Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Updated Outbreak Assessment #50

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

16 February 2024

Disease report

Since our last outbreak assessment on 15 January 2024, there has been one report of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5 clade 2.3.3.4b in domestic poultry in the United Kingdom (UK). This was in England. There has also been one HPAI H5 clade 2.3.3.4b event involving a “found-dead” wild bird (Herring Gull) in Great Britain (GB) since our last assessment.

Found dead wild bird cases of HPAI H5 are sporadic in GB at the moment and are at much lower numbers than in the previous two seasons. 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 with medium uncertainty.**

Across Europe, HPAI H5 reports in wild birds and poultry decreased from a peak of 69 in week 51 (2023) to just one wild bird case in week 5 (2024). Since 15 January 2024, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) has reported 53 outbreaks of HPAI H5 in domestic poultry.

116 HPAI H5N1 events have been reported to WOAH along with five cases of HPAI H5N5 and three cases of HPAI H5Nx. These were all in wild birds. There has also been one report of HPAI H5N1 in mammals.

15 outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in non-commercial non-poultry* were reported.

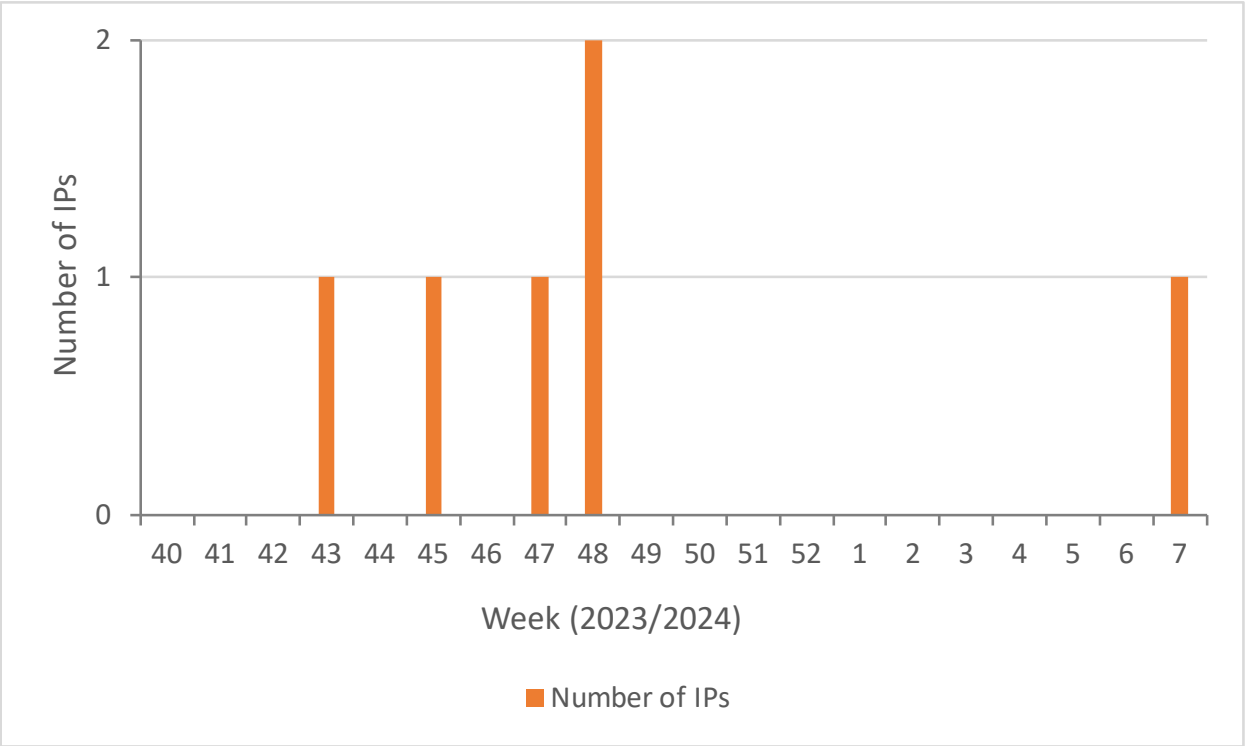
Situation assessment

Here, a HPAI H5 event refers to a report of HPAI Nx 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.

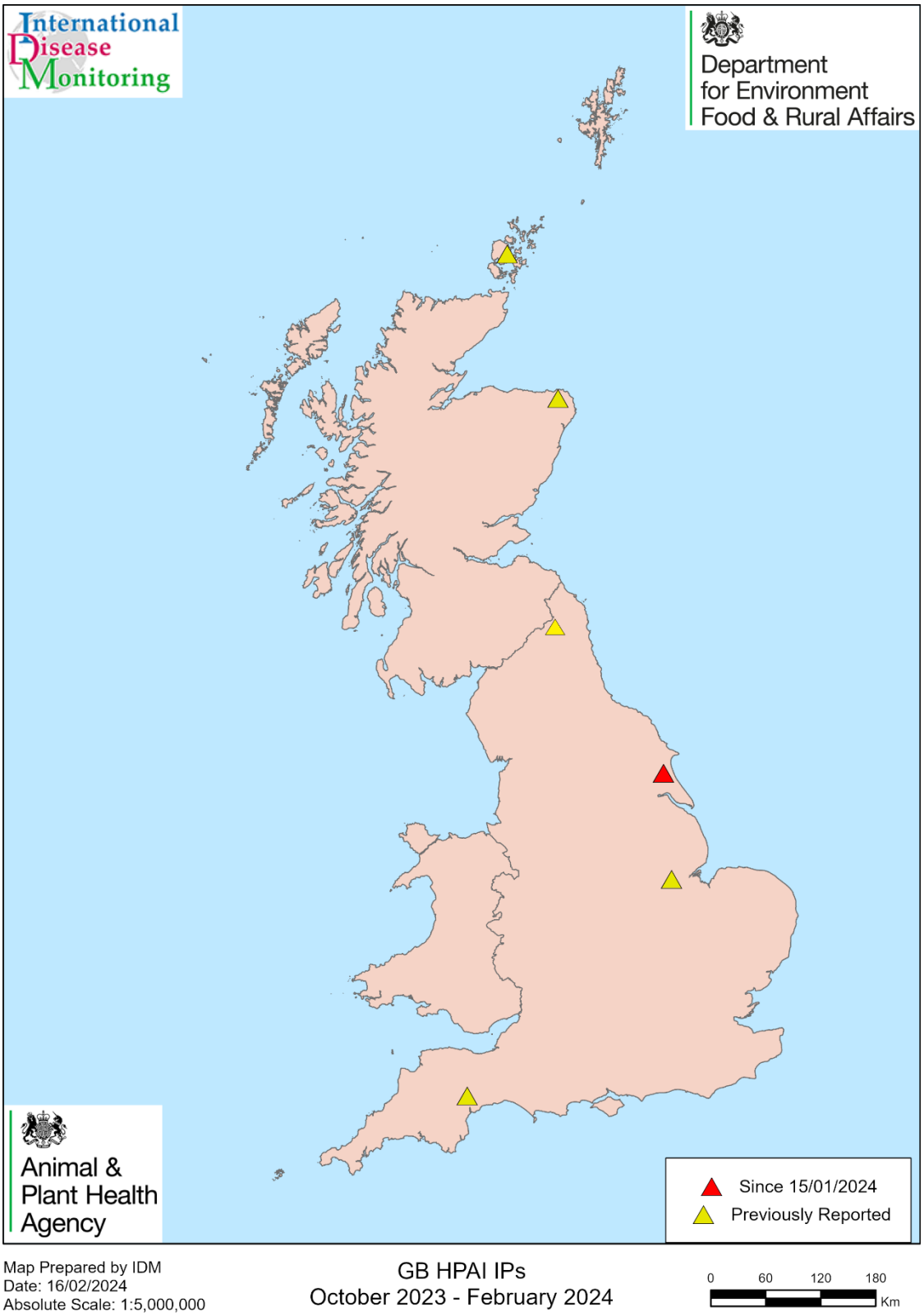
United Kingdom

Since our last report on 15 January 2024 (to 16 February 2024), one infected premises (IP) has been confirmed in poultry in GB with HPAI H5N1. The IP was in East Yorkshire and housed 48,000 commercial laying 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.



Map 1. HPAI H5 outbreaks in poultry[1] and captive birds across Great Britain, October 2023 to 16 February 2024.



[1] 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 01 October and 13 February 2024.

Wild birds

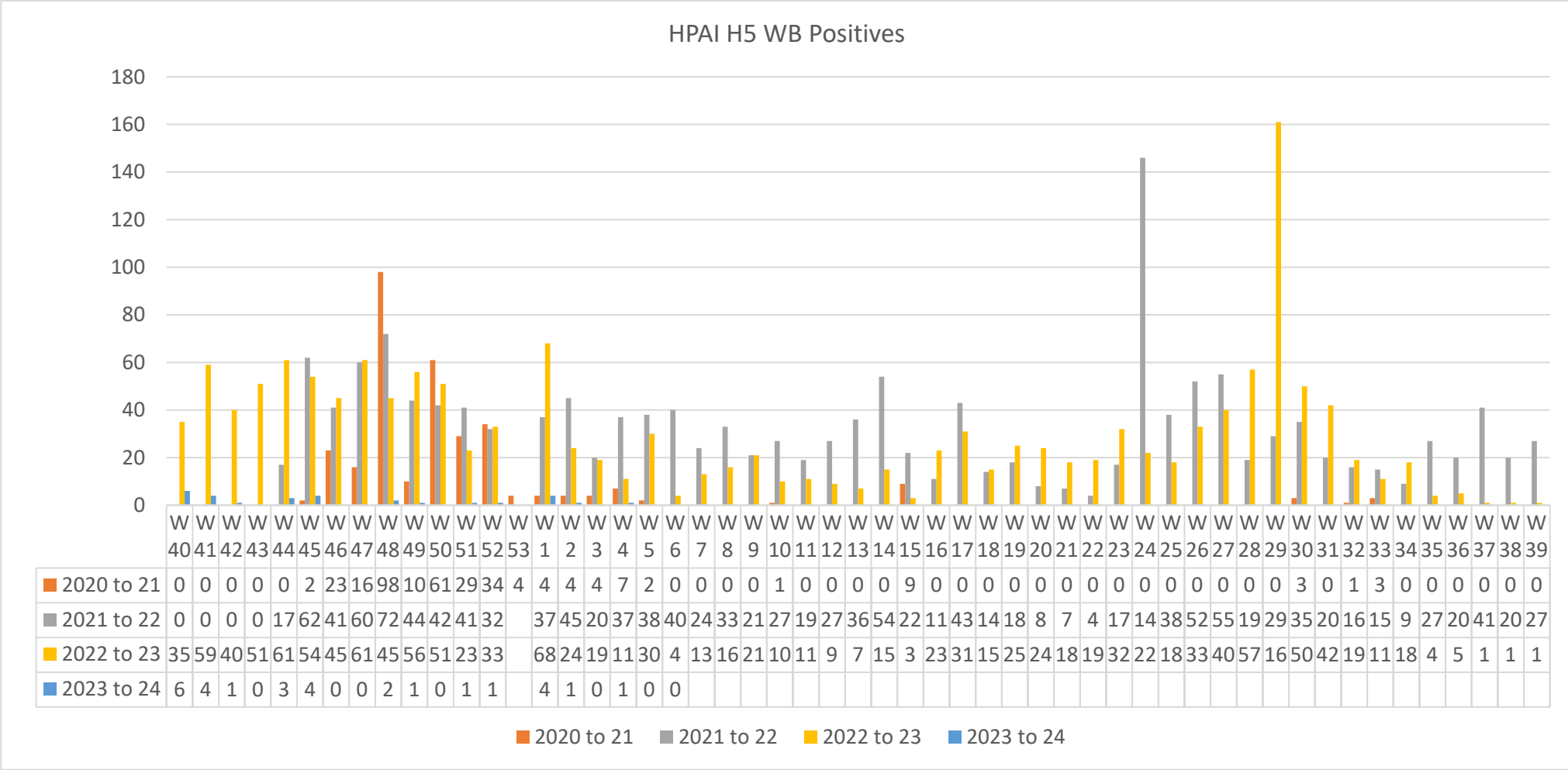
Between 15 January 2024 and 16 February 2024, HPAI H5 has been detected in one found-dead wild bird (state species) in Great Britain (listed in Appendix 1). Please note there is a lag period between found-dead wild bird reporting, collection, sampling, and testing.

It is important to note that these surveillance figures 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 visiting 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), 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 15 January 2024, 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 2023) to the beginning of week 7 (mid-February 2024).

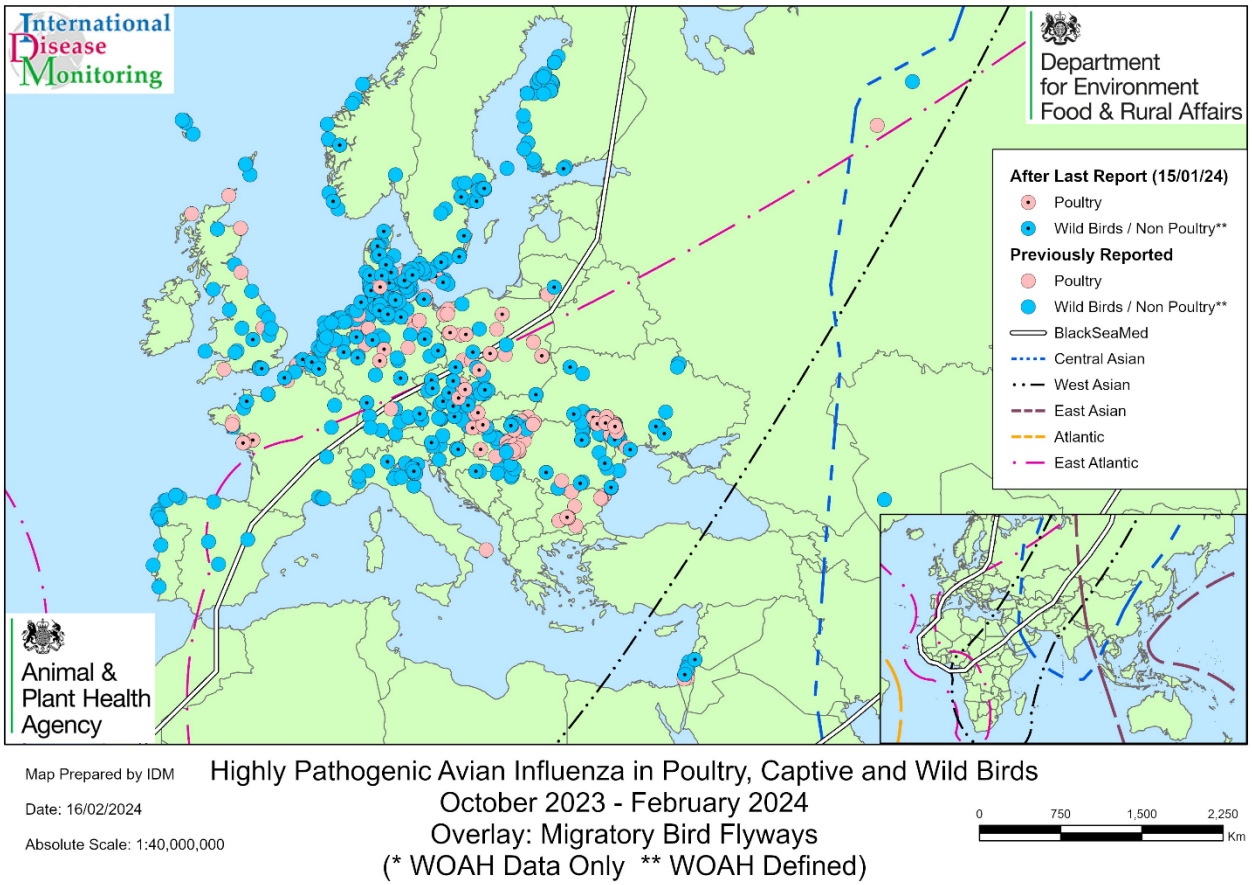


	W40	W41	W42	W43	W44	W45	W46	W47	W48	W49	W50	W51	W52	W53	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12	W13	W14	W15	W16	W17	W18	W19	W20	W21	W22	W23	W24	W25	W26	W27	W28	W29	W30	W31	W32	W33	W34	W35	W36	W37	W38	W39
2020 to 21	0	0	0	0	0	2	23	16	98	10	61	29	34	4	4	4	4	7	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2021 to 22	0	0	0	0	17	62	41	60	72	44	42	41	32		37	45	20	37	38	40	24	33	21	27	19	27	36	54	22	11	43	14	18	8	7	4	17	14	38	52	55	19	29	35	20	16	15	9	27	20	41	20	27
2022 to 23	35	59	40	51	61	54	45	61	45	56	51	23	33		68	24	19	11	30	4	13	16	21	10	11	9	7	15	3	23	31	15	25	24	18	19	32	22	18	33	40	57	16	50	42	19	11	18	4	5	1	1	1
2023 to 24	6	4	1	0	3	4	0	0	2	1	0	1	1		4	1	0	1	0	0																																			

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 WOAH between 15 January 2024 and 16 February 2024 (WOAH, 2024).

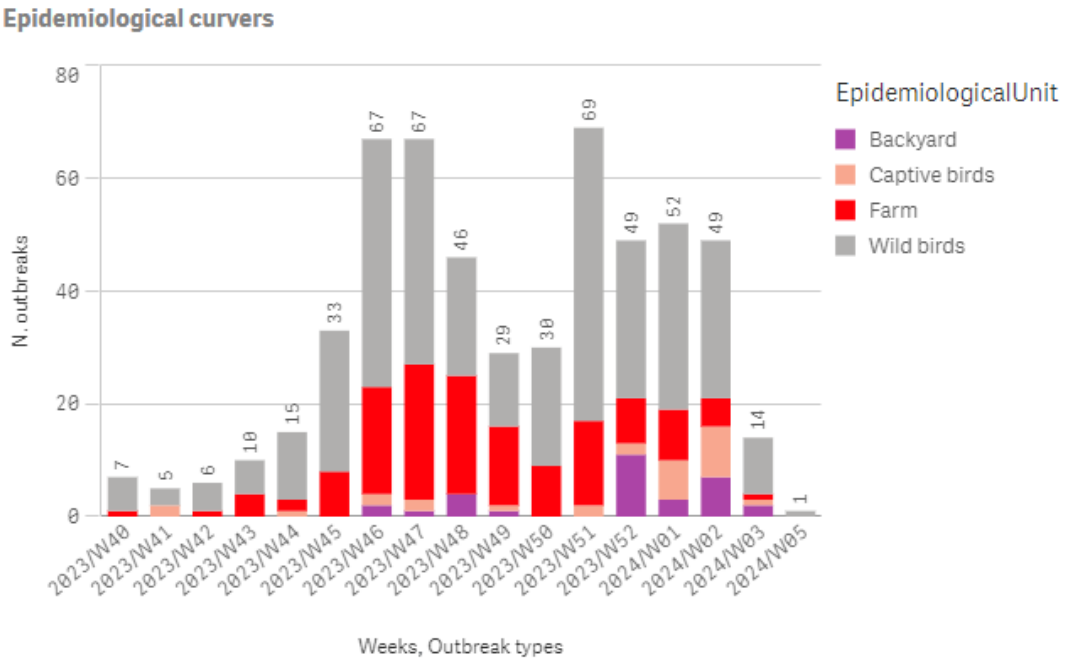


Between the 15 January and 16 February 2024, there were a total of 197 HPAI H5 events reported by WOAH in domestic poultry and non-poultry including wild birds (and mammals) across Europe. These occurred at both inland and coastal locations, mainly in the Balkans along with coastal wild bird reports in Scandinavia (Map 3). Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 were reported in domestic poultry in Bulgaria (4), Czech Republic (3), Denmark (6), Germany (5), Hungary (2), Moldova (19), Poland (10), Slovakia (3) and Sweden (1). Outbreaks of HPAI H5Nx were reported in France (4).

A total of 116 HPAI H5N1 cases were reported wild birds in Europe: Austria (2), Belgium (2), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1), Czech Republic (4), Denmark (30), France (2), Germany (27), Hungary (2), Italy (6), Lithuania (1), Moldova (2), Norway (1), Poland (5), Romania (7), Slovenia (5), Sweden (16) and Ukraine (3). Cases of HPAI H5N5 were reported in Germany (3), Iceland (1) and Norway (1). Cases of HPAI H5Nx in wild birds were reported in Belgium (1), Finland (1) and Sweden (1). There has also been one report of HPAI H5N1 in a wild Red fox in Germany.

Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in non-commercial non-poultry were reported in Austria (2), Czech Republic (7), Denmark (1), Germany (2) and Ukraine (3).

Figure 3. Weekly outbreaks of HPAI in poultry and captive birds and cases in wild birds reported across Europe between week 40 (beginning of October 2023) and week 5 (beginning of February 2024) (IZSVe, 2024)



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 69 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). Reports have since decreased dramatically from week 3 with only 14 reports. There were no reports in week 4 and only one report in week 5.

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, and with just one positive case at a coastal site since our last report (Map 2). HPAI cases are still ongoing in Europe although the number of reports has levelled off in recent weeks (Figure 3) and a large second peak which has occurred in January and February in some previous years in Europe does not appear to be materialising.

There are three main continuing trends in avian species in Europe. Firstly, a few more cases of H5N5 in wild birds have been detected in northern Europe with Germany reporting two unidentified gulls and an unidentified goose. The second trend is the ongoing cases of HPAI H5N1 in southern Europe from the Balkans and Hungary and southern Germany, Austria and northern Italy. There have been no more cases in southern France or in Spain, with the westward migration of common cranes having stopped and birds preparing to fly back east. 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-February, not only have all birds have arrived for the winter period but also any birds in northern Europe will not want to fly west due to their coming departure east in the next few weeks. 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 15 January 2024, the numbers of wild bird cases of HPAI H5 reported per week remain at very low levels in GB and report cases in Europe have levelled off although there will be variation in surveillance plans across Europe and as with previous years. Although HPAI H5 is ongoing in western Europe, at this time of year any migratory ducks, geese and swans still in Continental Europe will not want to fly further west into GB and will be preparing to fly eastwards in the coming weeks. The national risk level for HPAI H5 in wild birds remains at **MEDIUM** (occurs regularly). As we approach the end of February, our uncertainty in this medium risk level decreases and the possibility of being reduced to low increases as the migratory wild birds depart in March and April, though increased movement may also bring an increase in contacts and disease spread.

The number of poultry IPs in GB has remained low in 2024 with one IP since our last update on the 15 January. 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 medium uncertainty. 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 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 16 February 2024.

Region and species	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since last assessment (16 February 2024)	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since 01 October 2023
England		
Canada Goose	0	1
Common Buzzard	0	1
Common Gull	0	1
Gannet	0	1
Greylag Goose	0	3
Herring Gull	1	3
Merlin	0	1
Mute Swan	0	2
Whooper Swan	0	3
England total	**1**	**15**
Scotland		
Herring Gull	0	2
Pheasant	0	1

Region and species	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since last assessment (16 February 2024)	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5 since 01 October 2023
Shag	0	1
Sparrowhawk	0	1
Gannet	0	1
Scotland total	**0**	**6**
Wales		
Lesser black-backed gull	0	1
Wales total	**0**	**1**
Grand total	**1**	**23**

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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.