Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Updated Outbreak Assessment #5

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

27 February 2026

Disease report

In our previous outbreak assessment on 19 December 2025 (HPAI_Europe__4_December_2025.pdf) we noted that cases of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5 in wild birds were continuing at high levels both in Europe and Great Britain and the wild bird risk level in Great Britain was still considered to be VERY HIGH. Since then, wild bird cases in Great Britain have continued, albeit slowly falling from the peak in December (Figure 2), with 273 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 854. Of these 854, 839 have been confirmed as HPAI H5N1, 11 as HPAI H5Nx and 4 as HPAI H5N5 (see Map 2 for wild bird cases).

Wild bird cases since our previous outbreak assessment on 19 December 2025 extend across most of Great Britain with many inland cases (see Map 2). Wild bird cases have slowly fallen in the first 2 months of 2026 roughly halving from around 40 per week in January to 20 per week in February with just 11 cases in the last week of February. Most wild bird cases in Great Britain in 2026 have been in resident water birds namely mute swans, Canada geese and greylag geese, with some cases in migratory pink-footed geese. There were two cases in seabirds, namely a puffin in Tayside and a gannet in Suffolk. Also there was a case of the BB 'gull strain' (as opposed to the DI.2.1 genotype) in a herring gull in Wales in late January. Given the relatively high number of cases in wild bird ongoing in February, the wild bird risk level across Great Britain is maintained at VERY HIGH. The number of migratory waterbirds overwintering in Great Britain will have peaked in December and January and few birds are now expected to fly over to Great Britain from northern Europe, where positive reports of HPAI H5 have also continued.

Since our previous outbreak assessment on 19 December 2025 there have been 25 reports of HPAI H5 clade 2.3.4.4b in domestic poultry in Great Britain with 18 in England and 7 in Scotland. These extend across most of England and into southern Scotland, namely Scottish Borders, Perth and Kinross and Midlothian although there have been no more in Wales (see Map 1). All 25 reports have been confirmed as HPAI H5N1. However, while there have been 25 more IPs since our previous assessment, the number of IPs per week in Great Britain has steadily fallen from 14 in week 45 (early November) of 2025 to

on average one per week by week 5 (early February) of 2026 (see Figure 1). This supports a reduction in the medium risk level for poultry with stringent biosecurity from medium to LOW. The risk to poultry with suboptimal biosecurity is maintained at HIGH while the wild bird risk is still at very high and considering there will be a change in wild bird behaviour with outward migration in coming weeks and a lot of movement of wild birds within Great Britain. It should be noted that the 'high' risk level (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 decreased from medium with low uncertainty to LOW with medium uncertainty
- with non-stringent or suboptimal biosecurity is maintained at HIGH with medium uncertainty

Since our previous assessment on the 19 December 2025 (HPAI_Europe__4_December_2025.pdf), outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in poultry have continued through January and February across Europe with 269 reports between 20 December 2025 and 26 February 2026 to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH 2026). Of these 269 new poultry outbreaks, 60 were in Germany, 58 in Poland, 33 in France and 22 in the Netherlands. At this time of year (late February) migratory waterbirds are not expect to fly from these areas to Great Britain because in the next few weeks those migratory waterflow will be flying north-east from their wintering sites in Europe to their breeding sites.

Wild bird cases of HPAI have continued across Europe with 2,100 cases of HPAI H5N1, 2 cases of HPAI H5N2, one case of HPAI H5N9 and 29 cases of HPAI H5Nx between 20 December 2025 and 26 February 2026 according to WOAH (2026). As with poultry outbreaks, Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands were most affected with 1,300, 157, 131 and 102 wild bird cases respectively on WOAH. There were also 123 wild bird cases in Poland. Wild bird cases were also detected in Norway (26 cases), Sweden (47 case) and Denmark (52 cases). Common cranes cases have fallen markedly with just one case in Germany and Poland and none in France or Belgium so far in 2026.

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 19 December 2025 (to 24 February 2026) there have been 25 infected premises (IPs) confirmed with HPAI H5N1 in poultry. Of these, 18 occurred in England and 7 in Scotland (see Map 1 for approximate locations). These have been reported in a mixture of backyard and commercial premises housing poultry. 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 with on average around 1 per week in February (see Figure 1).

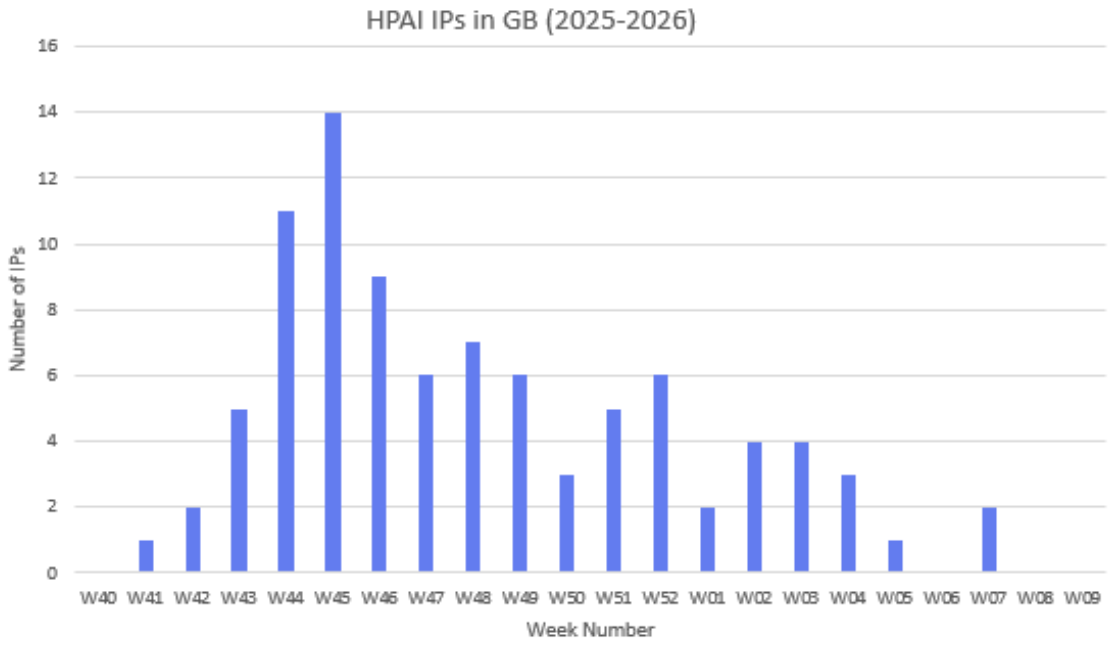
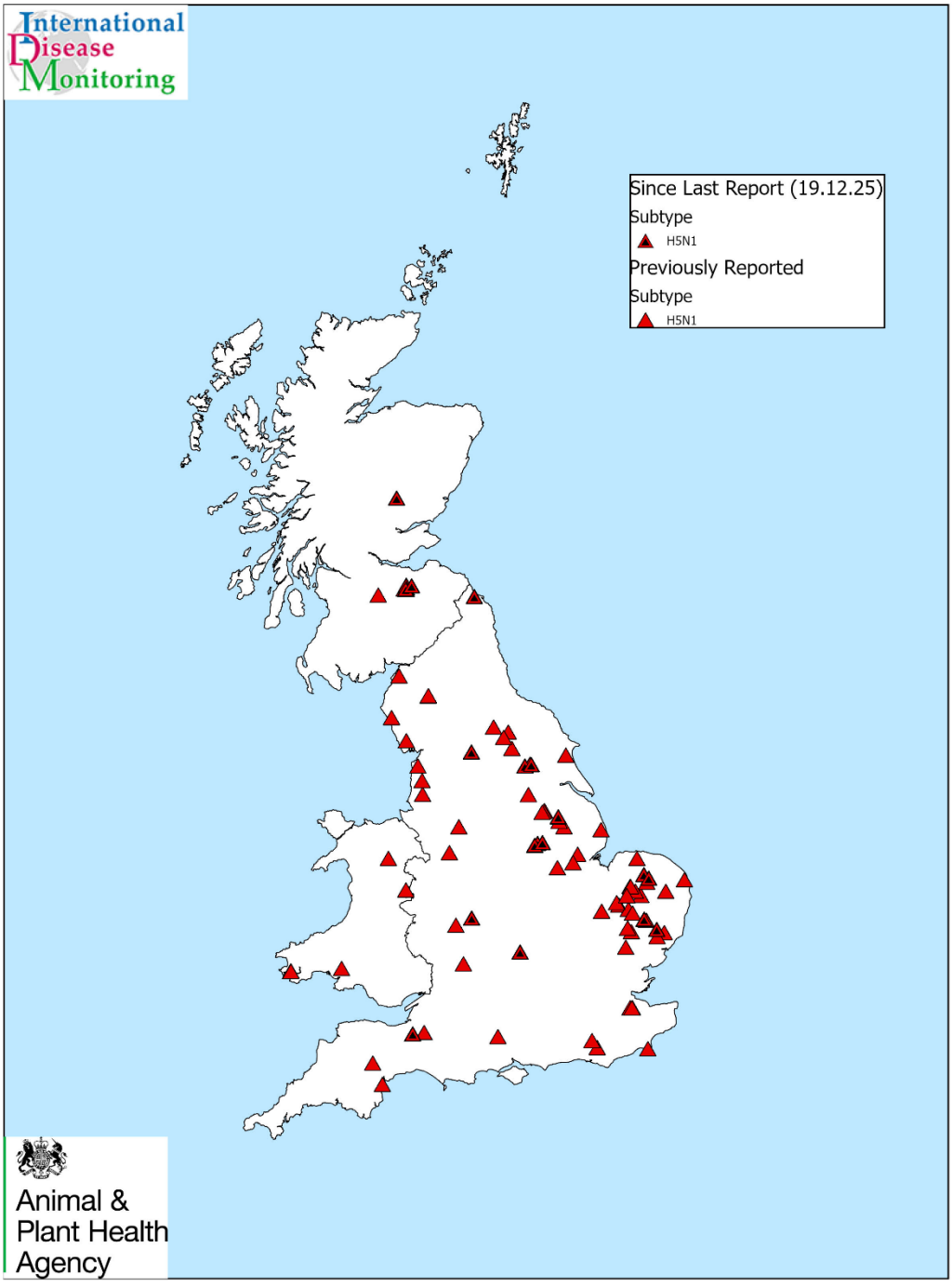


Figure 1: Number of HPAI H5N1-infected premises (IPs) in Great Britain each week from 28 September to 27 February 2026. Graph shows number of IPs coming down from a peak of 14 per week in week 45 to around 1 per week in February.

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 2025, 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. 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 27 February 2026. Black triangles with red borders are IPs since our last report (19 December 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 19 December and 27 February (based on laboratory testing date), HPAI H5

has been detected in 284 found-dead wild birds, including 26 wild bird species (data available https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/avian-influenza-in-wild-birds), across 72 counties. Wild bird cases since 19 December have been reported at both inland and coastal locations across Great Britain (Map 2). The majority of the findings were in England (189), with 86 in Scotland and 9 in Wales (based on laboratory testing date).

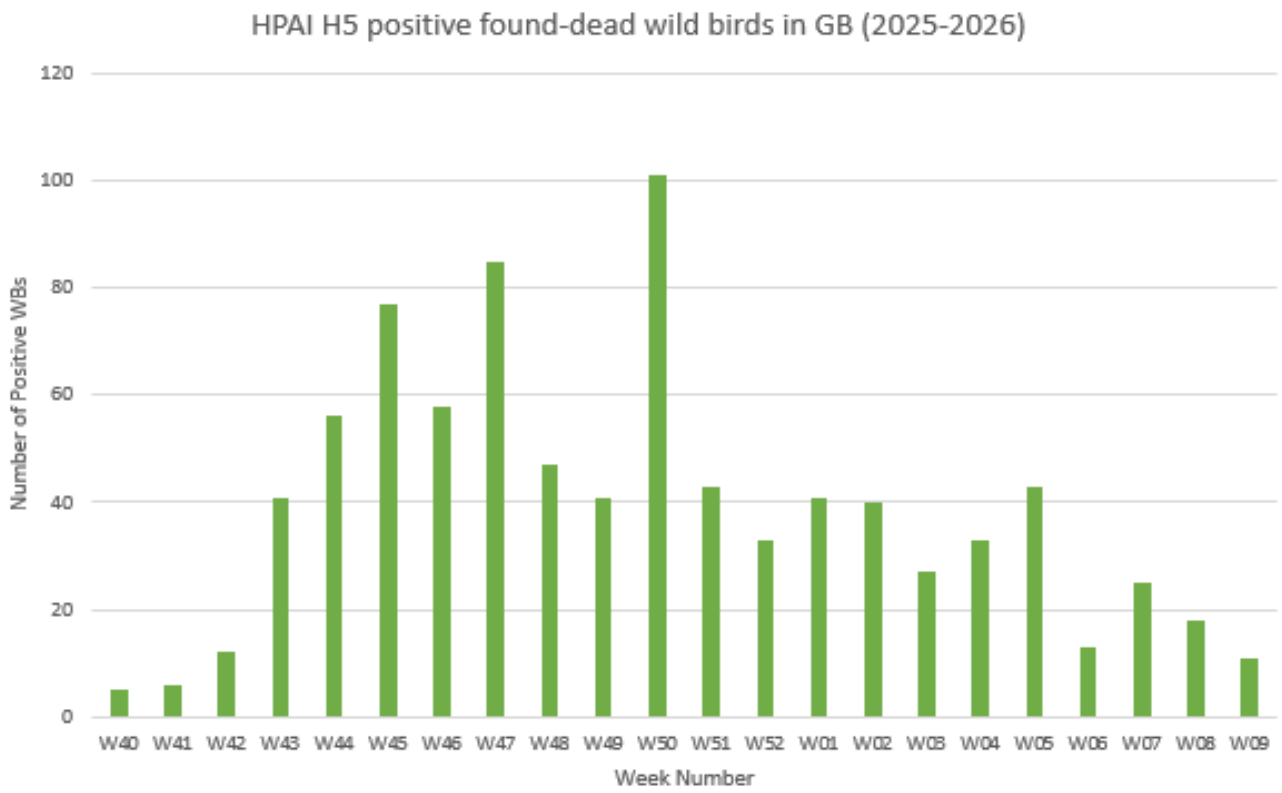
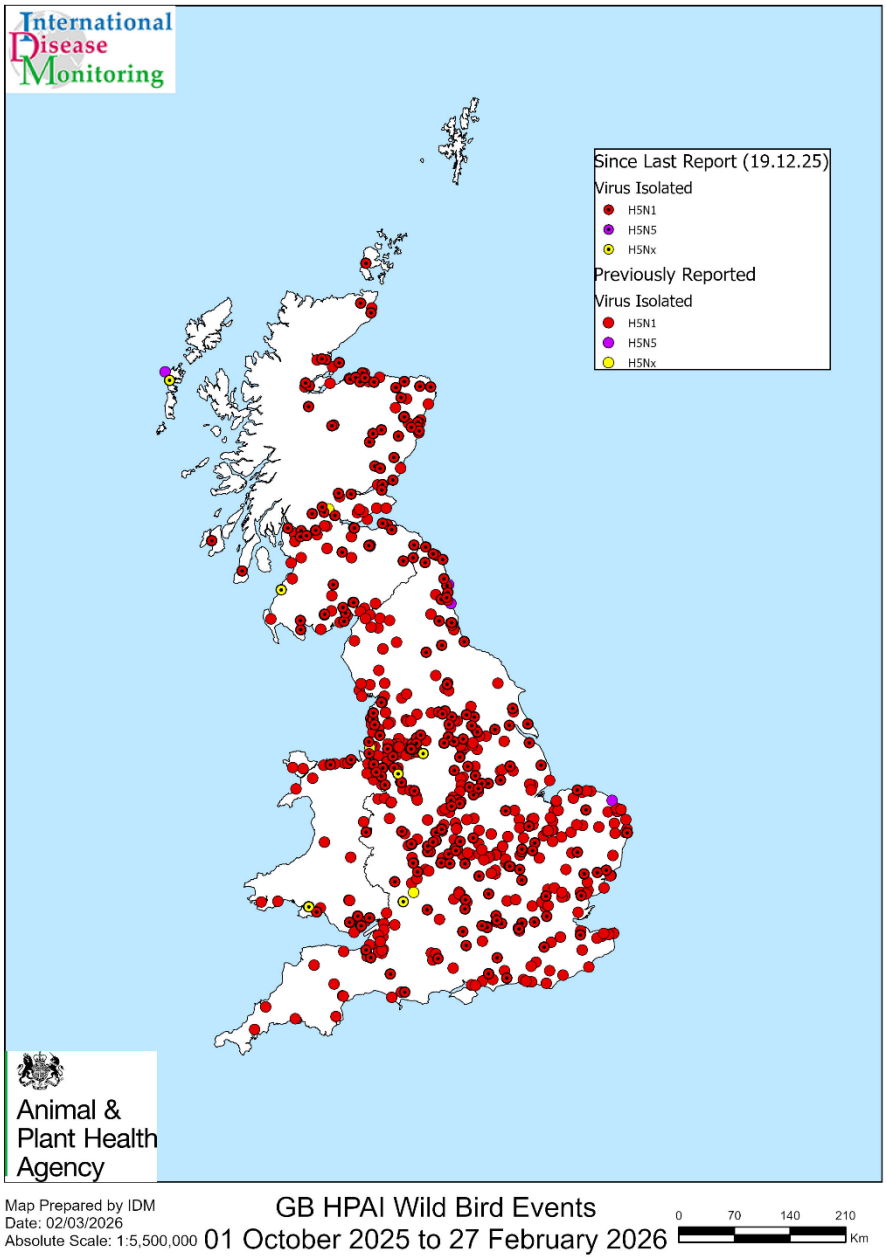


Figure 2: Detections per week of HPAI H5 positive found-dead wild birds in Great Britain since 28 September 2025 to 27 February 2026 (based on test date).

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 27 February 2026 (based on laboratory testing date). Circles with a dot inside are wild bird positive detections since our previous assessment on 19 December 2025 and those without are before 19 December 2025. The map shows coastal and inland cases across most of Great Britain as discussed in body of report.

Non-avian wildlife

Since 19 December, there has been one positive HPAI H5 detection in non-avian wildlife in Great Britain. This case involved a Eurasian otter that was retrospectively tested from September 2025.

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 20 December 2025 and 26 February 2026 there were a total of 2,395 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, 2,132 were in wild birds, 92 in non-commercial poultry and 177 were poultry outbreaks. In total there were 2,100 wild bird cases of HPAI H5N1 including 2 in Iceland in January 2026. Of interest, there were single cases of HPAI H5N2 in wildfowl in Latvia (mallard duck) and Sweden (barnacle goose) in November 2025, although HPAI H5N2 has not been detected further west this season. There was also a case of HPAI H5N6 in a gull in Portugal in November. Positive reports according to data from IZSVe (2025) have fluctuated at around 200 per week since January 2026 as shown in Figure 3. Reports continue to be dominated by the large number of wild bird cases, although the number of cases in common cranes has greatly diminished with 209 reported since 20 December 2026 and most of these (164) detected in Germany in December with 41 in France, all detected in December.

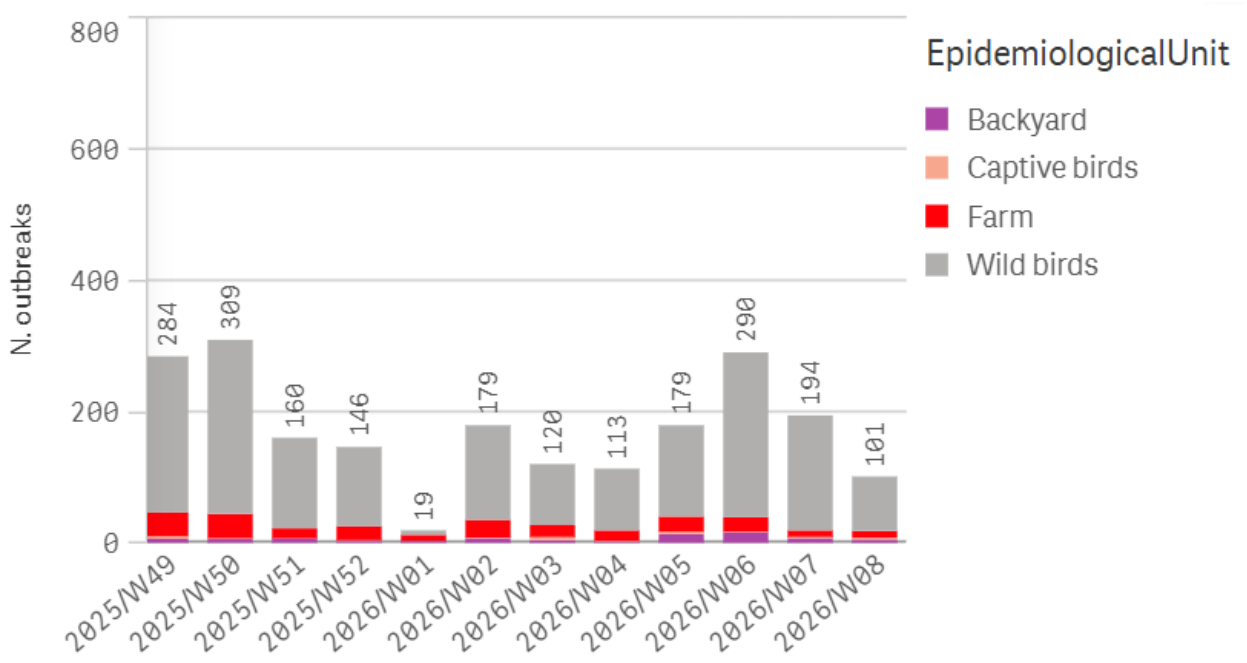
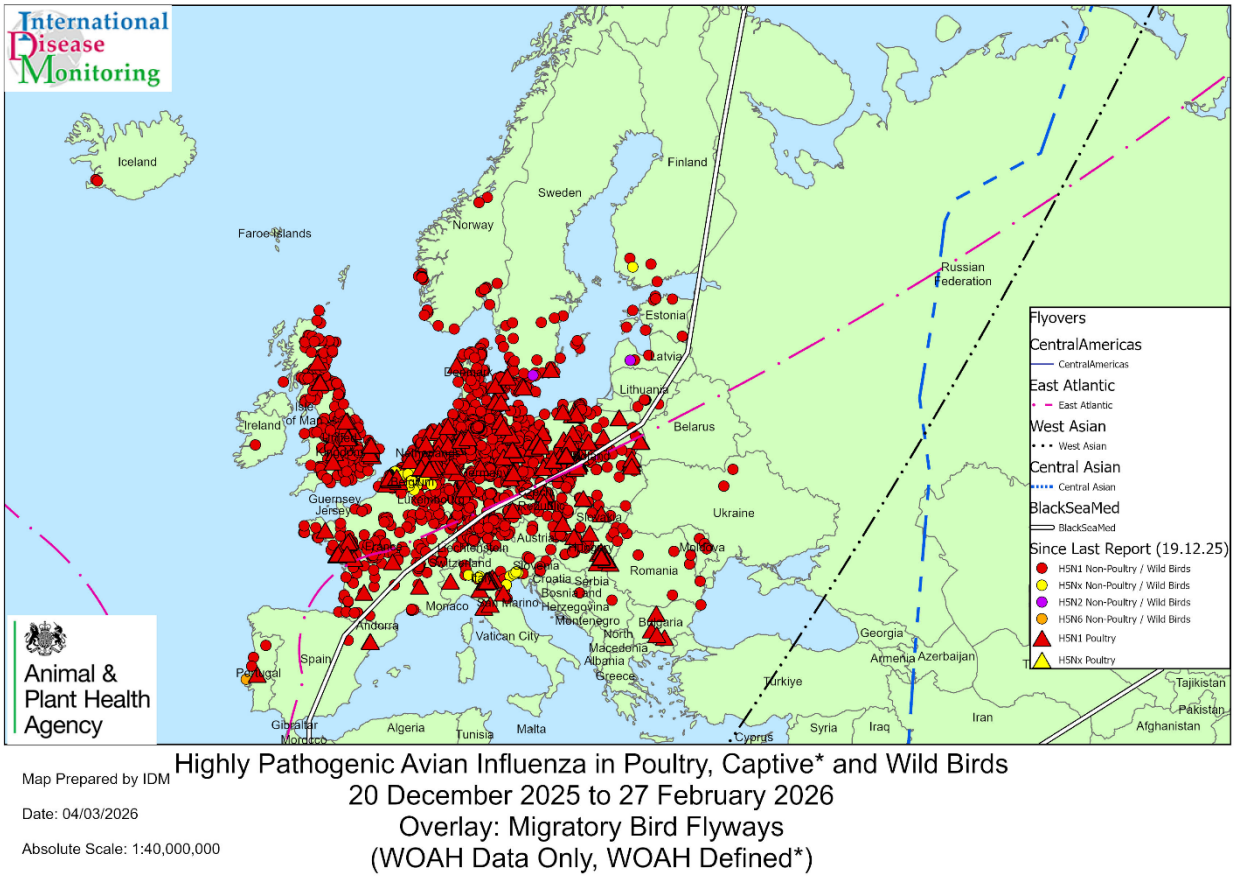


Figure 3: Weekly numbers of HPAI H5 positive reports in Europe according to data from IZSVe (2026) from December 2025 to 27 February 2026. The figure shows levels fluctuating at around 200 positive reports per week through late December and into February. Wild bird cases in grey account for the major proportion relative to the poultry outbreaks in red and

purple as discussed in the text. It should be noted there will be more reports to follow for week 08.

Large numbers of wild bird cases have been reported on ADIS (2026) this year. From 1 January 2026 to 25 February 2026 there have been 580 wild bird cases in Germany, 113 in Poland, 81 in the Netherlands, 77 in Belgium, 52 in Denmark, 36 in Hungary, 28 in Sweden, 27 in Czechia, 22 in France, 21 in Norway, 15 in Austria, and fewer than 10 wild bird cases each in Spain, Estonia, Finland, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovkia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Switzerland, Iceland, Moldova and Serbia. Some of those 580 wild bird cases in Germany are likely to be detections from 2025 as shown through assessing data from WOAH.



Map 3. HPAI events in domestic poultry and wild birds in Europe reported by WOAH between 20 December 2025 and 27 February 2026 (WOAH, 2026). Wild bird cases and poultry outbreaks continue across most of northern and central Europe with only southern Europe relatively unaffected as described in the main body of this report above.

Map 3 shows the HPAI H5 reports from WOAH across Europe from 20 December 2025 to 26 February 2026. The high number and density of reports across northern and central Europe continue with very few reports in southern Europe including the Iberian Peninsula, southern Italy and the Balkans. Wild bird species reported in Europe are still predominantly large numbers of ducks and geese, mute swans, and raptors with smaller number of grebes, cormorants, owls, pheasants and a few passerine species including blackbirds

and 11 Columbiformes. In February on WOAH (to 26 February 2026) there have been 419 detections including 39 poultry outbreaks, 29 non-commercial poultry outbreaks and 351 wild bird cases.

Since 20 December 2025, Germany has reported 1,378 detections on WOAH including 60 poultry outbreaks. Of these 844 were from 2025. Of the 534 cases in Germany in 2026, some 250 were in wild geese, with 69 cases in mute swans, although there was just one case in cranes. For February 2026 (so far to 26 February) Germany has detected 167 wild bird cases. Lower numbers have been detected in other European countries for February with 44 in Poland, 27 in Hungary, 19 in Belgium and 13 each in Austria and Czechia according to WOAH.

High numbers of poultry outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 have also continued across Europe reflecting the wild bird infection pressure, most notably in Germany, Poland and France where there have been 60, 58 and 33 outbreaks, respectively, according to data from WOAH (2026). In addition, Italy, the Netherlands and Czechia have reported 25, 22 and 20 outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 on WOAH respectively with 11 in Hungary and 9 in Denmark. On ADIS (2026) in the week to 25 February 2026 there were 227 wild bird cases of HPAI H5N1 reported in Germany (although many of these may be detections from 2025 as discussed above), 20 in Poland, 14 each in Belgium and the Netherlands, 12 in Denmark, 7 in Hungary, 5 in Sweden with fewer than 5 cases in Austria, Estonia, France, Croatia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, Switzerland and Norway.

Implications for Great Britain

In our previous assessment on 19 December 2025 (HPAI_Europe__4_December_2025.pdf) we reported wild bird cases continuing at high levels into mid-December in Great Britain (Figure 2) together with ongoing high numbers of wild bird cases in Europe, particularly in common cranes. Wild bird cases continue in Europe (Figure 3) although migratory ducks, geese and swans will not be flying into Great Britain from northern Europe at this time of year (late February to/ early March). Wild bird cases have been reported across much of Great Britain through January and into February (see Map 2). Since our previous assessment on 19 December 2025 wild bird cases have generally fallen since the peak of over 100 cases in week 50 (mid-December) 2025 in Great Britain with fewer than 25 cases per week in late February (see Figure 2). Monthly trends are apparent from the month totals in Table 1 with the total number of wild bird cases roughly halving each month since the peak in November/December.

Table 1: Monthly numbers (and percentages) of positive wild bird cases of HPAI H5Nx according to bird group in Great Britain collected from 1 October 2025 to 27 February 2026. These are based on collection date (not test date) to give information on monthly trends in wild bird cases.

Wild bird group	October	November	December	January	February
Gamebird	3 (1.9%)	18 (6.5%)	3 (1.3%)	0	0
Gull	7 (4.4%)	18 (6.5%)	8 (3.4%)	4 (3.1%)	5 (10.6%)
Heron	1 (0.6%)	0	0	0	0
Migrant goose or duck	16 (10.0%)	23 (8.3%)	28 (11.9%)	11 (8.6%)	5 (10.6%)
Migrant swan	7 (4.4%)	22 (7.9%)	7 (3.0%)	1 (0.8%)	0
Owl	0	2 (0.7%)	0	3 (2.3%)	1 (2.1%)
Pigeon	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.4%)	1 (0.4%)	3 (2.3%)	0
Raptor	10 (6.4%)	17 (6.1%)	32 (13.6%)	26 (20.3%)	11 (23.4%)
Resident goose, ducks	49 (30.6%)	56 (20.2%)	70 (29.7%)	34 (26.6%)	8 (17.0%)
Resident swan	63 (39.4%)	117 (42.2%)	83 (35.2%)	46 (35.9%)	15 (31.9%)
Seabird	1 (0.6%)	0	1 (0.4%)	0	2 (4.3%)
Wader	0	3 (1.1%)	3 (1.3%)	0	0
Total	**160**	**277**	**236**	**128**	**47**

Resident geese and ducks (greylag geese and Canada geese) and resident swans (mainly mute swans with the occasional black swan) continue to account for two-thirds of the wild bird cases in Great Britain throughout December and January falling to just under half in February (Table 1). Migrant geese and ducks (mainly pink-footed geese) have continued at around 10% of wild bird cases each month while the percentage of cases in raptors (mainly common buzzard) has steadily increased month on month to almost 25% in February (Table 1).

On the basis of the continued high numbers of wild bird cases in Great Britain, and the upcoming outward migration with large-scale movement of birds, (see Figure 2) the wild bird risk level is maintained at VERY HIGH.

In our previous assessment on 19 December 2025 (HPAI_Europe__4_December_2025.pdf) the risk level in Great Britain for poultry with sub-optimal biosecurity was reduced from very high to high (medium uncertainty reflecting the steady fall in the number of IPs since the peak of 14 at the beginning of November (week 45). Since our previous assessment the number of IPs has continued to fall steadily with an average on around one per week at the end of February (Figure 1). On the basis that no outbreaks in poultry premises with stringent biosecurity have been reported in the last month, the risk level for poultry with stringent biosecurity has been reduced from medium (low uncertainty) to LOW with medium uncertainty. The wild bird infection pressure appears to be falling (Figure 2) albeit from very high levels. With the dispersion of the wintering aggregates of resident waterbirds together with the departure of the migratory waterbirds in the next few week, it is anticipated that the wild bird risk will fall further. However, while the wild bird risk is at VERY HIGH, the infection pressure on poultry remains, and therefore the risk level for poultry with suboptimal biosecurity is maintained at HIGH (with medium uncertainty).

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. However, there will be large scale movements of waterbirds within Great Britain in the coming weeks as resident waterbirds disperse from their wintering aggregations and migratory waterbirds fly across Great Britain. This not only includes pink-footed geese for example flying north through Scotland but also ducks from the island of Ireland flying across Great Britain as they head north and east. It is notable from Table 1 that in February the percentage of gull cases has doubled to over 10% albeit with only a small number of cases (5 in February). It is not clear at this stage whether this is the start of spread within gulls into the summer, and it should be noted that the BB ‘gull strain’ of HPAI H5N1 which over-summered in 2025 has been detected in a herring gull in Wales in late January 2026. It is also noted that there were 2 cases in seabirds (namely a puffin in Angus and a gannet in Suffolk) in February.

Conclusion

Since our previous assessment on 19 December 2025 (HPAI_Europe__4_December_2025.pdf), cases of HPAI H5Nx in wild birds in Great Britain have continued to steadily fall from very high levels week on week to around 20 cases per week (Figure 2). These are mainly resident waterbirds such as mute swans, Canada and greylag geese (Table 1). Although the number of cases in wild birds continues to fall, there are still a number of reports weekly in various locations in Great Britain including inland sites and across multiple waterbird species. Therefore, the national risk level for HPAI H5 in wild birds in Great Britain is maintained at VERY HIGH (occurs almost certainly). Wild bird cases are continuing at high levels in Europe (Figure 3) particularly in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. At this time of year (almost March), it is very unlikely that wild birds would fly from Continental Europe into Great Britain.

The risk to poultry where stringent biosecurity is maintained is decreasing in line with the decrease in wild bird cases as shown in the fall in the number of IPs each week (Figure 1). With no outbreaks in stringent biosecurity premises in the last month, the risk level for poultry with stringent biosecurity is reduced from medium to LOW (with medium uncertainty). The risk of infection of poultry in Great Britain with suboptimal biosecurity is maintained at HIGH (occurs very often) with medium uncertainty. This risk level reflects the continued considerable infection pressure from wild birds at multiple locations in Great Britain (Map 2), and the upcoming large-scale movements of waterfowl within Great Britain as part of outward migration. Good biosecurity practices remain of utmost importance.

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 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.

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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 (2026) Animal Disease Information System (ADIS) - Food Safety.

IZSVe (2026) EURL Avian Flu Data Portal (izsvenezie.it)

WOAH (2026) 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.