since our previous update. In southern Europe, Italy continued to report wild bird cases of H5N1 each month, mostly in the north (see Map 3).

Table 2 Wild bird cases of HPAI H5 reported in Europe on WOAH between 19 December 2024 and 18 March 2025 by start date. Note some cases were reported late from 2024.

Country	Jan 2024	Sep 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	Total
H5N1								
Austria	0	0	0	4	2	0	0	6
Belgium	0	0	0	1	4	13	5	23
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Czech Republic	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Denmark	0	0	2	2	2	3	1	10
Finland	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
France	0	0	0	3	4	5	1	13
Germany	0	0	3	19	62	36	2	122
Greece	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Hungary	0	0	0	4	10	5	2	21
Ireland	0	0	0	1	3	2	1	7
Italy	0	0	14	16	10	1		41

Country	Jan 2024	Sep 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	Total
Lithuania	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Moldova	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Netherlands	0	0	0	45	61	34	6	146
Norway	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Poland	1	0	0	4	13	5	0	23
Portugal	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Romania	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
Slovakia	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Slovenia	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	6
Spain	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sweden	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	5
Switzerland	0	0	0	1	4	2		7
Ukraine	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
H5N5								
Germany	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

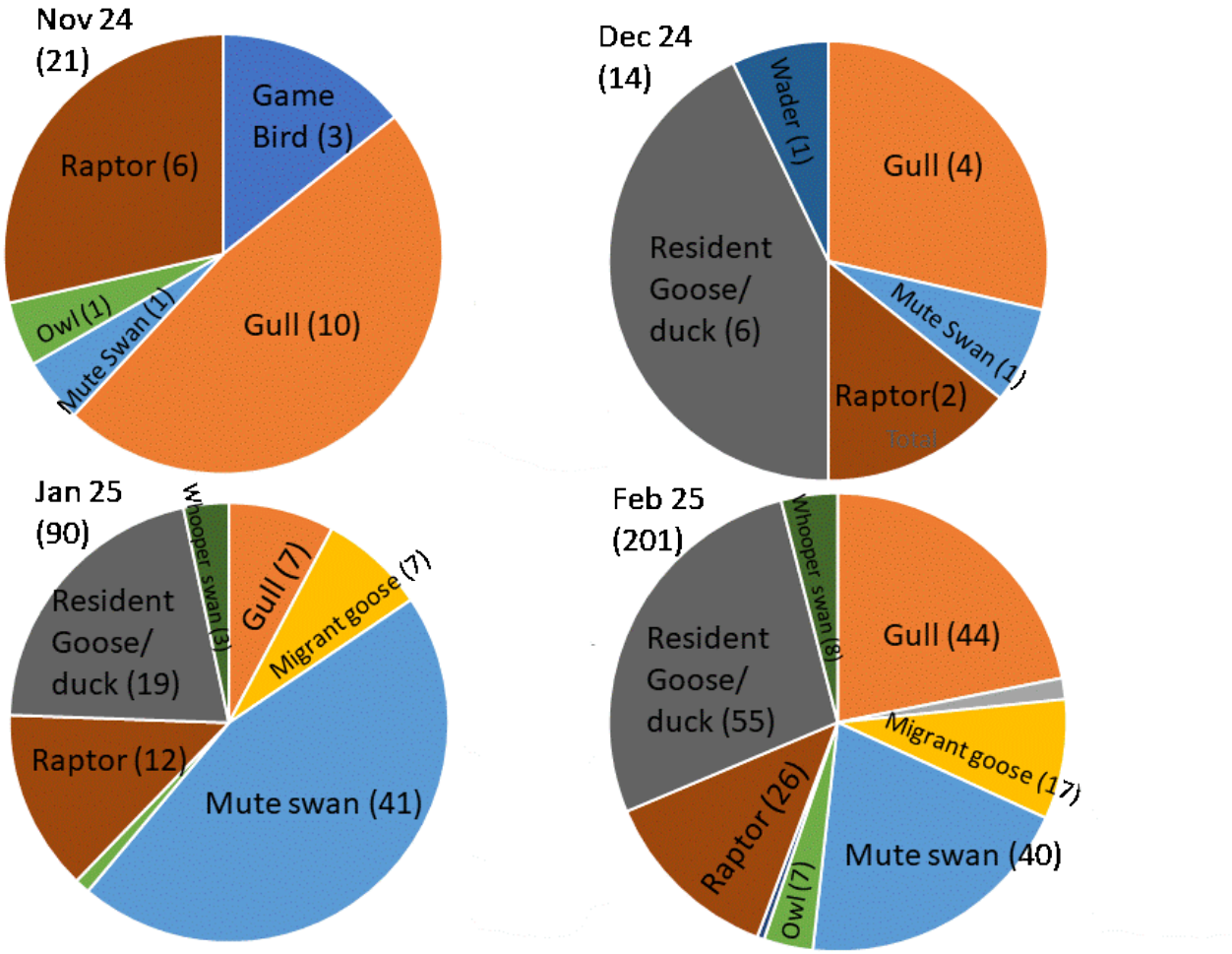
Country	Jan 2024	Sep 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	Total
Iceland	0	3	2	4	8	0	0	17
Total	1	3	21	113	191	117	23	469

There have been ten reports of HPAI H5 in mammals in Europe since our previous update on 18 December 2024. These include HPAI H5N5 in two cats, a mink, and a fox in Iceland and H5N5 in an otter and a lynx in Norway. There were cases of HPAI H5N1 detected in one cat and two foxes in Italy, and one fox in Slovenia.

Implications for Great Britain

Since our previous outbreak update on 18 December 2024 (HPAI in Europe #6), there has been a marked increase in the number of wild bird cases of HPAI H5 in Great Britain. This represents a national disease process with wild bird cases detected across much of England and Scotland and a few cases in Wales (see Map 2). The increase in wild bird cases was proceeded by a similar increase in wild bird cases in Continental Europe (Figure 1) particularly in the Netherlands and northern Germany (Table 2).

Figure 2: Proportions of HPAI H5 wild bird positive by species or order across the 2024 to 2025 season in Great Britain. Total numbers are in parentheses. Shows pie charts for November 2024, December 2024, January 2025 and February 2025 with increasing gull cases between December and February.



Given the marked increase in the number of wild bird cases in Great Britain since our previous update assessment on 18 December, it is important to consider which wild bird species and orders have been affected and how this is changing. A change in the species or orders of wild birds over the HPAI season in Great Britain has been documented in a previous outbreak update for the 2021 to 2022 season (Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in the UK and Europe: Updated Outbreak Assessment #27 6 June 2022). The pie charts presented in Figure 2 show how the proportion of species or orders for wild bird positive cases in Great Britain changed from November 2024 to February 2025. It is notable how the number of wild bird cases increased markedly in January 2025 and then again in February 2025. Resident waterbirds, namely mute swans, mallard and geese such as Canada geese, feature prominently from December 2024 through to February 2025 peaking as a proportion of the wild bird positive cases at 67% in January. While the proportion of migrant waterbirds, namely whooper swans and geese such as pink-footed geese was constant at 11% to 12% in January and February, the proportion of gull cases increased markedly from 8% in January to 22% in February with mute swan cases halving from 46% to 20%. In contrast, the proportion of raptor cases remained relatively constant at 13% to 14% through December to February. A key observation is that the total number of gulls cases increased markedly in February 2025 together with the numbers of resident waterbird species and migratory waterbird species. In the next few weeks, the migrant goose and whooper swan cases will disappear as the migratory ducks, geese and swans depart from Great Britain and return to their breeding sites in north-eastern Europe and Russia. Mute swan cases and resident goose or duck cases also may decrease as these birds pair up for breeding and leave their winter aggregations thus reducing the opportunity for contacts. The marked increase in gull cases in Great Britain in February 2025 is the main concern as this could indicate more cases in gulls in Great Britain over the summer.

Data for March 2025 are not complete and therefore not presented in Figure 2. Up to 18 March 2025 there were 115 positive wild bird cases in Great Britain. Of these 33 (29%) were gull species and 25 (22%) were raptors. There were another 17 (22%) mute swan cases and 2 cases in Bewick's swans. Thus, initial observations suggest the proportion of gull cases has increased again in the first half of March.

The wild bird risk in Great Britain was increased from high to very high on 18 December 2024 (HPAI in Europe #6). This naturally increased the risks to poultry as shown by the increase in poultry outbreaks. On 18 December 2024, the risk to poultry with suboptimal biosecurity was elevated to high (with medium uncertainty) and risk to poultry with stringent biosecurity was elevated to medium (with medium uncertainty). Since our previous outbreak assessment on 18 December 2024 (HPAI in Europe #6) the number of wild bird positive reports have increased markedly in January 2025 and again in February 2025 (Figure 2) and the wild bird risk level is therefore maintained at very high.

Given the very high wild bird infection pressure it is surprising there have not been more outbreaks in poultry in Great Britain although there is a AIPZ across Great Britain and regionalised housing orders in place in England (Avian Influenza Prevention Zone declared for whole of England - GOV.UK). It is not clear whether there has been a decoupling of the wild bird risk to some extent from the poultry risk as was observed in the summer of 2023 when there were large numbers of positive cases in seabirds and gulls in Great Britain but relatively few outbreaks in poultry (HPAI_Europe__44_18_August_2023_.pdf). The risk to poultry with suboptimal biosecurity is maintained at high, although the uncertainty is now low, reflecting our greater confidence that the risk level is not very high. Most outbreaks in poultry have been in premises with suboptimal biosecurity with none in containment premises with stringent biosecurity. The risk level for poultry with stringent biosecurity is maintained at medium, although the uncertainty is increased to high as the actual risk may be lower than medium.

In the next few weeks, all the migratory ducks, geese and swans will depart Great Britain and fly to their breeding sites in Iceland, Scandinavia, northern Russia and eastern Europe. In addition, the resident ducks, geese, and swans which have spent the winter in large aggregates around lakes in Great Britain will pair up and disperse to their breeding grounds, thus reducing the opportunity for bird to bird contacts. This together with the longer day lengths, increasing solar intensity and higher temperatures is considered likely to reduce the number of cases of HPAI H5 in wild birds in Great Britain, though it is noted that there have been high numbers of seabird cases in previous years too. As discussed above, cases of HPAI H5 are continuing in wild birds and in poultry in northern Europe with large numbers of cases in gulls according to data from WOAH. While the risk levels in Europe are no relevance to Great Britain at this time of year (because migratory birds will be flying the opposite way, unlike in the autumn) the trends in Europe are generally ahead of those in Great Britain. In this respect, the fall in gull cases in February from January in Europe may be indicative of a fall in gull cases in Great Britain in the next few weeks, although the proportion of gull cases may continue to rise.

Conclusion

Following our previous outbreak update on 18 December 2024 (HPAI in Europe #6) there have been 315 cases of HPAI H5 in wild birds in Great Britain, mostly in England with some in Scotland and a small number in Wales, and predominantly H5N1. The wild bird risk level in Great Britain is maintained at very high, with further cases of HPAI H5 expected to be detected in the coming weeks until the migratory ducks, geese and swans depart to their breeding grounds in the north and eastern Europe and resident waterbirds disperse from their winter aggregates as pairs to their breeding sites. It is not known whether cases in gulls will continue into the summer as in some previous years in Great Britain.

Given the ongoing very high wild bird risk level together with the 32 additional HPAI H5N1 IPs in Great Britain, the risk to poultry with sub-optimal biosecurity is maintained at high now with low uncertainty as we are more certain that the risk level is not very high despite the large number of wild bird cases. The risk of infection of poultry in Great Britain with stringent biosecurity is maintained at medium but now with high uncertainty. The high uncertainty reflects the possibility the risk for stringent biosecurity may be low (despite the very high wild bird risk) as there have been no outbreaks in such premises. 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.

Additional biosecurity measures came into force on 13 December 2024 in four counties in England. At noon on the 25 January 2025, the regional avian influenza prevention zone (AIPZ) that was declared in the East Riding of Yorkshire, City of Kingston upon Hull, Norfolk and Suffolk to mitigate the risk of further outbreaks of disease occurring was extended to the whole of the England and Scotland, and on 30 January 2025 in Wales. This means that it is a legal requirement for all bird keepers within the zone to follow strict biosecurity measures to help protect their flocks, of whatever type or size. This does not include a requirement to house birds, unless you are also in a 3km protection zone or in a region where the mandatory housing order is in place. As of 16 February 2025, a mandatory housing order is in place in Cheshire, City of Kingston Upon Hull, East Riding of Yorkshire, Herefordshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, Norfolk, North Yorkshire, Shropshire, Suffolk, Worcestershire and York. This is being kept under constant review.

See the interactive map for details and check the declarations for details of the restrictions.

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 with migratory ducks, geese and swans now present at peak numbers in Great Britain and forming wintering aggregates with resident waterbirds.

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 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 WOAH, 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.

Authors

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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).

- IZSVe (2025) EURL Avian Flu Data Portal (izsvenezie.it)
- WOAH (2025) WAHIS (woah.org)

This publication is available at https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/animal-diseases-international-monitoring.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at iadm@apha.gov.uk.