

## **BIRD FLU AND GAMEBIRDS**

**As the serious and notifiable disease H5N8 bird flu continues to be found in wild birds and some kept flocks in the UK, government has come together with countryside and shooting organisations to issue the following important information to all involved with gamebirds.**

**This REVISED version reflects new laws in GB in place from 28 February and it replaces the original document dated 13 January 2017.**

### **THE OUTBREAK**

Avian Influenza, also known as bird flu, is a disease that affects gamebirds, chickens, ducks, geese and other poultry. It can also occur in many species of wild birds.

A severe strain of the disease, H5N8, has been spreading in wild and captive birds throughout Europe, including the UK. A full [report](#) on the outbreak, including maps, is regularly updated.

The H5N8 strain is highly pathogenic and can be passed from wild birds to kept flocks, causing birds to fall ill and die, although signs may be variable. It can be transmitted directly from bird to bird or via the environment, for example in bird droppings or on people and equipment.

Risks to human health from H5N8 are very low and bird flu does not pose a food safety risk.

However, the potential impacts of bird flu on the UK's poultry industries, on bird collections and not least on wildlife and shooting are hard to exaggerate. It is not just the disease itself but also the essential legal measures taken to eradicate it that could affect your activities so you need to read and heed this information very carefully.

By taking the right actions now, you will not only be protecting your own birds and interests, you will also be contributing to a nationwide effort to safeguard all bird-related businesses, particularly those located in your area.

### **THE LAW**

To reduce the risk of bird flu spreading further, new Avian Influenza Prevention Zones (AIPZ) have been declared in [Wales](#), [Scotland](#) and [England](#). The new zones came into effect from 00:01 on the 28 February 2017 and will be in place until 30 April 2017. In Northern Ireland a new AIPZ will come into effect at 00:01 on 17 March 2017. Management of the disease is a devolved matter and so the requirements for each country have been set out below:

#### **Wales**

The new AIPZ continues to apply to the whole of Wales, but includes changes to the required measures. All keepers of poultry and other captive birds must comply with specified biosecurity measures, complete a biosecurity [self-assessment form](#) and adopt one or more of the following: i) House their birds, ii) Keep their birds totally separate from wild birds by the use of netting etc. or iii) Allow controlled access to outside, subject to applying

[additional risk mitigation measures](#). Following consideration of their premises, keepers will be able to select the appropriate approach to protect their birds. Further advice and guidance is available on the Welsh Government [Avian Influenza webpages](#).

## **Scotland**

The new AIPZ continues to apply to the whole of Scotland. It now permits keepers in all areas of Scotland to let their birds outside provided that they have enhanced biosecurity in place. This includes a requirement that any person in charge of poultry or other captive birds must take all appropriate and practicable steps to ensure that poultry and other captive birds are protected against contact with wild birds through the use of cages, nets or roofs or by other appropriate and effective biosecurity measures. For some, voluntarily housing their birds may still be the best option. The full list of requirements is provided within the declaration available on the Scottish Government [Avian Influenza webpages](#).

## **England**

All areas in England remain at high risk of H5N8 in wild birds. However, in England a number of areas have been defined as '**Higher Risk Areas**' (HRAs). These are generally areas near where wild birds (and in particular gulls and wild waterfowl) gather, such as lakes, marshes or estuaries.

The new AIPZ continues to apply to the whole of England, but includes a more targeted approach in HRAs. The rationale for the approach to HRAs has been [published](#) on GOV.UK. An interactive map is available on the Defra website to enable all keepers to check whether they are within an HRA or not.

All poultry keepers in England (whether they have commercial flocks, game birds or just a few birds in a backyard flock) are required by law to take a range of biosecurity precautions. Keepers with more than 500 birds must take some extra biosecurity measures. These include identifying clearly defined areas where access by non-essential people and vehicles is restricted. Vehicles, equipment and footwear must be cleaned and disinfected. [The Defra guidance](#) explains this in more detail.

Outside of HRAs, housing of birds is no longer required by law, and keepers can let their birds outside provided they take specific precautions against avian flu. This means either fully netting outside areas or allowing the birds managed access to outside areas / pens providing clear biosecurity measures have been taken. Within the HRAs, keepers are only permitted to house or fully net their birds. Further advice and guidance on the measures and biosecurity can be found on <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu>

## **Northern Ireland**

Up until 16 March 2017 the current AIPZ zone applies, which requires all poultry and captive bird keepers to apply heightened biosecurity including keeping their birds indoors if possible, or otherwise separated from wild birds. From 17 March the requirements of the zone will be amended, meaning that keepers will have the option of letting their birds outside, provided they put in place additional biosecurity mitigation measures to minimise

the risk of infection from wild birds. These measures in the new zone will apply across all of Northern Ireland. Further advice and guidance is available at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/avian-influenza-ai>.

## **OTHER LEGAL REQUIREMENTS**

There are also UK-wide bans on Bird Gatherings. These are mainly bird shows and auctions but they include any situation where birds come together from several places and then, shortly afterwards, either go back where they came from or go on to other destinations.

Around the outbreaks in kept flocks including gamebirds and other poultry there are additional restrictions, usually out to 10km from the infected premises and often lasting many weeks. These include restrictions on the movement of birds, bird products and people and also an automatic ban on all gamebird releasing. Licences may be obtained for movements, following a veterinary risk assessment, but never for releasing.

There is a longstanding legal requirement to register with the Government if you keep a total of 50 or more gamebirds or other poultry (*all* bird keepers are expected to register in Northern Ireland). This applies even if your premises are only stocked for part of the year. You can register via these links in [England](#), in [Scotland](#), in [Wales](#), or in [Northern Ireland](#).

Full details of all the legal restrictions in place are constantly updated on the Government websites in [England](#), in [Scotland](#), in [Wales](#) or in [Northern Ireland](#). Click on the links, which also include a wealth of other information about the disease and its implications.

Local Authorities have been briefed on these requirements and on enforcement.

## **BIOSECURITY**

Next to staying within the law, the over-riding consideration at this time is biosecurity. Particular attention should be paid to thorough cleaning and disinfection of clothing, footwear, vehicles and equipment when moving and mixing birds. Such things are always important in gamebird management but never more so than now. Regulations requiring heightened biosecurity are in place throughout the UK but the detail varies between countries. If you keep gamebirds, look up the rules applying in your location on the Government websites (see above) and follow them.

The key points are to keep species apart, especially separating poultry or gamebirds from waterfowl, and avoid penning any birds close to open water. Separate different gamebird production stages, for example by keeping laying birds away from hatching and rearing facilities. Minimise human and vehicle contact between such functions and ensure that any people or items moving between them are biosecure. Use footbaths containing government-approved disinfectant products which should also be used for all other disinfection tasks, (in [GB](#) or in [Northern Ireland](#)). Ask your vet for advice. Brief staff thoroughly and restrict access by non-essential visitors. Be scrupulous with your record keeping as to where birds, people and equipment have come from and gone to. Keep food

and water clean and, as far as possible, inaccessible to wild birds. Biosecurity is not just a physical barrier, it's a way of thinking too; work it out and take appropriate action now.

### **CATCHING-UP**

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, all catching up of gamebirds after 1 February is illegal under the Game Act of 1831 and the Game Preservation Act (Northern Ireland) 1928. In these countries, catching up is only lawful during the shooting season of the species in question. In Scotland, catching up of gamebirds is illegal after 28 February.

### **MOVING GAMEBIRDS**

The only areas where gamebird movements are currently banned are the 10 km control zones around actual bird flu outbreaks in kept flocks. No birds may be moved within, from or to these zones without a specific licence issued by the authorities managing the outbreak.

Elsewhere, kept gamebirds can be moved and the normal rules apply. In summary, the animal transport regulations permit only healthy gamebirds to be moved. Maximum journey times are specified and all consignments must be accompanied by an Animal Transport Certificate. Good biosecurity implies moving gamebirds around as little as possible while the current outbreak lasts. All journeys must be undertaken with great care. Transport must be cleaned and disinfected between consignments, as the law requires, and accurate records of all gamebird movements must be kept.

Imports and exports of gamebirds to and from the UK (alive or dead) are covered by additional rules and can be stopped by Order to prevent the spread of notifiable diseases such as bird flu. Typically, no exports of eggs or birds are allowed from premises in Europe that are within 10 km of a confirmed outbreak in kept birds. Those who source game from abroad should keep an eye on the extent of such restrictions via the first document link in '*The Outbreak*' section above.

### **LAYING AND REARING PENS**

The setting up and use of gamebird laying pens and rearing systems is allowed within the current restrictions provided they meet the requirements in force for keeping gamebirds separate from wild birds. These differ between countries (see '*The Law*' section above).

### **GAMEBIRD RELEASING**

The national restrictions associated with controlling bird flu do not currently affect gamebird releasing except within the 10 km control zones around kept bird outbreaks. In these zones, no gamebird releasing is allowed, not even under licence. So far, we have been fortunate that there has not been a bird flu outbreak within the UK during the main period for releasing gamebirds but we cannot know what will happen later in 2017. Further guidance on releasing gamebirds in High Risk Areas in England will be issued if those areas continue beyond 30 April.

## SHOOTING

Shooting, whether of gamebirds or other species, is normally unaffected by the controls on bird flu outbreaks. An exception is if the outbreak is of the very serious H5N1 type in wild birds, when all shooting is automatically stopped within the control area to reduce the risk of moving infected birds around. The current outbreak is not H5N1.

There is, however, a possibility – albeit remote - that wild birds shot or culled in pest and predator control could be infected with H5N8. It clearly makes sense, therefore, to avoid actions that could spread infection from killed wild birds into any kept birds, whatever their species. Do not use the same vehicles and storage facilities for shot and live birds without thorough cleansing and disinfection in between. Keep all shot or culled birds well away from any kept flocks. Likewise, wash hands and clothing well after handling dead birds and before any contact with kept flocks. Public Health England has issued more [advice](#) on this.

Gundogs are not at any particular risk from the current H5N8 outbreak but as a precaution do not allow dogs eat any dead wild birds and do not feed uncooked shot or culled birds to animals. Well-cooked birds can be safely consumed by humans and animals alike.

If you find dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, you should report them to the Defra helpline (03459 33 55 77) or in Northern Ireland to the DAERA Helpline (0300 200 7840).

## PLANNING AHEAD

Forecasting the future of the current outbreak remains fraught with difficulty. Typically, outbreaks of bird flu eventually die out, just like other diseases. Once springtime reverse migration of wild birds is over, the risk of spread via wild birds may decrease. The weather can be a factor as well, although we have seen summer outbreaks in the past. But the extent of the current outbreak is causing veterinary experts to predict that the disease will certainly be present in Europe and probably the UK for many weeks to come. Gamebird keepers therefore need to think ahead as to how their future activities might be affected.

It is important not just to consider the impact of your own birds catching bird flu but also what would happen if there were outbreaks nearby or further afield. For example, you might find yourself within one of the 10 km control zones where gamebird movements would be restricted and releasing banned.

Consider also your supply chains; where do your eggs, chicks or poults come from and what would happen if those producers, or their suppliers, found themselves under similar restriction at a critical time? Is there anything you can do now to reduce such risks and to plan ahead? Do you need to source new items, such as roof netting, in order to comply with current or future requirements to separate birds? If you run a business, what do your contracts with suppliers and customers say about what happens in the event of disease or control-based restrictions? Have you considered insurance?....

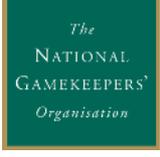
Everyone’s circumstances will be different and we cannot give specific advice on such matters here but we do urge you to give very careful consideration to all the information in this document and the ways in which it could affect you, now or in the future.

**VIGILANCE**

Finally, remember that bird flu is by law a notifiable disease. Know the signs, which include loss of appetite, swollen heads, respiratory problems and multiple unexpected deaths. Involve your vet and if you suspect bird flu call the Defra helpline immediately on 03000 200 301 in England, 0300 303 8268 in Wales or 0300 200 7840 in Northern Ireland. In [Scotland](#) please call your local APHA office.

Bird flu and its consequences certainly impact game management and shooting but it is also true that game managers and shooters are in a good position to detect and report outbreaks. Please keep vigilant and report any concerns. That way we can all help to eradicate bird flu, so that the UK can get back to being a disease-free country once more and all our important activities can return to normal again as soon as possible. Thank you.

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