Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Updated Outbreak Assessment #51

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

01 April 2024

Disease report

Since our last outbreak assessment on 16 February 2024, there have been no reports of high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) H5 clade 2.3.3.4b in domestic poultry in the United Kingdom (UK). There has however been 7 HPAI H5 clade 2.3.3.4b events involving “found-dead” wild birds in Great Britain (GB).

Found dead wild bird cases of HPAI H5 are sporadic in GB at the moment and are at much lower numbers compared to this time of year in the previous 2 seasons. The **wild bird risk** level has been lowered from **medium** to **low** (rare but does occur). This is due to the low number of wild bird cases and decreased infection pressure to poultry. It is noted that the H5N5 subtype, while still being detected in a low number of found-dead wild birds, has not been detected in commercial poultry, and does not appear to represent the start of a disease process in wild birds. 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, however, with medium uncertainty.**

Across Europe, HPAI H5 reports in wild birds and poultry decreased from a peak of 81 in week 7, to 5 in week 11. Since 16 February 2024, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) has reported 29 outbreaks of HPAI H5 in domestic poultry. Over the same time period, Europe reported 731 outbreaks in 2022, and 90 in 2023. Also in Europe, 13 outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in non-commercial non-poultry* were reported.

For wild birds in Europe, since 16 February 2024, 124 HPAI H5N1 events have been reported to WOAH, along with 2 cases of HPAI H5N5, 2 cases of HPAI H5 and 1 case of HPAI H5N8. There has also been 3 reports of HPAI H5N1 in mammals, 1 report of HPAI H5 in mammals, and 1 report of HPAI H5Nx in mammals.

Situation assessment

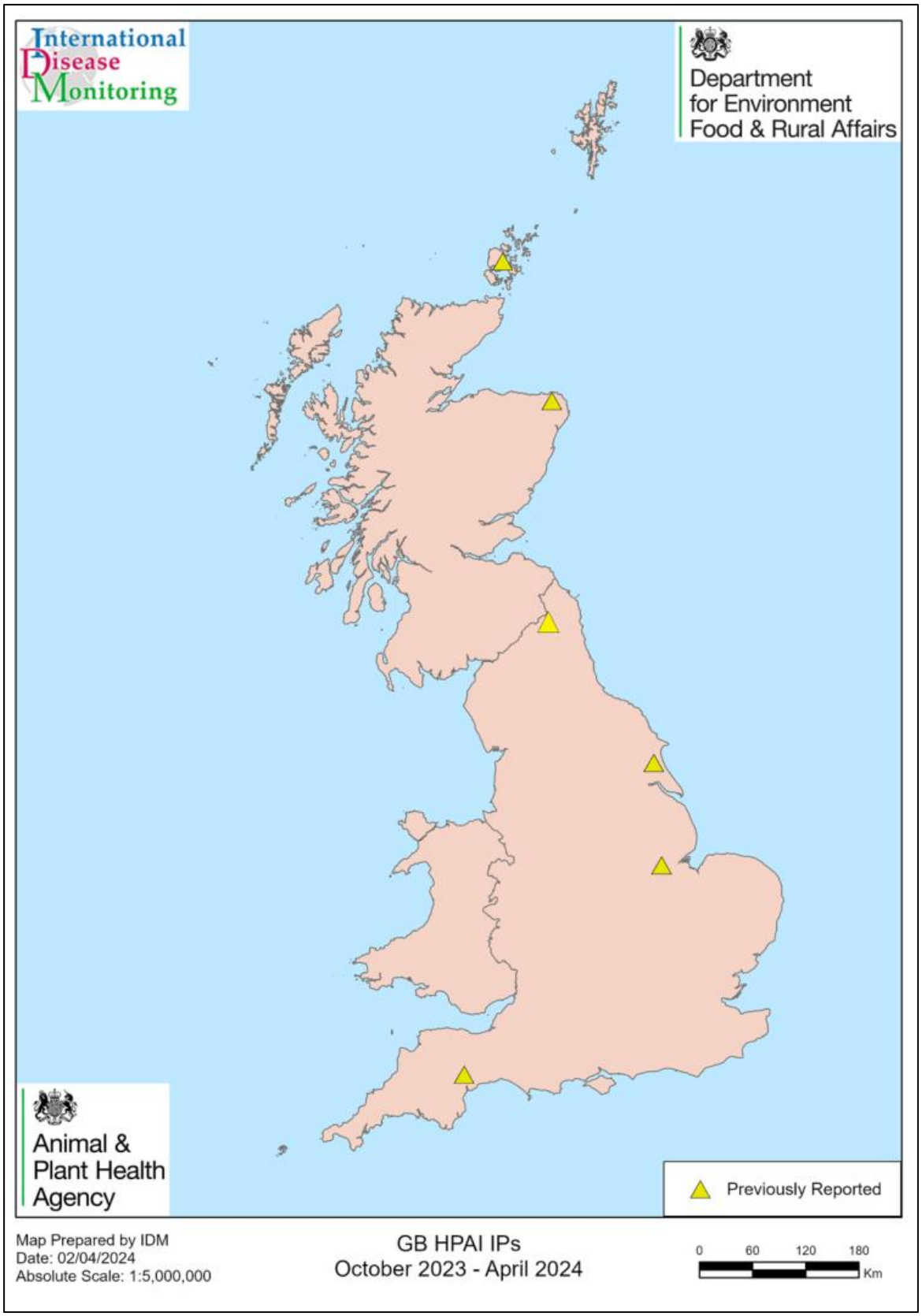
Here, an HPAI H5 event refers to a report of HPAI in poultry, or a location with at least 1 HPAI H5 positive wild bird. Individual HPAI H5 positive wild birds are referred to as cases.

United Kingdom

Since our last report on 16 February 2024 (to 01 April 2024), there have been no infected premises (IP) in poultry in GB confirmed with HPAI H5N1 (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 01 April 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 01 April 2024.

Wild birds

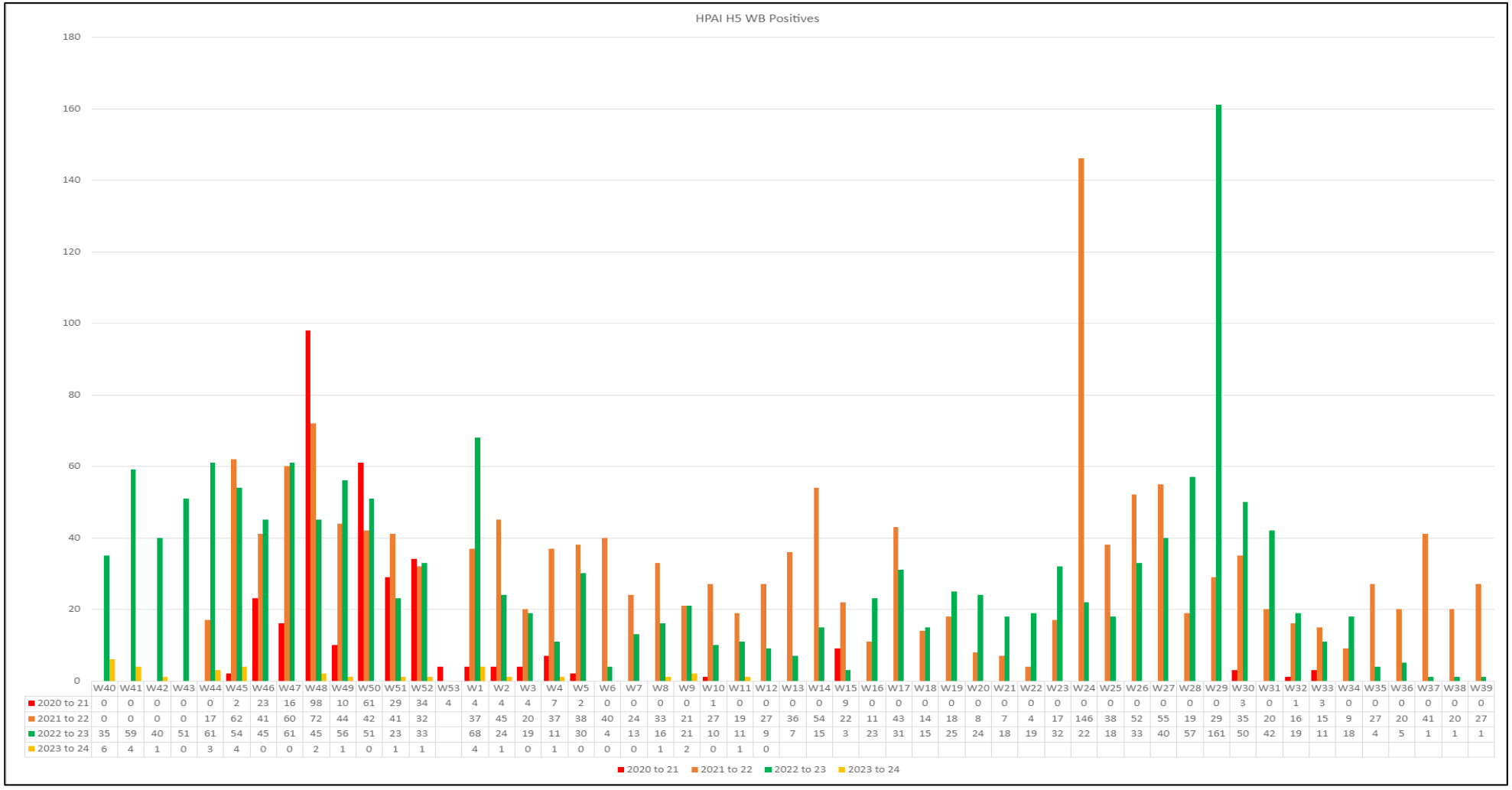
Between 16 February and 01 April 2024, HPAI H5 has been detected in 7 found-dead wild birds in Great Britain (listed in Appendix 1). Please note, there is a lag period between found-dead wild bird reporting, collection, sampling, and testing.

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 16 February 2024, there have been no further positive HPAI H5 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 2020) to the beginning of week 13 (end of March 2024).

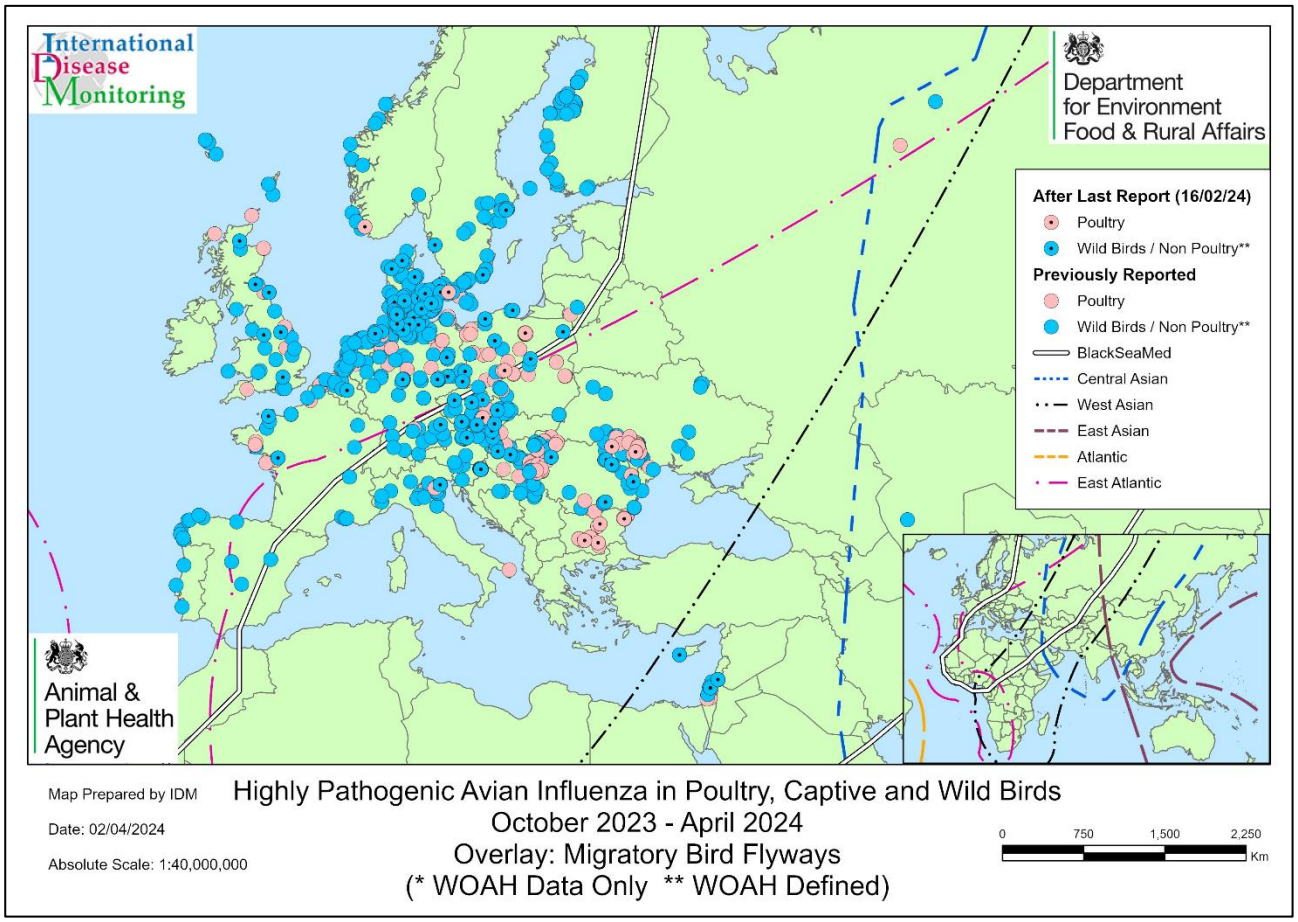


	W40	W41	W42	W43	W44	W45	W46	W47	W48	W49	W50	W51	W52	W53	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W10	W11	W12	W13	W14	W15	W16	W17	W18	W19	W20	W21	W22	W23	W24	W25	W26	W27	W28	W29	W30	W31	W32	W33	W34	W35	W36	W37	W38	W39
2020 to 21	0	0	0	0	0	2	23	16	98	10	61	29	34	4	4	4	4	7	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	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	146	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	161	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	0	1	2	0	1	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 01 October 2023 and 01 April 2024 (WOAH, 2024).

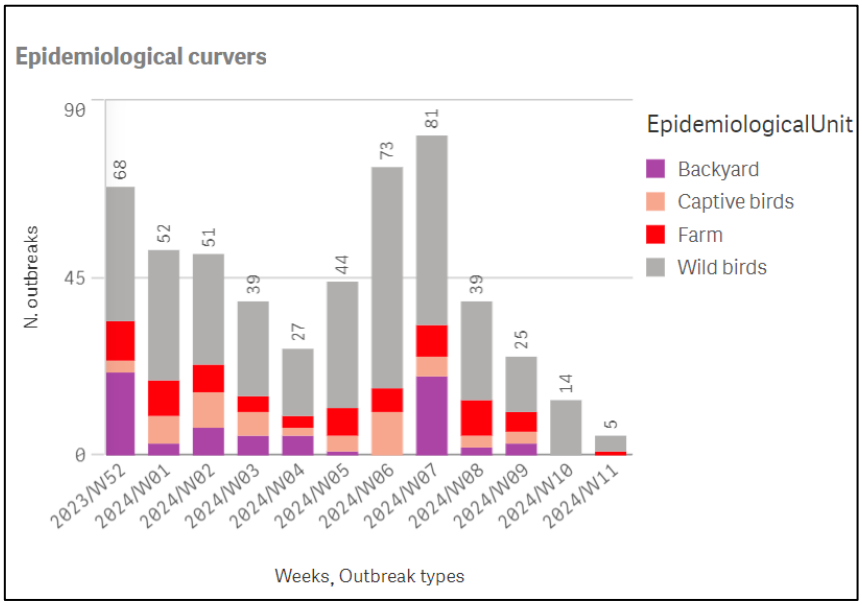


Between 16 February and 1 April 2024, there were a total of 173 HPAI H5 events reported by WOAH in domestic poultry and non-poultry including wild birds (and mammals) across Europe. These occurred at both inland and coastal locations, mainly in the Balkans along with coastal wild bird reports in Scandinavia (Map 3). Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 were reported in domestic poultry in Bulgaria (6), Czech Republic (2), Denmark (1), Italy (1), Moldova (3), Poland (12), Romania (1) and Russia (1). Outbreaks of HPAI H5Nx were reported in poultry in Norway (1) and Sweden (1).

A total of 121 HPAI H5N1 cases were reported wild birds in Europe: Austria (5), Belgium (1), Czech Republic (3), Denmark (30), France (2), Germany (52), Hungary (4), Italy (1), Poland (7), Romania (6), Slovenia (7), Sweden (2) and Ukraine (1). Cases of HPAI H5N5 were reported in Germany (2). Cases of HPAI H5N8 were reported in Germany (1). Cases of HPAI H5 in wild birds were reported in Sweden (2). Germany reported 2 cases of HPAI H5N1 in wild foxes and 1 case of HPAI H5N1 in a Northern racoon. Norway also reported HPAI in 2 racoons, 1 with H5N5 and the other with H5Nx.

Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in non-commercial non-poultry were reported in Czech Republic (7), Germany (3) and Poland (3).

Figure 3. Weekly outbreaks of HPAI in poultry and captive birds and cases in wild birds reported across Europe between week 52 (end of December 2023) and week 11 (middle of March 2024) (IZSVe, 2024)



There was an observed increase in the number of reports across Europe in late December 2023 and then again in the middle of February, where there was a peak of 81 reports. Since the peak in mid-February, reports have slowly decreased to just 5 in week 11 (mid-March). The majority of these reports were in wild birds.

Implications for GB

The sporadic reports of HPAI H5 in found dead wild birds provide evidence that it is still circulating in wild bird populations in GB, albeit at greatly reduced levels compared to this time of year in 2022 and 2023, with just 7 positive cases since our last report on 16 February 2024 (Map 2). Of these, 1 was a herring gull with H5N1 in southern England in mid-February and 6 were H5N5, mainly raptors, in northern England and Scotland. HPAI cases in wild birds, mainly H5N1, are still ongoing in Europe although the number of reports has fallen in recent weeks (Figure 3).

There are 3 main continuing trends in avian species in Europe. Firstly, since 16 February 2024, more cases of H5N5 in wild birds have been detected in northern Europe with Germany reporting 2 unidentified gulls. The trajectory of H5N5 in northern Europe is of interest to Great Britain because it may give an indication of how H5N5 might spread in Great Britain. The second trend is the ongoing cases of HPAI H5N1 in southern Europe

from Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary through to southern Germany, Austria and north-eastern Italy. However, in southern Europe, HPAI reports are greatly decreased. There have been no further cases in southern France or in Spain, with the westward migration of common cranes having stopped and birds will now be starting to fly back east. According to WOAH disease freedom declarations, France, the Netherlands and Belgium have all self-declared freedom from highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry. The third trend is the ongoing detection of wild bird cases in northern Germany, Denmark, the Wadden Sea, and Sweden, extending as far west as northern France. Though these cases are of greater concern to Great Britain during the autumn migration period (September through to December), at this time of year in early April, many of the ducks, geese and swans have started to depart from Great Britain flying north and east, and those in the Wadden Sea area would certainly not want to fly further west.

The main concern for Great Britain is the trajectory of H5N5 in wild birds in the next few weeks and whether HPAI H5 will emerge again in seabirds and gulls this spring and summer. So far this does not appear to be case in Europe, where H5N1 infection in black-headed gulls preceded that in gulls in England last year. However, we will continue to monitor the situation. Perhaps reassuringly H5N5 has not been reported in Germany in the last 2 weeks, though surveillance strategies will vary between countries, and HPAI H5N8 in shore birds has been reported from February. Therefore, although the wild bird risk in Great Britain has been reduced to from medium to low this month, there is uncertainty in this low risk for wild birds currently.

Conclusion

Since our last assessment on 16 February 2024, the numbers of wild bird cases of HPAI H5 reported per week has remained at very low levels in Great Britain and report cases in Europe have begun to decline although, there will be variation in surveillance plans across Europe. Although HPAI H5 is still present in wild birds in western Europe, at this time of year, we are not expecting wild bird movements from the Wadden Sea area and northern Germany into Great Britain. Many of the migratory water bird species will have departed Great Britain by the end of March and pink-footed geese, for example, will have started moving northward through Scotland. Most of the recent HPAI H5 cases in wild birds have been HPAI H5N5, and mainly in northern England and Scotland. If these were to represent the start of a disease process for H5N5 in wild birds, we would have expected to have detected a notable increase by now. This of course does not mean HPAI H5 will not spread into seabirds or gulls this summer as in previous years. However, with the low number of HPAI H5 cases in wild birds and the imminent departure of all the migratory ducks, geese and swans, together with dispersion of wintering aggregates of resident waterbirds into breeding pairs, it is concluded that the national risk level for HPAI H5 in wild birds can be lowered from **MEDIUM** (occurs regularly) to **LOW** (rare but does occur). It is noted that the risk to wild birds could unexpectedly increase due to the unpredictability of the situation, and we will continue to monitor the situation closely.

The number of poultry IPs in GB has remained low in 2024 with no new IPs since our last update on the 16 February. 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.

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 01 April 2024.

Region and Species	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N1 since last assessment (16 February 2024)	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N1 since 01 October 2023	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N5 since last assessment (16 February 2024)	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N5 since 01 October 2023	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5Nx since last assessment (16 February 2024)	Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5Nx since 01 October 2023	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	0	0	0	0	0	1
Common Buzzard	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	2
Common Gull	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Gannet	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Greylag Goose	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Herring Gull	1	3	1	1	0	1	2	5
Merlin	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Mute Swan	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2

Peregrine Falcon	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Pheasant	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	5
Sparrow Hawk	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Whooper Swan	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
England Total	**1**	**18**	**4**	**6**	**0**	**2**	**5**	**26**
Scotland								
Region and Species	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N1 since last assessment (16 February 2024)**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N1 since 01 October 2023**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N5 since last assessment (16 February 2024)**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N5 since 01 October 2023**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5Nx since last assessment (16 February 2024)**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5Nx since 01 October 2023**	**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**
Common Buzzard	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Gannet	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Great Black Headed Gull	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Great Black-Backed Gull	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Herring Gull	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2

Pheasant	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Red Kite	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Shag	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sparrow Hawk	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Scotland Total	**0**	**5**	**2**	**4**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**10**
Wales								
Region and Species	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N1 since last assessment (16 February 2024)**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N1 since 01 October 2023**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N5 since last assessment (16 February 2024)**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5N5 since 01 October 2023**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5Nx since last assessment (16 February 2024)**	**Total number of birds testing positive with HPAI H5Nx since 01 October 2023**	**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**
Lesser Black-Backed Gull	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wales Total	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**
Grand Total	**1**	**24**	**6**	**10**	**0**	**3**	**7**	**37**

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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.