Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Updated Outbreak Assessment #47

# High pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in the UK and Europe

01 November 2023

## Disease report

Since our last outbreak assessment on 10 October 2023, there has been one further report of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5 clade 2.3.3.4b in domestic poultry in the United Kingdom (UK). The outbreak was on a smallholder premises. There have been 7 HPAI H5 clade 2.3.3.4b events involving "found-dead" wild birds in Great Britain since our last assessment.

Weekly found-dead wild bird cases have been low throughout Great Britain for a number of weeks, so the **wild bird risk** level has been reduced from high (occurs often) to **medium** (occurs regularly)**.** The risk to **poultry with stringent biosecurity** remains at **low, with low uncertainty,** and the risk to **poultry with suboptimal biosecurity** also remains at **low, but the uncertainty has been reduced from high to medium**. This is because of the low number of reports of found dead wild birds and Infected Premises (IPs) in Great Britain, although there remains considerable uncertainty due to the continued inward migration of wild birds.

Although housing measures and the strengthened biosecurity requirements of the Avian Influenza Prevention Zones (AIPZs) have been lifted, a ban on poultry gatherings remains in force in Scotland and Wales (the ban was lifted in England on 23 August for Galliforme poultry, but not Anseriforme poultry).

Across Europe, HPAI H5N1 cases in wild birds have fallen to a very low level from the peak in summer, with very few poultry outbreaks. Since our last report, there have been seven poultry outbreaks, three captive bird reports and 14 wild bird reports in Europe. Since 10 October 2023, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) has reported five outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in domestic poultry in Norway, and one in each of Poland, Romania, and Russia, all of which were commercial premises. Bulgaria reported two outbreaks of untyped or partially typed HPAI H5 in commercial poultry.

HPAI H5N1 events in non-poultry species, including wild birds, have been reported to WOAH from Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain and Sweden. There were reports of HPAI H5N5 in Norway and untyped or partially typed HPAI in the Faroe Islands in non-poultry species, including wild birds. There have been no further reports of HPAI H5N1 in mammals in fur farms in Finland.

## Situation assessment

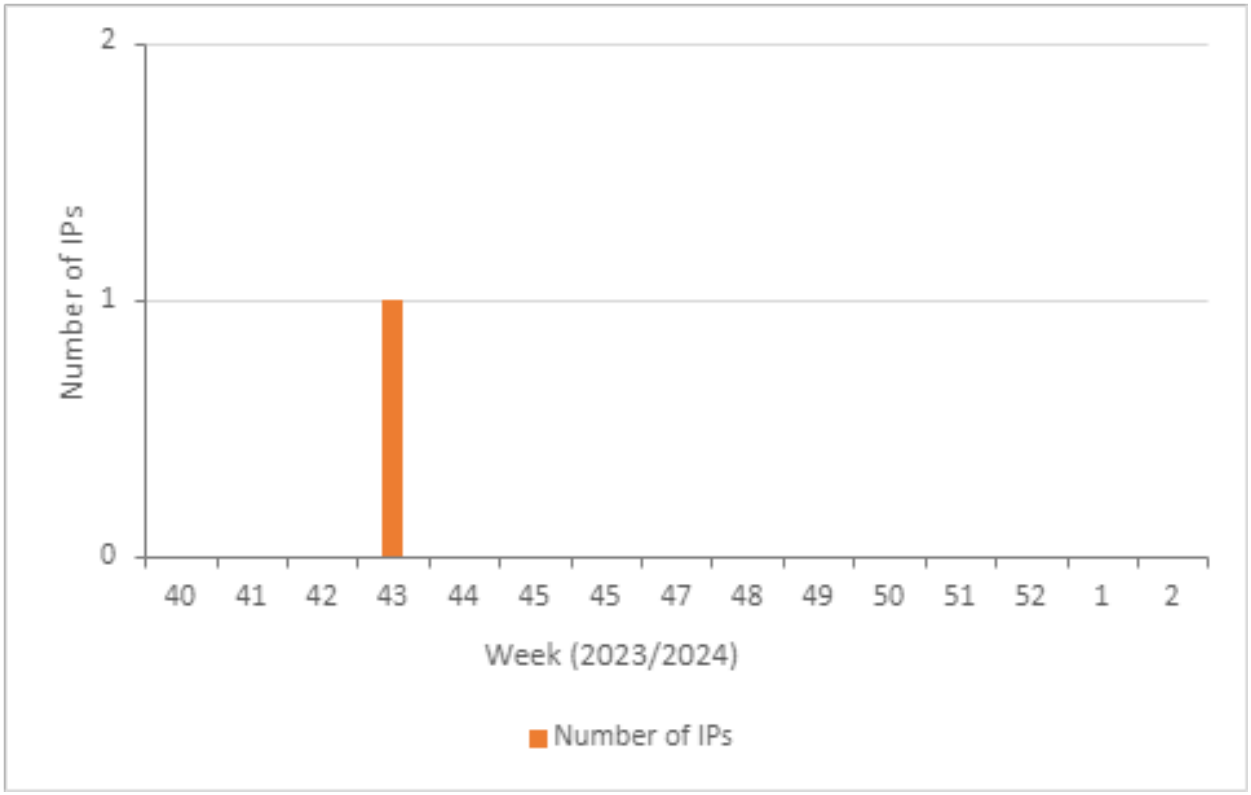
Here, a HPAI H5 event refers to a report of HPAI H5 in poultry, or a location with at least one HPAI H5 positive wild bird. Individual HPAI H5 positive wild birds are referred to as cases.

### United Kingdom

Since our last report on 10 October 2023 (to 01 November 2023), the first IP of the 2023/24 season, which started on 01 October 2023, was confirmed. The premises was confirmed with HPAI H5N1 in poultry[1] which was a smallholder premises (Figure 1). The premises was in Aberdeenshire, Scotland and housed 15 chickens. (Map 1).

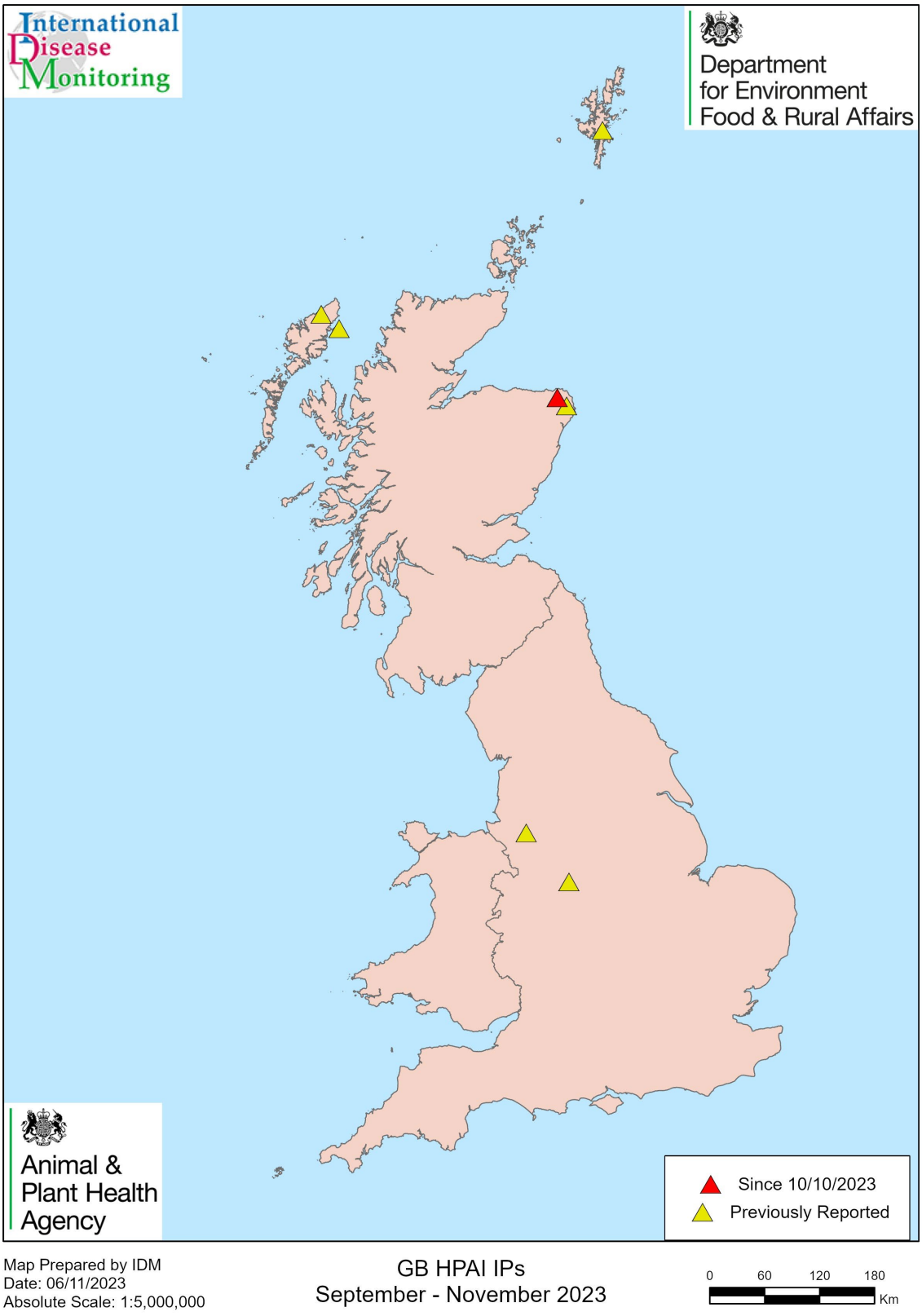
For further details, please see the reports on the latest situation regarding HPAI in domestic poultry and captive birds in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Figure 1 Number of infected premises (IPs) confirmed with HPAI H5N1 in Great Britain from week 40 2023 (start of October 2023) to week 44 (start of November 2023).**




[1] According to the 2021 WOAH definition of poultry. Terrestrial Code Online Access - WOAH - World Organisation for Animal Health

**Map 1. HPAI H5 outbreaks in poultry[2] and captive birds across Great Britain, September 2023 to 01 November 2023.**




[2] According to the 2021 WOAH definition of poultry. Terrestrial Code Online Access - WOAH - World Organisation for Animal Health

**Map 2. Map showing the HPAI H5 positive findings in wild birds across Great Britain which were confirmed between September 2023 and 01 November 2023.**

**Wild birds**

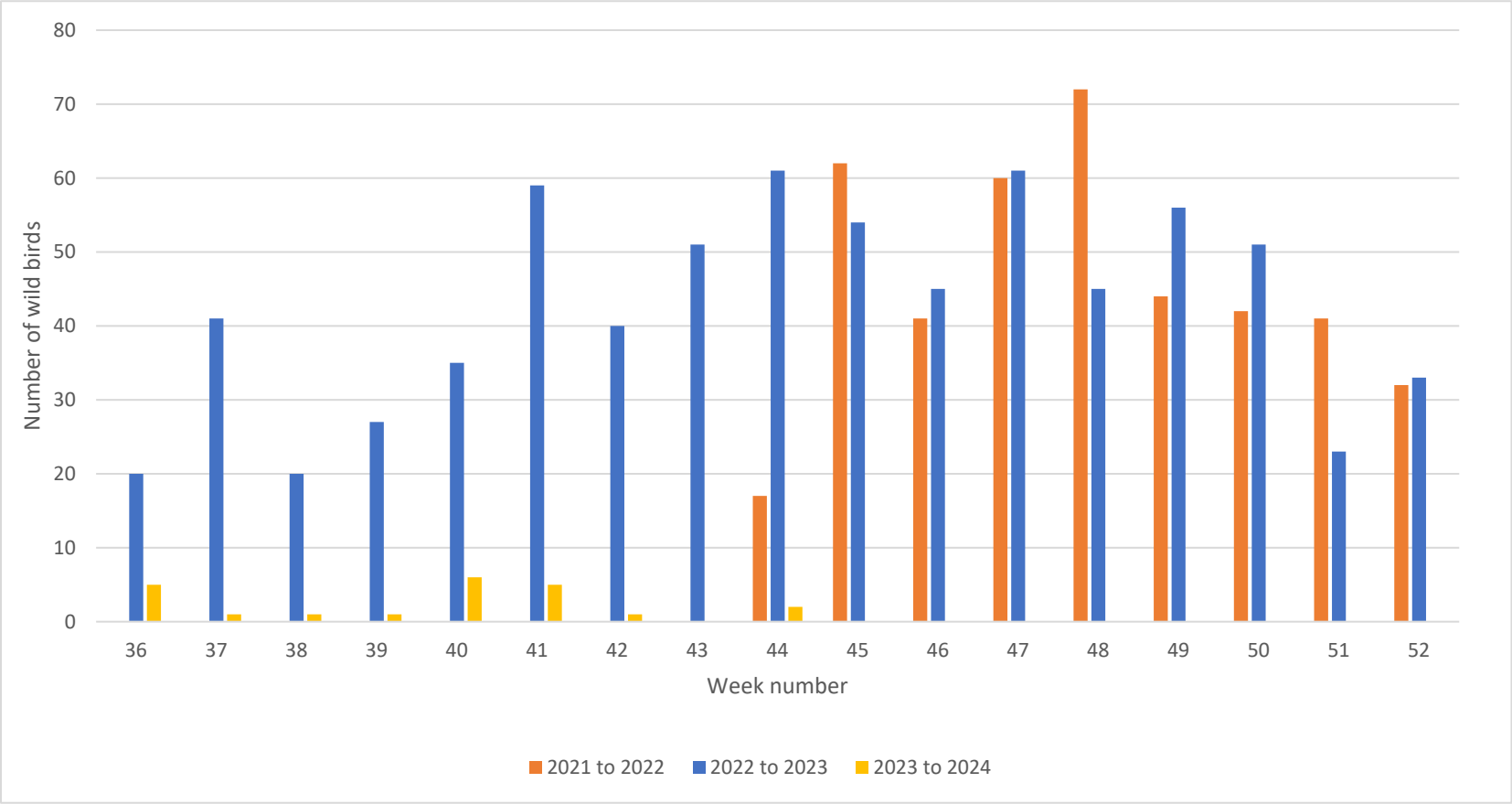
Between 10 October 2023 and 1 November 2023, HPAI H5 has been detected in 7 found-dead wild birds in 7 separate locations in Great Britain, including 5 wild bird species (listed in Appendix 1) across 6 counties. All of the wild bird cases since 10 October 2023 were at coastal locations (Map 2). Of these, 5 of the findings were confirmed as HPAI H5N1 (2 in England, 4 in Scotland, and 1 in Wales) and 2 were confirmed as HPAI H5Nx in Scotland.. (See Appendix 1).

It is important to note that these surveillance figures are based on passive surveillance of found dead birds and as such, may be affected by several factors including frequency of visiting areas with dead birds, sensitivity (discussed below) as well as the size and location of carcasses, meaning that this wild bird surveillance does not 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 Northern Ireland.

**Non-avian wildlife**

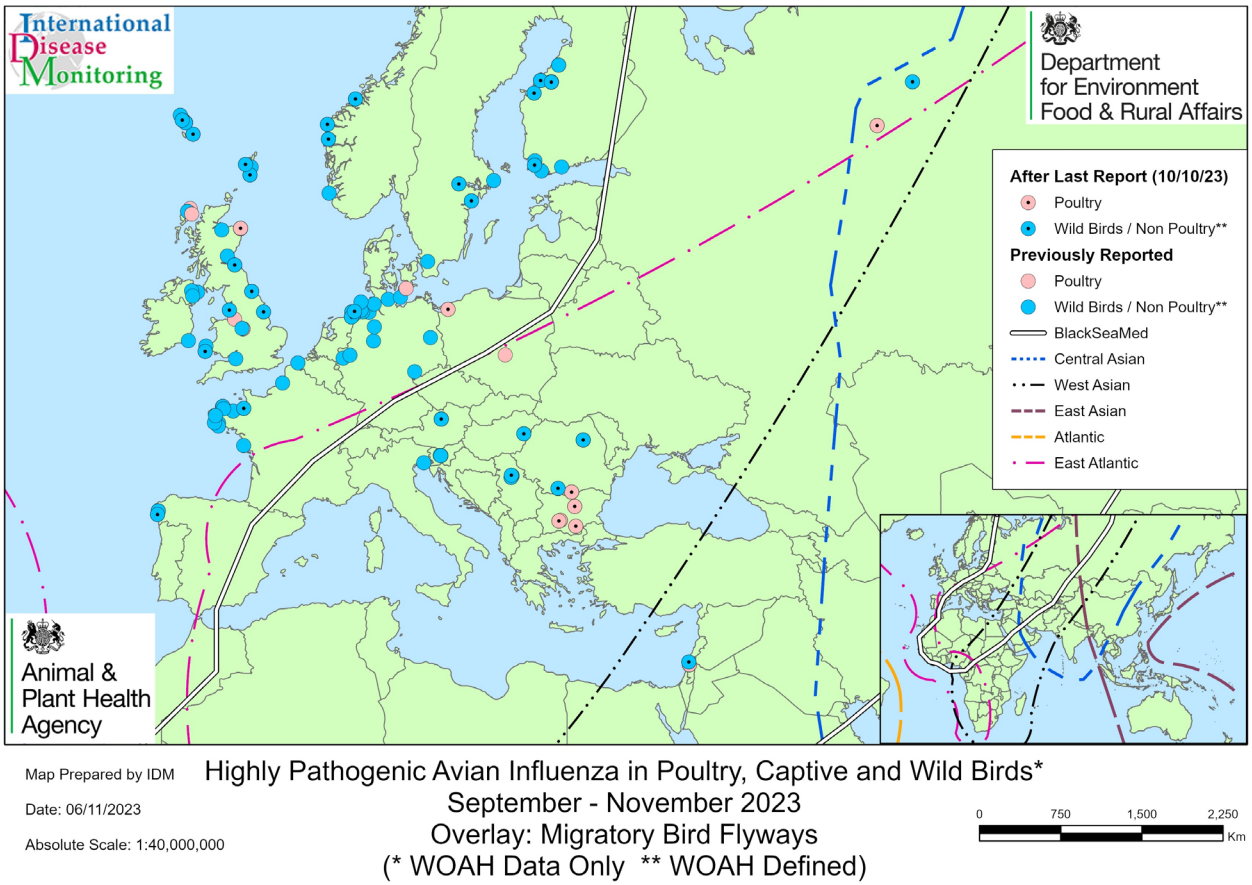
Since 10 October, there have been 2 further positive HPAI H5N1 detections from retrospective testing in wild mammals in Great Britain. These involved two otters which were found dead in January 2022 and May 2022, respectively. For further details and for previously reported detections in wild mammals, please see the report on findings of HPAI in non-avian wildlife in Great Britain. For further details and for previously reported detections in non-avian wildlife from retrospective testing, please see the report on findings of HPAI in non-avian wildlife in Great Britain.

**Figure 2** Wild bird HPAI H5 positive cases per week across Great Britain between 2020 and 2023 from week 36 (beginning of September) to the end of week 52 (end of December).



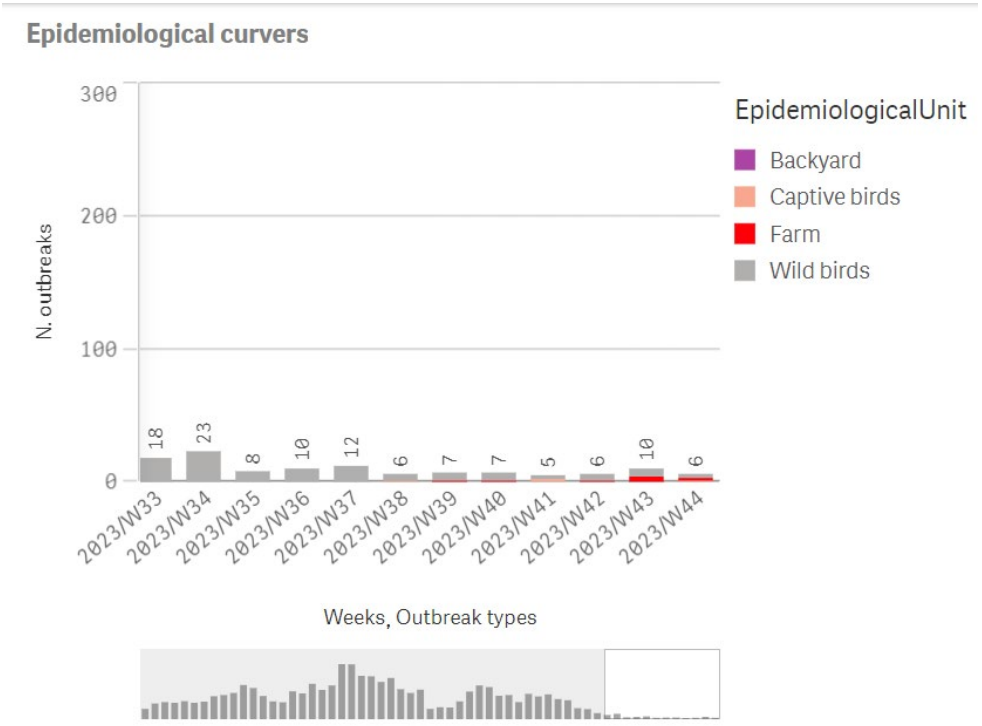
# Europe

**Map 3. Map showing HPAI H5 events in domestic poultry and wild birds in Europe reported by WOAH between 01 September and 01 November 2023 (WOAH, 2023).**




Between the 10 October and 1 November, there were a total of 34 HPAI H5N1 events reported by WOAH in domestic poultry and non-poultry including wild birds (and mammals) across Europe. Most of these occurred at inland locations in the Balkans and in Poland, along with coastal wild bird reports in Scandinavia, west Germany and north-west Spain (Map 3). Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 were reported in domestic poultry in Norway (1), Poland (1), Romania (1) and Russia (1). Two outbreaks of HPAI H5Nx were reported in Bulgaria. A total of 28 HPAI H5N1 events were reported in non-poultry including wild birds in Europe: Austria (2), Finland (6), Germany (4), Hungry (1), Norway (1), Romania (1), Russia (1), Serbia (2), Spain (2) and Sweden (2). There was one case of HPAI H5N5 reported in non-poultry including wild birds in Norway and 3 cases of HPAI H5 in the Faroe Islands.

**Figure 3. Weekly outbreaks of HPAI in poultry and captive birds and cases in wild birds reported across Europe between week 33 (mid-July 2023) and week 44 (mid-October 2023) (IZSVe, 2023)**




The number of outbreaks of HPAI in poultry farms each week across Europe has increased slightly in the last two weeks, with three to four outbreaks reported, up from none or one outbreak each week over the last few months (Figure 3). The number of cases in wild birds has plateaued over the past few weeks; however, the numbers continue to be lower, albeit from a high level of over 100 cases per week in July, with 6 and 10 cases per week, respectively, in the last two weeks. A range of species such as birds of prey, swans, gulls, and waterfowl are currently being detected as positive for H5 across Europe.

## Implications for Great Britain

HPAI H5 is still circulating in wild bird populations both in Europe and Great Britain. All of the cases of HPAI H5 in wild birds in Great Britain since 10 October have been coastal (Map 2). There is currently no obvious indication of increased infection pressure at inland locations, although our surveillance is limited to found dead wild birds. The number of positive wild bird cases has continued to be low in Great Britain with just single cases in each of the last three weeks (weeks 42 to 44). Over the next month, migratory waterbirds will continue to arrive to Great Britain although the vast majority are thought to have arrived. The continued arrival of wild birds may result in an increase in wild bird cases. Last year HPAI H5N1 cases in resident waterbirds (mallard, mute swan, Canada goose) were detected in Great Britain prior to the arrival of the migratory birds. While there have

been a few cases in mallards and other resident waterbirds in the last few months, numbers have not significantly increased. It remains to be seen, therefore, which species of found-dead HPAI H5 positive wild birds will be detected in the coming weeks, and what risk they will pose to poultry.

The number of positive wild bird cases in continental Europe has fallen steadily over the last few months with very few wild bird positive cases (Figure 3) each week in the last three weeks, although there are still detections. The ongoing presence of HPAI in wild birds in northern and eastern Europe is now (late autumn) of much greater interest to Great Britain than in spring and summer as a potential source of HPAI entry to Great Britain because many of the migratory ducks, geese and swans fly from or through Eastern Europe and the Baltic on their journey to Great Britain. There have been too few reports in wild birds in recent 3weeks to give indication of any change, particularly in Eastern Europe. While this is encouraging, it is important to note that there will be differences in surveillance effort across Europe. It is interesting to note two poultry farm outbreaks of H5N1 in western Russia and, although these are well north-east of Moscow, they could indicate the presence of HPAI in areas where wild birds may have over-summered on their way to western Europe. While HPAI may not be reported in Belarus or Ukraine, HPAI H5N1 has been detected on two poultry farms in Poland in October with a case of H5N1 in barnacle geese in south-west Finland (see Map 3). It should also be noted that HPAI H5 is also present in poultry and wild birds in the Balkans (Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and eastern Hungary). Although these reports are too far south and east to present a direct concern to Great Britain from migrating birds, they may indicate a broader spread of HPAI H5 into Europe from the east and indeed there is a case of H5N1 in a greylag goose in Austria.  In “traditional” years when HPAI H5 has not over-summered in Great Britain and western Europe, such poultry outbreaks in Poland and Finland at this time of year would raise concern of potential incursion westwards into Great Britain.

## Conclusion

Since our last assessment on 10 October 2023, the numbers of wild bird cases of HPAI H5 reported per week have fallen to low levels both in Great Britain and Europe (though we note that there will be variation in surveillance plans across Europe). However, HPAI H5 is still present in wild birds both in Great Britain and Europe, and we are currently in a state of flux with the wild bird migration ongoing and more ducks, geese and swans probably still to come in the Great Britain from north-west Europe in the next few weeks. Since 01 October 2023, there have been 7 confirmed cases of HPAI H5 in found-dead wild birds in Great Britain, with species including gulls, birds of prey, and pheasants.

With most migratory birds having now arrived in Great Britain for the winter, and the low numbers of found dead wild birds and IPs reported, the national risk level for HPAI H5 in wild birds is has been lowered from high (occurs often) to **MEDIUM** (occurs regularly). However, we are currently in a state of flux as we head into the colder winter months and migratory wild birds continue to arrive, and so we will continue to monitor the situation and reassess the risk frequently.

The number of poultry IPs in Great Britain has remained low in October with only one IP since our last update on the 10 October. (Figure 1). The risk of infection of poultry in Great Britain with stringent biosecurity is therefore maintained at **LOW** with **low uncertainty.** The risk to poultry with suboptimal biosecurity in Great Britain is also maintained at **low**. However, due to the low number of found dead wild birds and number of IPs, the level of uncertainty has been lowered to **medium**. With ongoing inward migration of wild birds, colder weather and the continued low presence of residual HPAI in resident GB wild birds, it is noted that the risk to poultry could be elevated at short notice.

Regardless of the lowering of the risk level in wild birds, it remains important that biosecurity is maintained to the highest extent possible to mitigate against the risk of infection posed by wild birds across Great Britain.

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

It is particularly important that stringent adherence to good biosecurity practices is still maintained, particularly with likely increased wild bird interactions with poultry in the coming weeks.

**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 via direct contact with wild birds (getting into housing or on the range) or indirect contact, such as contact with contaminated feed, water, bedding, equipment, vermin or 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, 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.

**Appendix 1. 2023 to 2024 HPAI season - wild bird species in Great Britain that have tested positive for HPAI H5 between 1 October 2023 and 01 November 2023.**

| Region and species | Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since last assessment (10 October 2023) | Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since 1 October 2023 |
|---|---|---|
| **England** | | |
| Herring Gull | 2 | 2 |
| **England total** | **2** | **2** |
| **Scotland** | | |
| Herring Gull | 1 | 1 |
| Pheasant | 1 | 1 |
| Sparrowhawk | 1 | 1 |
| Gannet | 1 | 1 |
| **Scotland total** | **4** | **4** |
| **Wales** | | |
| Lesser black-backed gull | 1 | 1 |
| **Wales total** | **1** | **1** |
| **Grand total** | **7** | **7** |

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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).


- DAERA (2023) Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Avian influenza information page
- IZSVe (2023) EURL Avian Flu Data Portal (izsvenezie.it)
- WOAH (2023) 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.