

Updated Outbreak Assessment #49

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

15 January 2024

Disease report

Since our last outbreak assessment on 18 December 2023, there have been no further reports of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5 clade 2.3.3.4b in domestic poultry in the United Kingdom (UK). There have been 7 HPAI H5 clade 2.3.3.4b events involving “found-dead” wild birds in Great Britain (GB) since our last assessment, with mainly wild anatidaes affected.

Weekly numbers of found-dead wild bird cases continue in GB each week, albeit at much lower numbers than in the previous two seasons where unprecedented numbers of reports were observed, and the **wild bird risk** level remains at **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 lowered from high to medium** as no new Infected Premises (IPs) have been confirmed in GB since the end of November.

Across Europe, HPAI H5 reports in wild birds and poultry increased exponentially from 30 in week 50 to 69 in week 51. They have since been fluctuating, likely due to delays in reporting over the festive period. Since 18 December 2023, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) has reported 49 outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in domestic poultry in Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Sweden, all of which were commercial premises. France reported five outbreaks of untyped or partially typed HPAI H5 in commercial poultry, including one in a vaccinated duck premises in Vendee.

HPAI H5N1 events in non-poultry species, including wild birds, have been reported to WOAH from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine. There were also reports of HPAI H5N5 in Iceland and untyped or partially typed HPAI in Sweden in non-poultry species, including wild birds.

There has been one further report of HPAI H5 in mammals in fur farms in Finland since 18 December. Species affected include Blue fox.

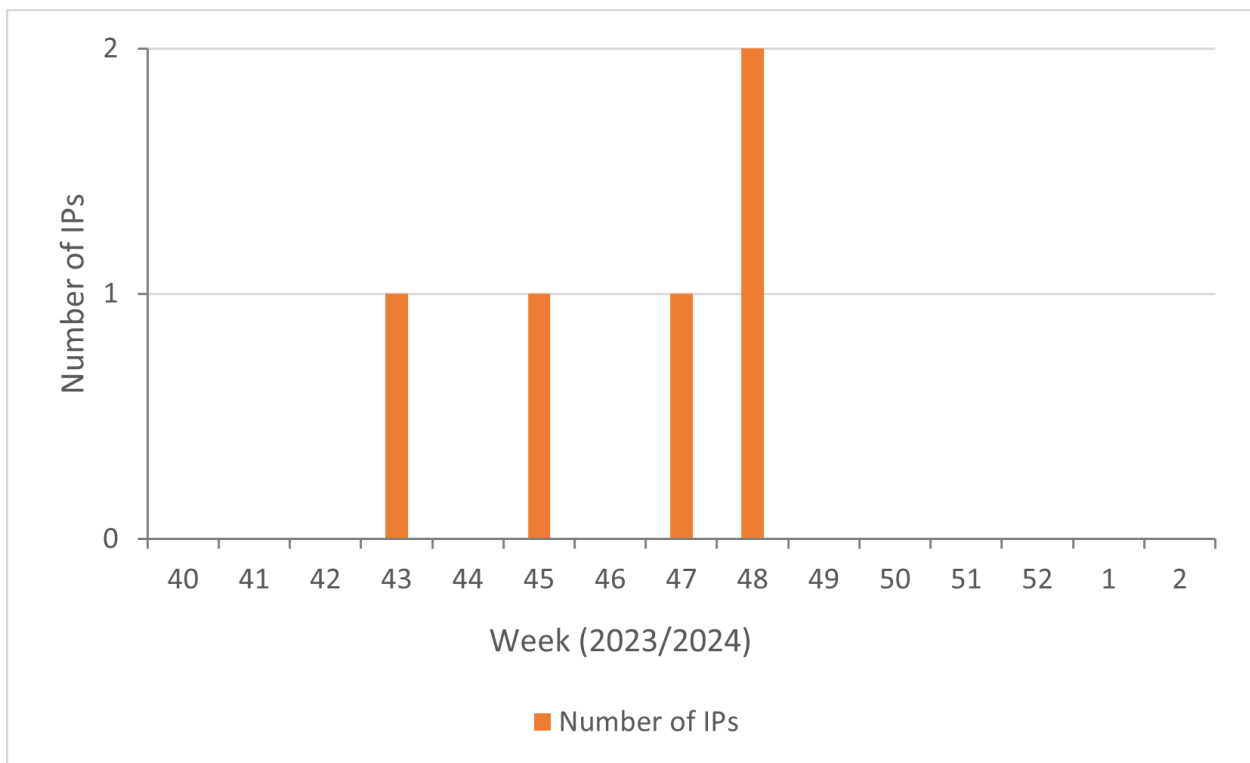
Situation assessment

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.

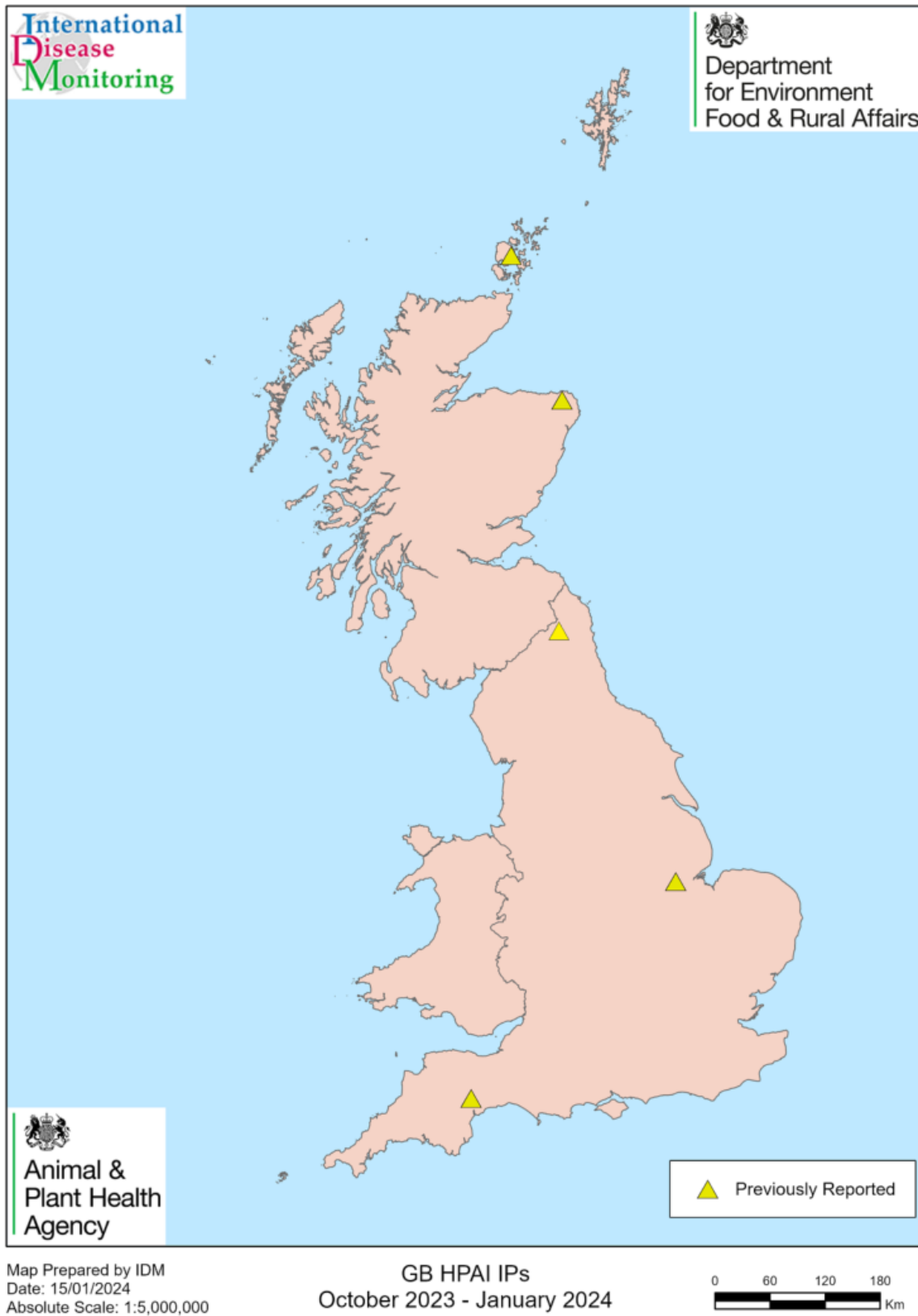
United Kingdom

Since our last report on 18 December 2023 (to 15 January 2024), no further IPs have been confirmed.

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](#).



Map 1. HPAI H5 outbreaks in poultry¹ and captive birds across Great Britain, October 2023 to 15 January 2024.



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

Wild birds

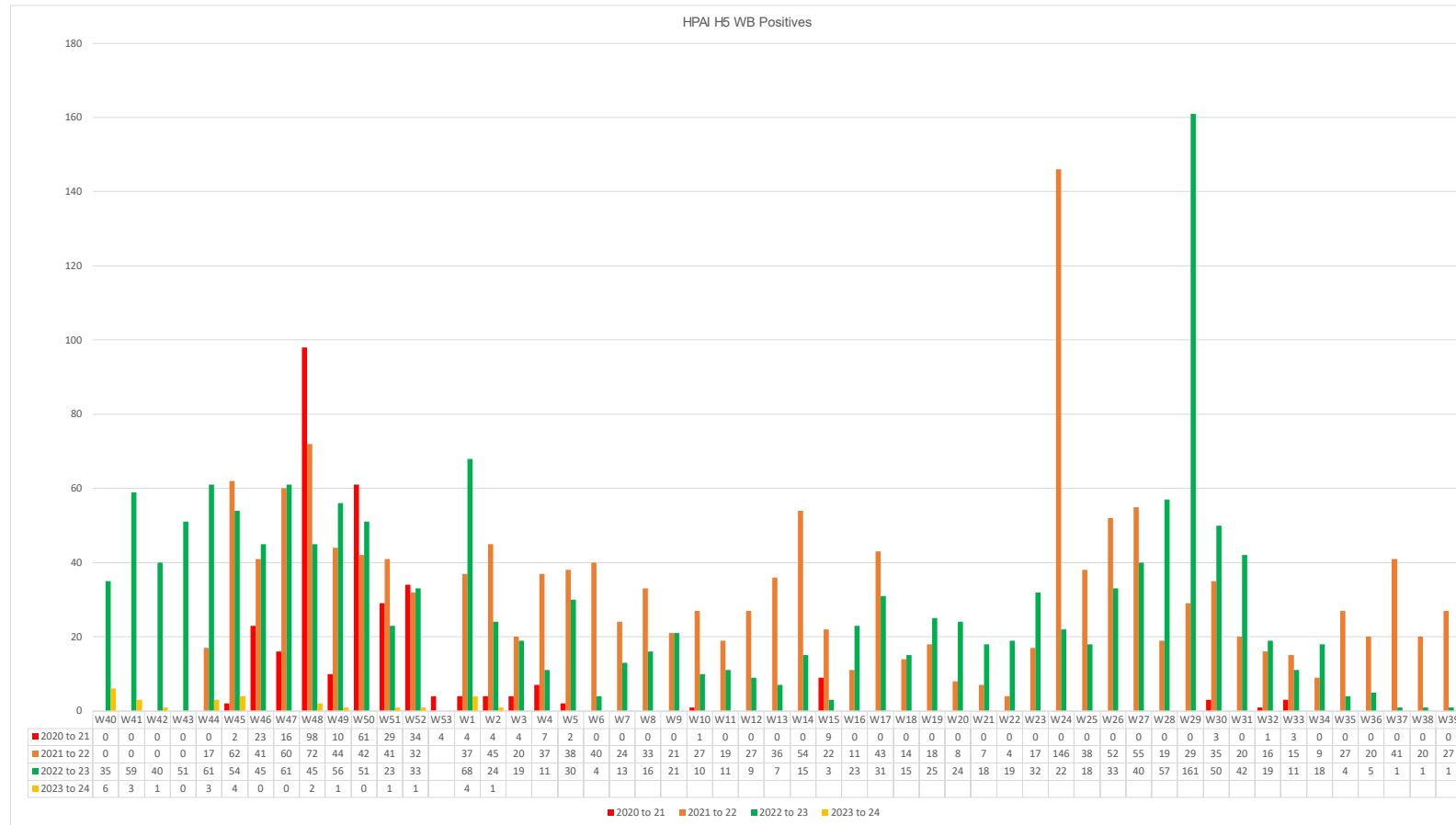
Between 18 December 2023 and 15 January 2024, HPAI H5 has been detected in 7 found-dead wild birds in 5 separate locations in Great Britain, including 5 wild bird species (listed in Appendix 1) across 3 counties, with mainly wild anatides affected as expected during this season. Please note there is a lag period between found-dead wild bird reporting, collection, sampling and testing. The majority of the wild bird cases confirmed since 18 December 2023 were at coastal locations or wetland sites (Map 2). All of the findings were confirmed as HPAI H5N1 in England. .

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 GB and [Northern Ireland](#).

Non-avian wildlife

Since 18 December, there have been no further positive HPAI H5N1 detections in non-avian wildlife in GB. For further details and for previously reported detections in wild mammals, please see the report on findings of [HPAI in non-avian wildlife](#) in GB. 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 GB.

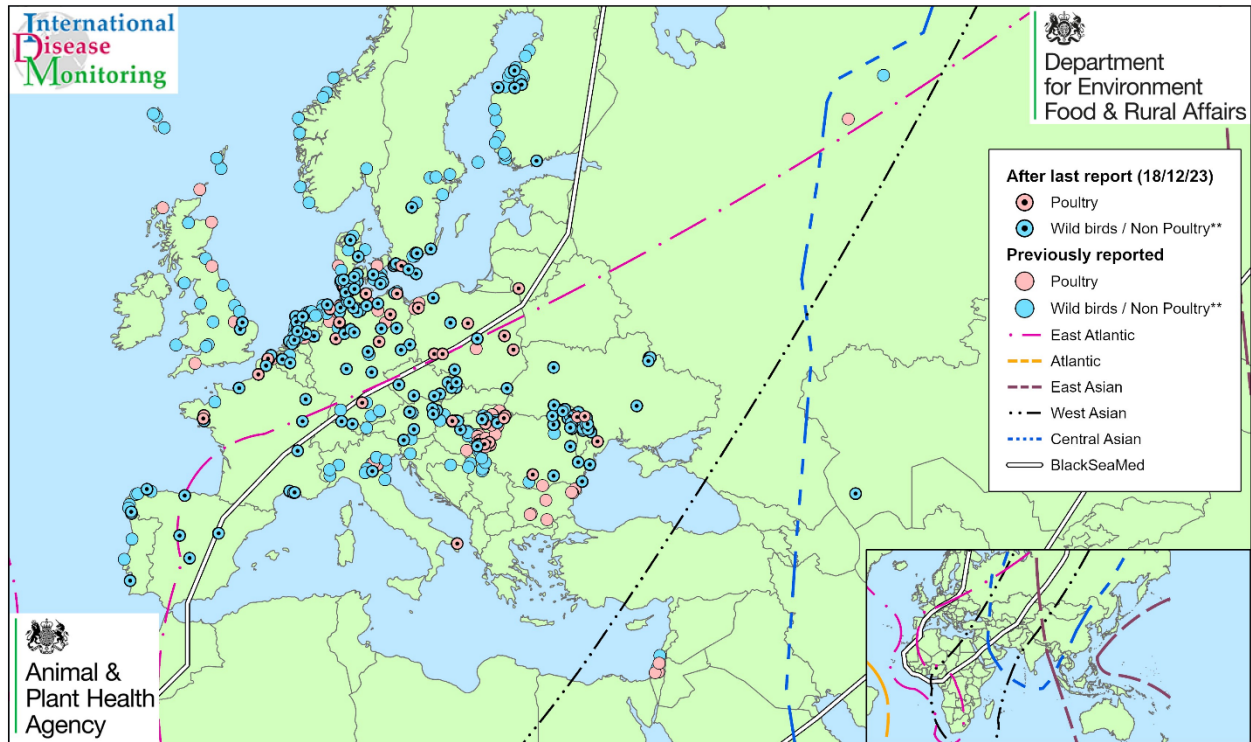
Figure 2 Wild bird HPAI H5 positive cases^a per week across GB in each season from week 40 (start of October) to the end of week 2 2024 (mid-January)



a Note that the wild bird sampling strategy may vary, particularly between seasons.

Europe

Map 3. Map showing HPAI H5 events in domestic poultry and wild birds in Europe reported by WOAHA between 01 October 2023 and 15 January 2024 (WOAH, 2024).



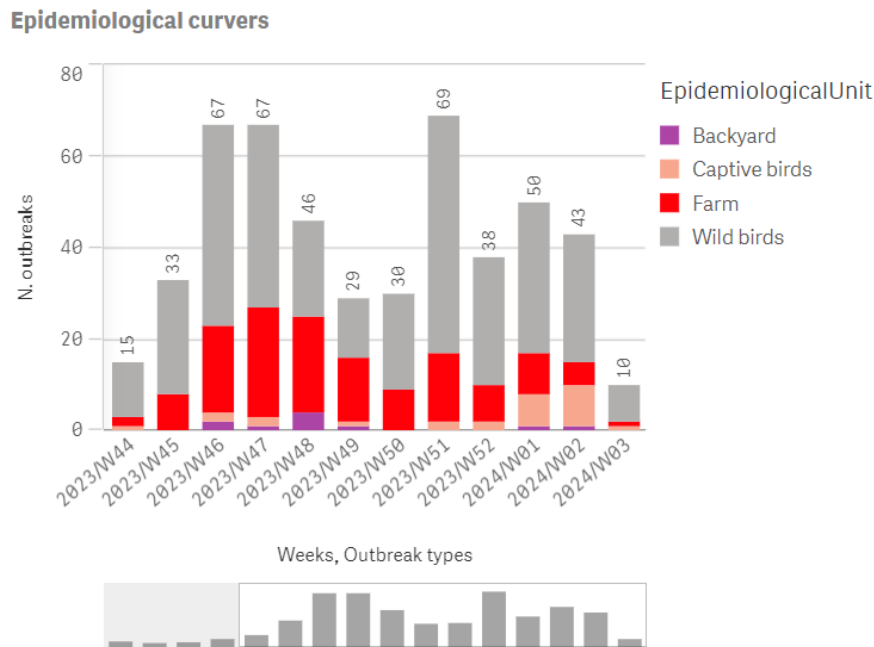
Map Prepared by IDM Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in Poultry, Captive and Wild Birds
Date: 16/01/2024 October 2023 - January 2024
Absolute Scale: 1:40,000,000 Overlay: Migratory Bird Flyways
(* WOAHA Data Only ** WOAHA Defined)

0 750 1,500 2,250
Km

Between the 18 December 2023 and 15 January 2024, there were a total of 214 HPAI H5 events reported by WOAHA in domestic poultry and non-poultry including wild birds (and mammals) across Europe. These occurred at both inland and coastal locations, mainly in the Balkans along with coastal wild bird reports in Scandinavia and north-west Spain (Map 3). Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 were reported in domestic poultry in Belgium (2), Germany (12), Hungary (11), Italy (1), Lithuania (1), Moldova (13), Poland (7), Romania (1) and Sweden (1). Outbreaks of HPAI H5Nx were reported in France (5).

A total of 158 HPAI H5N1 events were reported in non-poultry including wild birds in Europe: Austria (8), Belgium (3), Czech Republic (9), Denmark (12), Finland (1), France (8), Germany (30), Hungary (10), Italy (1), Moldova (27), Netherlands (9), Poland (6), Portugal (1), Romania (14), Spain (7), Sweden (6), Switzerland (1) and Ukraine (4). Cases of HPAI H5Nx were reported in Sweden (1). One case of HPAI H5N1 was reported in mammals in a fur farm in Finland. Also, there was a case of HPAI H5N5 in two ravens in Iceland in December.

Figure 3. Weekly outbreaks of HPAI in poultry and captive birds and cases in wild birds reported across Europe between week 44 (beginning of November 2023) and week 3 (mid-January 2024) (IZSVe, 2024)



Though there are a lower number of cases being reported this year than in the last two years, there was an observed increase in the number of reports across Europe in late December 2023 and the beginning of January 2024, reaching a peak of 55 in week 51. Cases have fluctuated over the winter period and into the new year, likely due to delays in testing and reporting over the Festive period (Figure 3). The magnitude of this second peak over the coming weeks is unknown.

Implications for GB

HPAI H5 is still circulating in wild bird populations in GB, albeit at greatly reduced levels compared to the summer of 2023, with coastal and inland cases (Map 2). The number of wild bird cases dipped in early December (Figure 3, 29 in week 49), although detections increased again at the end of December. It is also worth noting that in “traditional” years in Europe there is often a peak in November through December with cases falling towards Christmas and the New Year, only to increase strongly in a large second peak in January through to February.

There are three main continuing trends in avian species in Europe (excluding the detection of more outbreaks in fur farms in Finland). Firstly, another case of H5N5 in wild birds has been detected in Iceland although at this time of the year (early January) is of little importance to GB because the migratory birds (whooper swans and geese) which fly south

into GB from those northern latitudes arrived through November and Decembers . The second trend is the ongoing spread of HPAI H5N1 west through southern Europe from the Balkans and Hungary and southern Germany, Austria and northern Italy into southern France and now into Spain, with the working hypothesis that could be linked to the continued westward migration of common cranes.. While this route is too far south to be of importance to GB, it could represent the completion of the more general spread of HPAI from the north-east (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine) as autumn migrants fly south-west and west to their wintering grounds in southern Europe and the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, more cases in gulls have been detected as far west as northern Spain and Portugal. Of more importance to GB is the third trend, namely the ongoing detection of wild bird cases in northern Germany, Denmark, the Wadden Sea, and the Netherlands, extending as far west as northern France. Though these cases are of greater concern to GB during the migration period (September through to December), at this time of year in mid-January, generally all birds have arrived as we enter the stable, core winter period. Despite the increasing reports of cases in wild birds in Europe (figure 3) and the ongoing severe cold and heavy snow in northern Europe and Scandinavia, the number of reported wild bird cases in Great Britain has not increased, though the winter period does still carry a risk of severe cold snaps that could promote further movement of birds from the near continent to GB as well as the freezing of smaller waterbodies which could result in larger aggregations of birds at larger inland waterbodies or coastal locations (which are not as susceptible to freezing over) The small number of wild bird cases most weeks over the last two months in GB can be interpreted as “occurs regularly” which is the definition of medium risk level.. The wild bird risk in GB is therefore maintained at **medium**.

Conclusion

Since our last assessment on 18 December 2023, the numbers of wild bird cases of HPAI H5 reported per week remain at low levels in GB although there appears to be a second peak in Europe. We note that there will be variation in surveillance plans across Europe and as with previous years the second peak in birds in Europe may continue into February. Although HPAI H5 is ongoing in western Europe, at this time of year all migratory ducks, geese and swans have now arrived, and we are in the stable winter core period. The ongoing cold snap in Europe does not appear to have resulted in an increase in wild bird cases in Great Britain as yet, though the continued cold weather could result in more movements and current environmental conditions (shorter, colder days) are favourable for virus survival. This period of uncertainty could continue to the end of February 2024, after which it is unlikely more birds will fly over to Great Britain, with most then starting to move north-east to their breeding grounds. With the migratory birds having now arrived in Great Britain for the winter, and the current numbers of found dead wild birds and IPs reported, the national risk level for HPAI H5 in wild birds remains at **MEDIUM** (occurs regularly).

The number of poultry IPs in GB has remained low in December into January with no IPs since our last update on the 18 December. The risk of infection of poultry in GB with stringent biosecurity is therefore maintained at **LOW** with **low uncertainty**. The risk to

poultry with suboptimal biosecurity in GB is also maintained at **low** with the uncertainty reduced from high to medium as over the last 4 weeks the number of cases reported in wild birds in GB has not resulted in further IPs. With the ongoing colder weather expected in Europe and the continued presence of residual HPAI in wild birds in GB, it is noted that the risk to poultry could be elevated at short notice.

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 if wild bird interactions with poultry in the coming weeks were to increase due to cold weather.

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 WOA, 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 15 January 2024.

Region and species	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since last assessment (18 December 2023)	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since 01 October 2023
England		
Canada Goose	1	1
Common Buzzard	0	1
Common Gull	0	1
Gannet	1	1
Greylag Goose	1	3
Herring Gull	0	2
Merlin	0	1
Mute Swan	2	2
Whooper Swan	2	3
England total	7	15
Scotland		
Herring Gull	0	2
Pheasant	0	1
Shag	0	1
Sparrowhawk	0	1

Region and species	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since last assessment (18 December 2023)	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since 01 October 2023
Gannet	0	1
Scotland total	0	6
Wales		
Lesser black-backed gull	0	1
Wales total	0	1
Grand total	7	22

Authors

- Megan Arter-Hazzard
- Geraldine Burns
- Candida Adridge
- Dr Paul Gale
- Dr Lauren Perrin
- Joe Bowen
- Dr Marco Falchieri
- Prof Ash Banyard

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 \(izsvnezie.it\)](#)
- WOAH (2023) [WAHIS \(woah.org\)](#)



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