Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Updated Outbreak Assessment #4

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

19 December 2025

Disease report

In our previous outbreak assessment on 11 November 2025 (High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3) we noted that cases of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5 in wild birds were increasing markedly both in Europe and Great Britain and the wild bird risk level in Great Britain was increased from high to VERY HIGH. Since then, wild bird case numbers in Great Britain have continued to increase week on week with 374 more cases of HPAI H5 clade 2.3.4.4b events involving “found-dead” wild birds (number based on laboratory testing date). The total in Great Britain since the start of the HPAI season on 1 October 2025 is now 569. Of these 569, 562 have been confirmed as HPAI H5N1, 4 as HPAI H5N5 (see our previous assessment, High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3) and 3 as HPAI H5Nx (see Map 2 for wild bird cases).

Wild bird cases now extend across most of Great Britain (see Map 2). Most wild bird cases in Great Britain this season have been in resident water birds, particularly mute swans, although in November the number of migrant swan (whooper swan) cases has increased markedly. Through December wild bird cases have continued mainly in resident geese, swans and ducks. The wild bird risk level across Great Britain is therefore maintained at VERY HIGH. The number of migratory waterbirds overwintering in Great Britain is now peaking and, barring a prolonged cold snap in northern Europe (where positive reports appear to be falling) in the next few weeks, few birds are expected to fly over from northern Europe to Great Britain this winter.

Since our previous outbreak assessment on 11 November 2025 (High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3) there have been 33 reports of HPAI H5 clade 2.3.4.4b in domestic poultry in Great Britain with 29 in England, 2 in Scotland and 2 in Wales. These extend across most of England, much of Wales and into southern Scotland, namely South Lanarkshire and Scottish Borders (see Map 1). All 33 reports have been confirmed as HPAI H5N1. However, while there have been 33 more IPs since our previous assessment (High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3), the number of IPs per week in Great Britain has steadily fallen from 14 in week 45 and has averaged 5 per week over the last 5 weeks. There were 3 IPs in week 50 (see Figure 1). This supports a

reduction in the very high risk level for poultry with suboptimal biosecurity. It should be noted that the very high risk range is smaller than the 'high' risk range and that high (event occurs very often), is very much a concern and that implementing and maintaining biosecurity measures to prevent exposure of poultry and other kept birds to the infectious agent are of great importance.

The risk level in Great Britain for HPAI H5 incursion in poultry:

- With stringent biosecurity is maintained at MEDIUM with low uncertainty; and
- With non-stringent or suboptimal biosecurity is decreased from very high to HIGH with medium uncertainty.

Since our previous assessment on the 11 November 2025 (High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3), the number of outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in poultry has increased markedly across Europe with 276 reports (between 11 November 2025 and 19 December 2025) to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH 2025). Of these 276 new poultry outbreaks, 92 were in France, 91 in Germany and 19 in the Netherlands which are countries through which migratory waterbirds would have flown on their way to overwinter in Great Britain.

Wild bird cases of HPAI have continued across in Europe at increased levels with 1,825 cases of HPAI H5N1 and 8 cases of HPAI H5Nx between 11 November 2025 and 19 December 2025 according to WOAH (2025). As with poultry outbreaks, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands were most affected with 1,098, 136 and 144 wild bird cases respectively on WOAH. Common cranes continue to be badly affected along their migration routes through Germany, France and now into Spain (but do not fly to Great Britain).

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.

United Kingdom

Poultry Infected Premises

Since our last outbreak assessment on 11 November 2025 (to 19 December 2025) there have been 33 Infected Premises (IPs) confirmed with HPAI H5N1 in poultry. Of these, 29 occurred in England, 2 in Scotland and 2 in Wales (see Map 1 for approximate locations). These have been reported in a mixture of backyard and commercial premises housing poultry, as single species and backyard flocks of mixed species. The majority of recent IPs in Great Britain have been genotyped as DI.2.1. The number of IPs per week in Great

Britain peaked at 14 in week 45 (see Figure 1) prompting the increase in the risk level for poultry with suboptimal biosecurity from high to very high in our previous outbreak assessment on 11 November 2025 (High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3). However, since week 45, the number of IPs per week has fallen week on week to 3 in week 50 (see Figure 1).

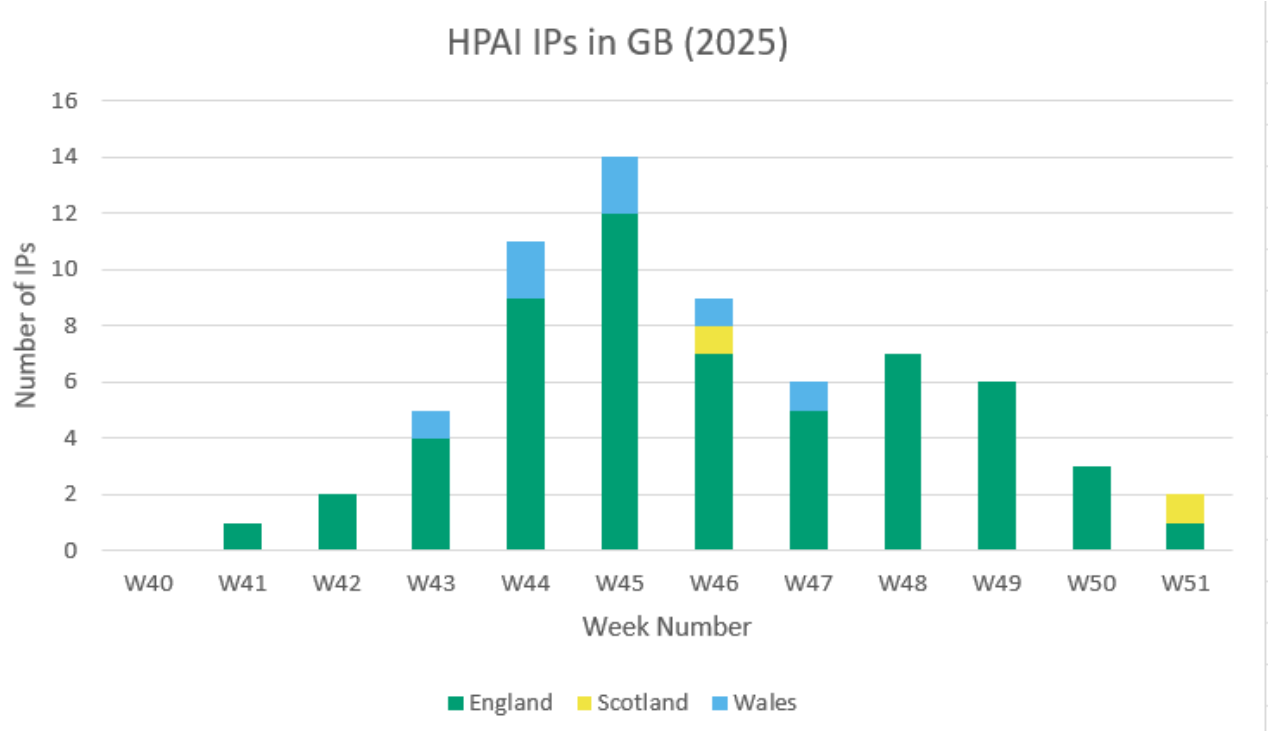
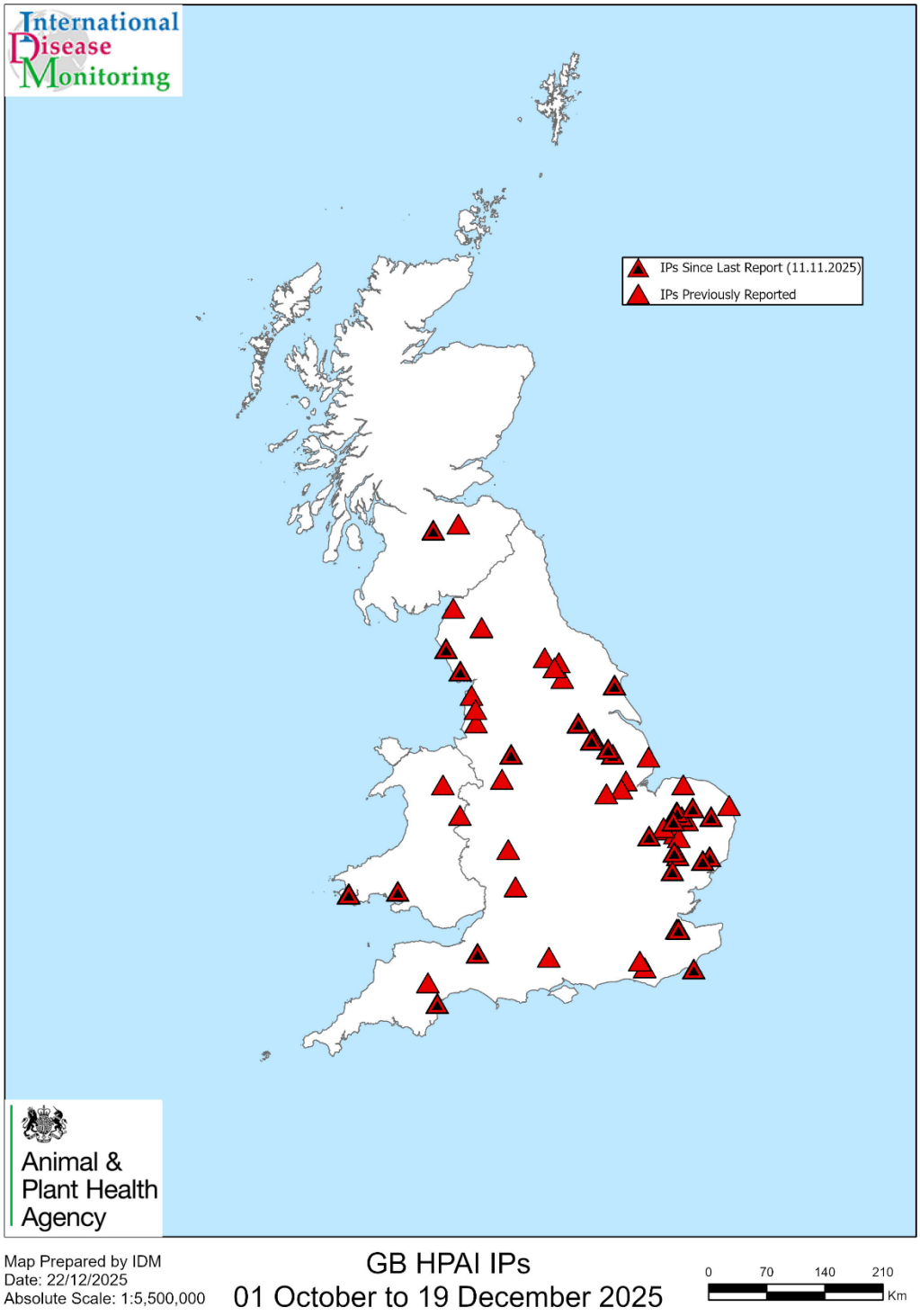


Figure 1: Number of HPAI H5N1-infected premises (IPs) in Great Britain each week from 28 September to 19 December 2025 split into countries.

As of 00:01 on 6 November 2025, a mandatory housing order to cover the whole of England was introduced for poultry flocks of more than 50 birds or those that sell or give away eggs or poultry products (National Housing Order declared to protect poultry from Avian Influenza - GOV.UK). From 00:01 13 November, mandatory housing measures were introduced in Wales. This is a legal requirement for all keepers of 50 or more birds of any species and those with flocks of less than 50 birds if eggs or poultry products are sold or given away. Additional measures are being introduced for gamebirds. An Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) remains in place across Scotland.

An AIPZ was introduced in Northern Ireland from 00:01 on Saturday 1 November 2025. Following 2 confirmations of HPAI H5N1 in County Tyrone and County Fermanagh, mandatory housing measures for all kept birds and poultry came in to force in Northern Ireland from 00:01, 6 November. There is also a ban on Galliformes and Anseriformes gatherings.

For updates on the latest situation in England please see Gov.uk.



Map 1. Showing HPAI H5Nx Infected Premises across Great Britain from 1 October 2025 to 19 December 2025. Black triangles with red borders are IPs since our last report (11 November 2025). Discussed in body of report.

Wild birds

The weekly number of HPAI H5-positive wild bird cases in Great Britain is shown in Figure 2. Between 11 November 2025 and 19 December (based on laboratory testing date), HPAI H5 has been detected in 374 found-dead wild birds, including 23 wild bird species (data available https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/avian-influenza-in-wild-birds), across 38 counties. Wild bird cases since 11 November have been reported at mainly inland locations across Great Britain (Map 2). The majority of the findings were in England (121), with 7 in Wales and 5 in Scotland (based on laboratory testing date).

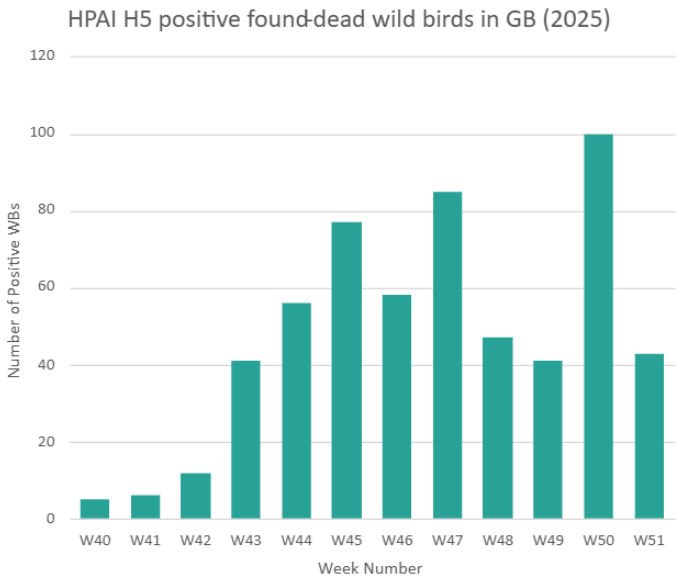
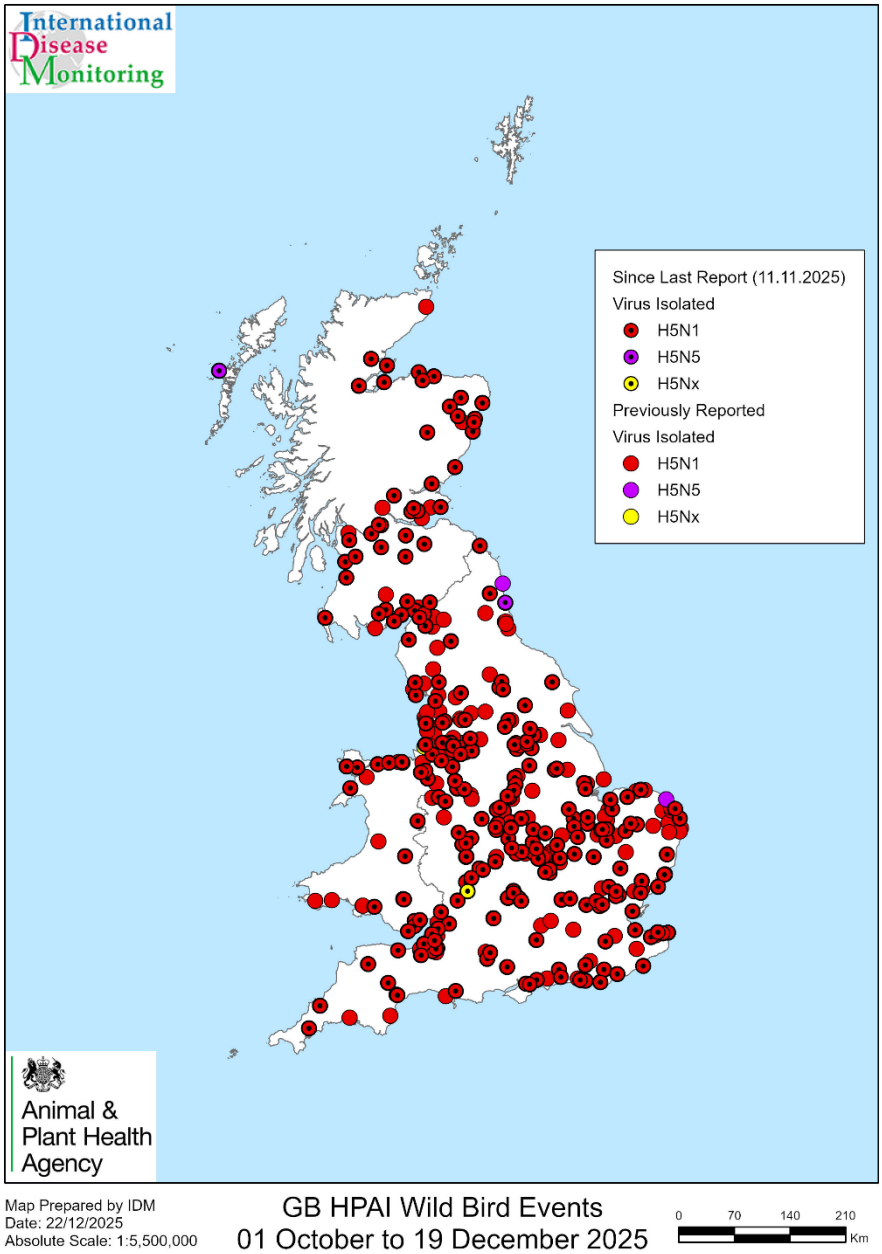


Figure 2: Detections per week of HPAI H5 positive found-dead wild birds in Great Britain since 28 September to 19 December 2025 (based on test date).

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.



Map 2. Wild bird positive detections for HPAI reports across Great Britain from 1 October 2025 to 19 December 2025 (based on laboratory testing date). Circles with a dot inside are wild bird positive detections since our previous assessment on 11 November 2025 and those without are before 11 November 2025. The map shows many inland cases across most of Great Britain as discussed in body of report.

Non-avian wildlife

Since 11 November, there have been no further positive HPAI H5 detections in non-avian wildlife in Great Britain. 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.

Europe

Between 11 November 2025 and 19 December 2025 there were a total of 2,140 HPAI H5 events in domestic poultry, captive birds and non-poultry including wild birds across Europe reported by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Of these reports on WOAH, 1,831 were in wild birds, 33 in non-commercial poultry and 276 were poultry outbreaks. Positive reports according to data from IZSVe (2025) more than doubled from 236 in week 43 to 510 in week 44, continuing at around 500 per week for the next three weeks and peaking at 607 in week 47 as shown in Figure 3. Reports continue to be dominated by the large number of wild bird cases, which reflects the large number of cases in common cranes along their migration route in Germany, France and now Spain. Between 11 November 2025 and 19 December 2025 there were a total of 664 cases in common cranes in Europe according to WOAH (2025) of which 517 were in Germany and 76 were in France. Spain has recently started detecting cases in common cranes as they arrive from north-eastern Europe with 48 cases according to WOAH (2025). From week 48, the number of positive reports of HPAI in wild birds and poultry in Europe has started to fall with fewer than 400 positive reports in week 48 (Figure 3).

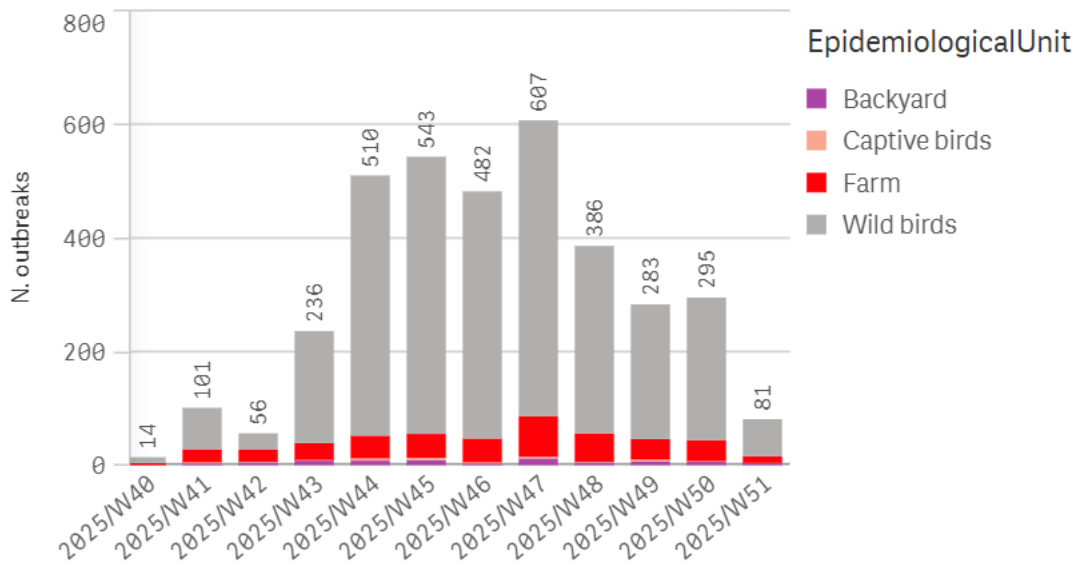
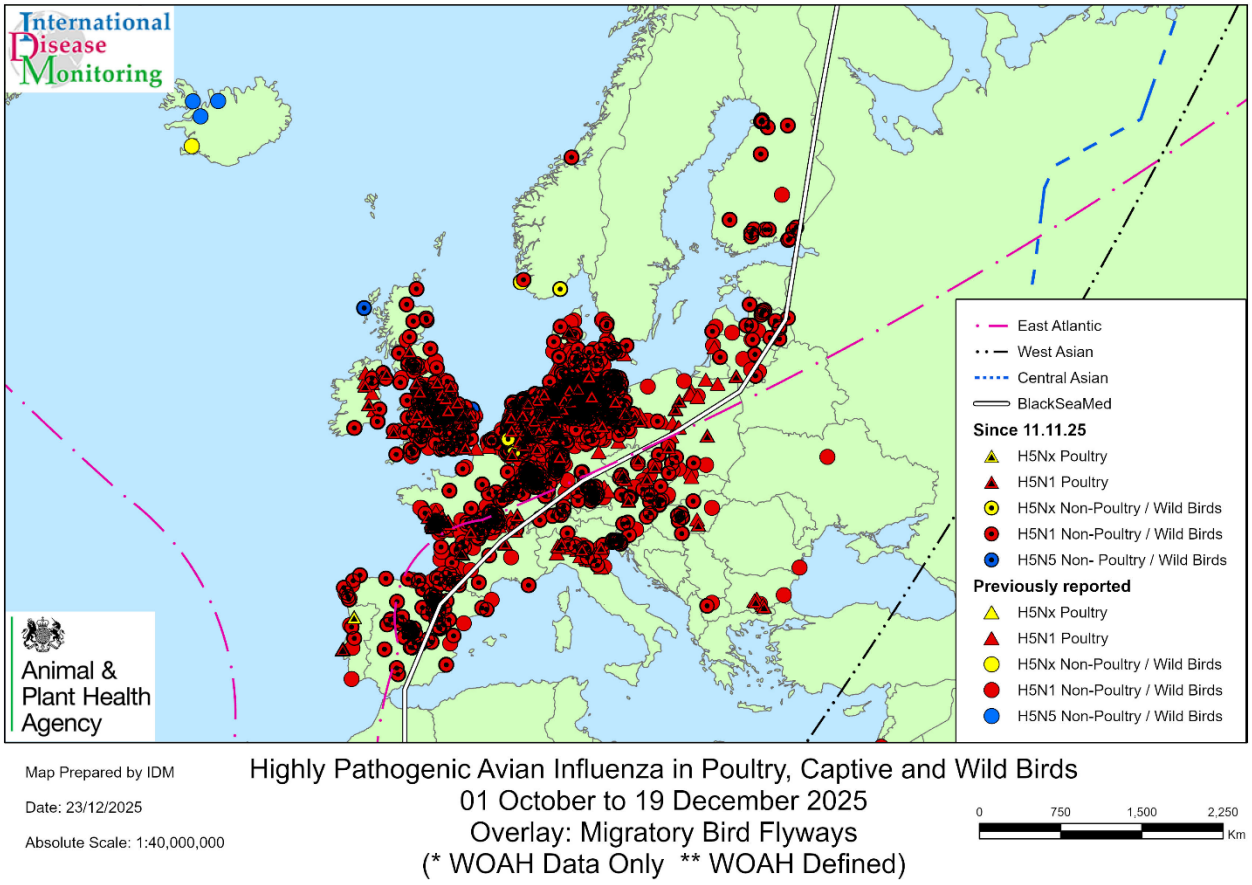


Figure 3: Weekly numbers of HPAI H5 positive reports in Europe according to data from IZSVe (2025) to 19 December 2025. The figure shows levels doubling in late October to 482 in week 44 and then remaining at about 500 to 600 per week through November. The proportion of wild bird cases in grey increases more rapidly than the proportion of poultry outbreaks in red and purple as discussed in the text. It should be noted there will be more reports to follow for weeks 50 and 51.

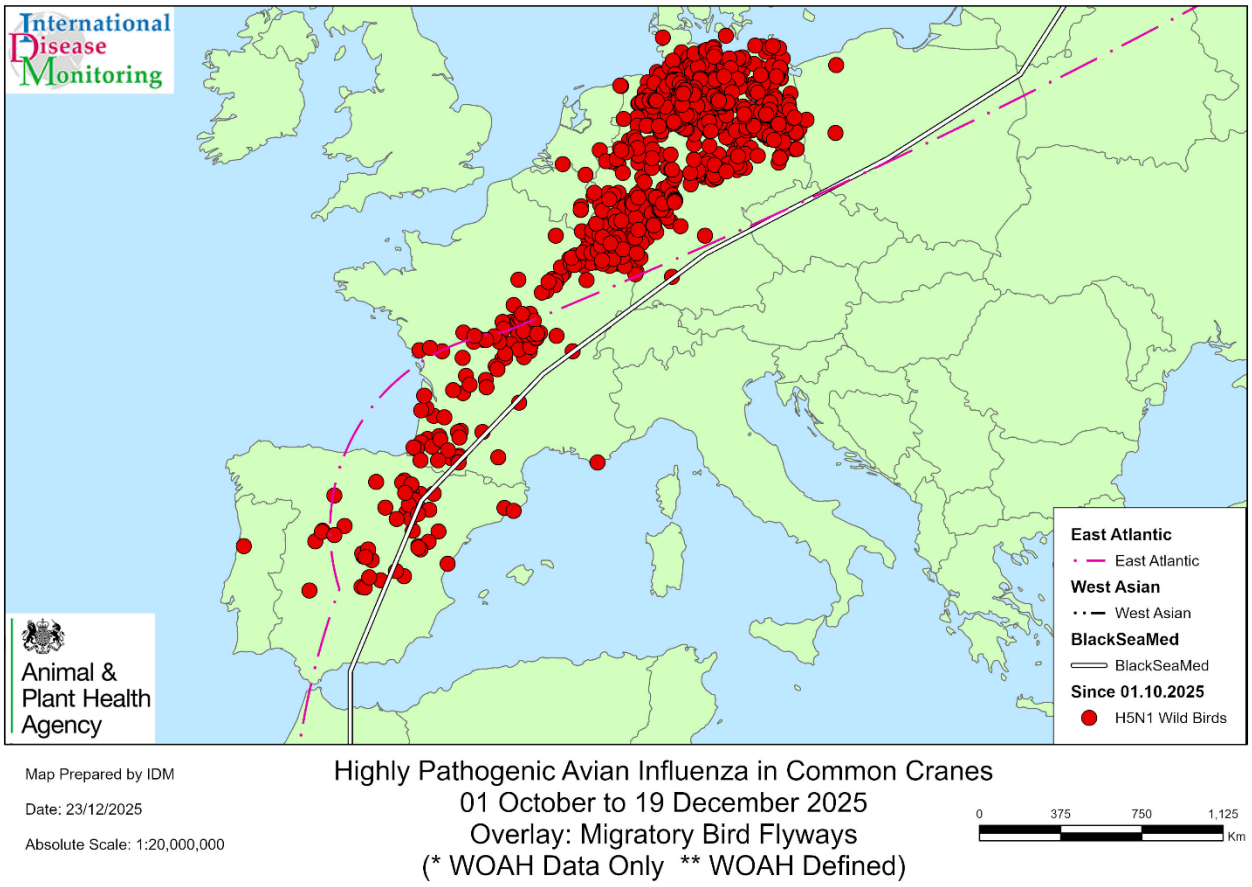
In the week to the 17 December, only 9 wild bird cases were reported in Germany on ADIS (2025) compared to over 400 a few weeks earlier. However, even up to the week ending 17 December 2025, Belgium reported 52 cases of HPAI H5/H5N1 and the Netherlands 27 cases on ADIS (2025).



Map 3. HPAI events in domestic poultry and wild birds in Europe reported by WOAH between 1 October 2025 and 15 December 2025 (WOAH, 2025). Reports since 11 November have dotted centres. Wild bird cases and poultry outbreaks across most of northern Germany, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands as described in the main body of this report above.

Map 3 shows the HPAI H5 reports from WOAH across Europe from 1 October 2025 to 19 December 2025 with the reports since our previous assessment on 11 November 2025 (High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3) discerned with dotted centres. The number and density of reports across northern Germany, Denmark, Belgium, north-east France and the Netherlands is remarkable, and reports in the Iberian Peninsula have increased markedly mainly due to the arrival of the common cranes. The location of common crane cases in Europe is shown in Map 4 with the migration route extending south-west from the north-east through Germany and France and into Spain. Preliminary data from Germany, France, Luxembourg and Belgium indicate that viruses belonging to the subcluster EA-2024-DI.2.1 were responsible for the mass mortality events in common cranes in these countries (PAFF 2025). Other wild bird species reported in Europe include migratory ducks and geese, mute swans, raptors and pheasants and a small number of passerine species including thrushes and Columbiformes (notably 5 Eurasian collared doves in Belgium).

In addtion to 517 cases in common cranes, Germany has reported 433 wild bird cases in geese, 62 hawks, 24 mallard ducks and 14 cases in gulls. In France, mass mortalities have been detected in migrating cranes along the migration corridor from the north-east to the south-west as shown in Map 3.



Map 4. Common crane cases across Europe from 1 October 2025 to 19 December 2025 (WOAH 2025). The cases highlight the common crane migration corridor from north-east Germany and southern Sweden through France and into the Iberian Peninsula.

High numbers of poultry outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 have also continued across Europe reflecting the wild bird infection pressure, most notably in France and Germany where there have been 92 and 91 outbreaks, respectively, according to data from WOAH (2025). In addition, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland have reported 21, 19 and 13 outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 on WOAH respectively with 10 in Portugal and 9 in the Czech Republic.

Implications for Great Britain

In our previous assessment on 11 November 2025 (High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3) we reported wild bird cases continuing to increase week on week in Great Britain through October and into early

November (Figure 2) together with a deteriorating situation in Europe particularly in northern Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark and France.

Table 1: Monthly numbers (and percentages) of wild bird cases of HPAI H5Nx according to bird group in Great Britain collected from 1 October 2025 to 7 December 2025. These are based on collection date (not test date) to give information on monthly trends in wild bird cases.

Wild bird group	Number of positive cases and percentage (by month)		
	October	**November**	**December**
Gamebird	3 (1.9%)	19 (6.9%)	3 (3.6%)
Gull	7 (4.4%)	18 (6.5%)	3 (3.6%)
Heron	1 (0.6%)	0	0
Migrant duck	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.4%)	0
Migrant goose	13 (8.2%)	22 (7.9%)	5 (6.0%)
Migrant swan	7 (4.4%)	22 (7.9%)	4 (4.8%)
Owl	0	2 (0.7%)	0
Pigeon	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (1.2%)
Raptor	9 (5.7%)	17 (6.1%)	5 (6.0%)
Resident goose, ducks	49 (30.8%)	56 (20.2%)	31 (37.3%)
Resident swan	63 (39.6%)	117 (42.2%)	31 (37.3%)
Seabird	1 (0.6%)	0	0
Wader	0	2 (0.7%)	0
Total	**159**	**277**	**83**

Since our previous assessment on 11 November 2025 wild bird cases have continued to increase in Great Britain with over 80 in week 47 and 100 in week 50 (see Figure 2). Wild bird cases are now across all of England, much of Wales and extending up into northern Scotland (see Map 2). Most cases are H5N1 although there are four HPAI H5N5 cases including two gulls in Northumberland and a common buzzard on the Western Isles. In October, resident swans, geese and ducks (mute swans, Canada and greylag geese and mallards) accounted for 70% of the cases in wild birds in Great Britain (Table 1) with migrant swans (whooper swans) and migrant geese (pink-footed geese) accounting for 15%. Raptors accounted for almost 6% in October and small numbers of cases continued in gulls. High numbers of cases in resident swans (mainly mute swans but also one naturalised black swan) continued through November in Great Britain with 117 cases accounting for 42% of the cases in November. Cases in resident geese and ducks fell slightly from 31% in October to 20% in November (Table 1). Cases in migrant swans (mainly whooper swans) increased markedly from just 7 in October to 22 in November in Great Britain with another four migrant swans so far in December (Table 1). The first case in a migrant Bewick's swan was reported in Lancashire in December.

The first case in migratory barnacle geese from Svalbard was reported in southern Scotland at the end of October with a case in Dumfries and Galloway. A further 3 barnacle geese cases were reported in November in Dumfries and Galloway with 2 in Cumbria taking the total in November to 5 barnacle geese. There have been 5 cases in migrant geese so far in December (Table 1), all pink-footed geese. Interestingly, detections of HPAI H5 in migratory ducks in Great Britain have remained very low this season with single Eurasian wigeon and tufted duck in October, and a single Northern pintail in October.

The trends in wild birds in Great Britain show a continuation of the cases in resident waterbirds into early December accounting for over 75% (Table 1) most notably in greylag geese, Canada geese and mute swans. On the basis of the continuing high numbers of wild bird cases in Great Britain through December (see Figure 2), the wild bird risk level is maintained at VERY HIGH.

It is not clear how long these high numbers of wild bird cases will continue in Great Britain. It is perhaps reassuring that the number of wild bird cases appears to be falling in Europe (Figure 3) although this may reflect the fall in common crane cases which have dominated wild bird reports in Europe through November and December. So far Great Britain has not detected any cases in common cranes which are relatively uncommon in Great Britain and tend to be resident. It is considered now that most migratory wild waterbirds have arrived in Great Britain for the winter from the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, and unless there is a prolonged spell of cold weather on the Continent that relatively few additional birds will fly over to Great Britain this winter. It is anticipated that wild bird cases in Great Britain will reduce to lower numbers as we approach March and April as the migratory waterbirds depart and the resident waterbirds disperse from their winter aggregations to

their breeding sites. It is not clear whether HPAI H5 will over-summer in gulls and seabirds in summer 2026.

Although the situation with wild birds may be improving in northern Europe and the number of poultry IPs in Great Britain lower week on week since the peak at the start of November (week 45) (Figure 1), the number of wild bird cases across Great Britain (see Figure 2) supports maintaining the wild bird risk level in Great Britain at VERY HIGH.

In our previous assessment, the risk level for poultry with suboptimal biosecurity was increased from high to VERY HIGH (with low uncertainty). This reflected the multiple IPs across a range of different production types in the non-stringent biosecurity poultry category in Great Britain with 14 IPs in week 45 alone. Since our previous assessment the number of poultry IPs has fallen markedly to 3 per week in week 50 (Figure 1), averaging around 5 per week in the last 5 weeks. Despite this decrease, the number of weekly IPs is still concerning and there continues to be a very high wild bird infection pressure in Great Britain (Figure 2). Therefore, on the basis of the IP data, the risk level for poultry with suboptimal biosecurity is reduced from very high (low uncertainty) to HIGH (occurs very often) with medium uncertainty.

The very high wild bird infection pressure is undoubtedly still presenting a substantial risk to poultry with stringent biosecurity and indeed small numbers of outbreaks on premises with housed birds with good biosecurity continue each week. While the risk level appears to have decreased (as judged by the number of IPs in Figure 1), it should be noted that the range of a very high risk range is smaller than the ‘high’ risk range, and there is still significant risk to poultry and it is not considered that the risk to poultry with stringent biosecurity is at low as yet. The risk level for poultry with stringent biosecurity is therefore maintained at MEDIUM with low uncertainty.

Conclusion

Since our previous assessment on 11 November 2025 (High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in Great Britain and Europe updated outbreak assessment 3), cases of HPAI H5Nx in Great Britain have continued at very high levels in wild birds week on week with almost 100 cases in week 50 alone (Figure 2). These are mainly resident waterbirds such as mute swans, Canada and greylag geese (Table 1). Therefore, the national risk level for HPAI H5 in wild birds in Great Britain is maintained at VERY HIGH (occurs almost certainly).

The risks to poultry both in Great Britain and Europe have increased with the increasing wild bird infection pressure. Since our previous assessment on the 11 November 2025 when the risk to poultry with suboptimal biosecurity was increased to very high (low uncertainty) there have been another 33 new IPs in Great Britain. However, week on week the number of IPs in Great Britain has decreased from 14 in week 45 to 3 in week 50 (see Figure 1). The risk of infection of poultry in Great Britain with suboptimal biosecurity is therefore decreased to HIGH (occurs very often) with medium uncertainty. This risk level

reflects the continued considerable infection pressure from wild birds in Great Britain and good biosecurity practices remain of utmost importance. There have been one or two premises per week recently with stringent biosecurity and while the risk to poultry with stringent biosecurity may be decreasing it is not yet at low. The risk to poultry with stringent biosecurity is therefore maintained at MEDIUM (occurs regularly) and the uncertainty is maintained at low.

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 important that stringent adherence to good biosecurity practices is maintained.

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 global scale, whilst utilising international 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 dead wild birds f 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.

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).

ADIS (2025) Animal Disease Information System (ADIS) - Food Safety.

PAFF (2025) The 2024-2025 clade 2.3.4.4b epidemic wave – a genetic view. Presentation: PAFF Committee – Animal health and welfare - 20-21 November 2025 - Genetic Evolution HPAI & ND.

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.