



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

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Avian Influenza Update

8th December 2023

National Disease Control Centre

Number 5 of 2023

Avian Influenza situation in Ireland

- There have been no outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in poultry in Ireland during 2023 to date
- Farmers and veterinary practitioners and other relevant stakeholders should continue to remain vigilant for any signs of disease in their flocks, and report any disease suspicion to their nearest [Regional Veterinary Office \(RVO\)](#)
- **Flock owners should ensure high biosecurity standards are maintained** to help protect flocks against all poultry diseases, not just Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (see biosecurity advice below)
- **Wintertime brings with it a higher risk period for Avian Influenza in Ireland.** Colder weather and decreasing daylight can extend the survival time of avian influenza viruses in the environment, and migratory wild birds (the natural hosts of many avian influenza viruses) arrive in large numbers to overwinter in Ireland

Risk to Ireland regarding HPAI

- Avian Influenza is **highly contagious** for birds. The virus may still be present in the environment and can be transmitted to poultry or captive birds by wild birds
- **Poultry owners and those working with poultry should beware of visiting areas, both at home and abroad, where deaths of wild birds have occurred (coastal areas, bird colonies, etc.).** Direct contact with sick or dead wild birds must be avoided
- Members of the public are reminded not to touch sick or dead wild birds. Dogs should be kept on a lead when walking in areas where sick or dead wild birds are present

Avian Influenza situation in Northern Ireland

- There have been no outbreaks of HPAI in poultry in Northern Ireland during 2023 to date
- On 8th and 15th September 2023 HPAI H5N1 was reported in a Swan and a Gull respectively submitted for official testing as part of Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) avian influenza wild bird surveillance

Current Avian Influenza situation in poultry in Europe

Since 1 October 2023, 96 outbreaks of HPAI in poultry have been reported to the European Commission's Animal Disease Information System (ADIS). The 96 outbreaks can be broken down by country as follows: Hungary (56), Germany (9), Bulgaria (9), France (5), Italy (4), The Netherlands (3), Denmark (3), Romania (2), Poland (2), Kosovo (1), Croatia (1), Belgium (1).

The numbers above do not include a further 3 outbreaks in England and 2 outbreaks in Scotland which have been confirmed during the same time period.

No outbreaks have been confirmed in Wales or Northern Ireland since 1 October 2023.

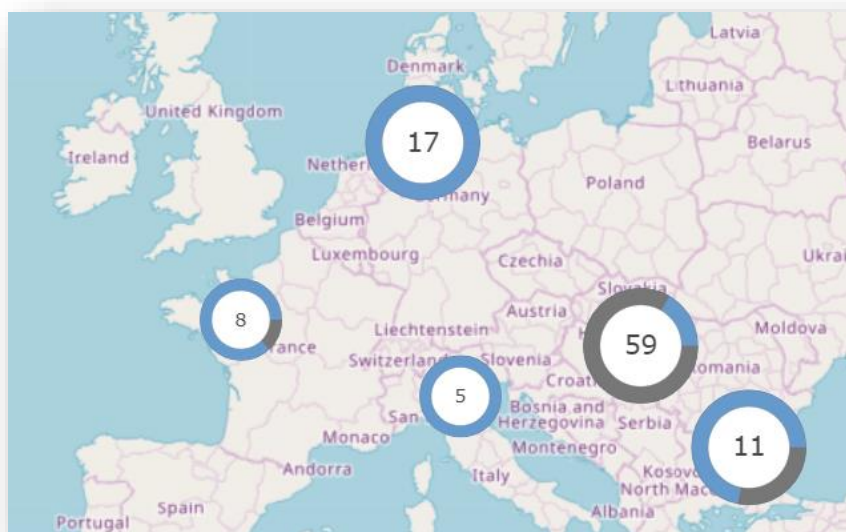


Figure 1.
Geographical location
of Avian Influenza
outbreaks in poultry
in Europe (01/07/23-
07/12/23)

While the situation in poultry eased over the summer, HPAI virus continued to affect seabirds in Europe, mostly along coastlines.

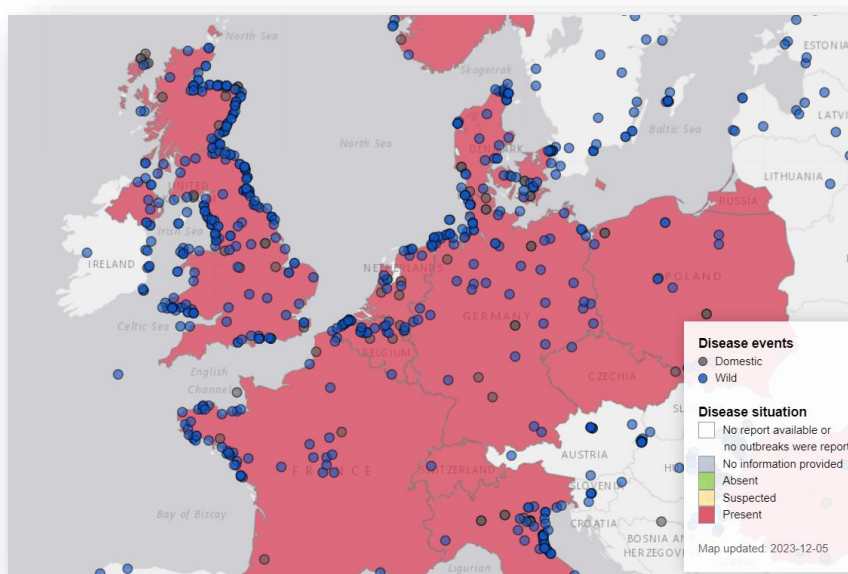


Figure 2.
Location and inter-
relationship between
cases of Avian
Influenza detected in
wild and domestic
birds in 2023

Recent outbreaks of HPAI highlight that the virus is still circulating in north-west Europe. Five outbreaks of HPAI have occurred in France since 01 October, all of which have occurred in turkey flocks.

Belgium's first HPAI outbreak of 2023 was confirmed on 01 December on a turkey farm in the north west of the country involving 20,000 birds. Contact with wild birds is considered the origin of infection. Significant outbreaks of HPAI have also occurred on poultry farms in the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark.

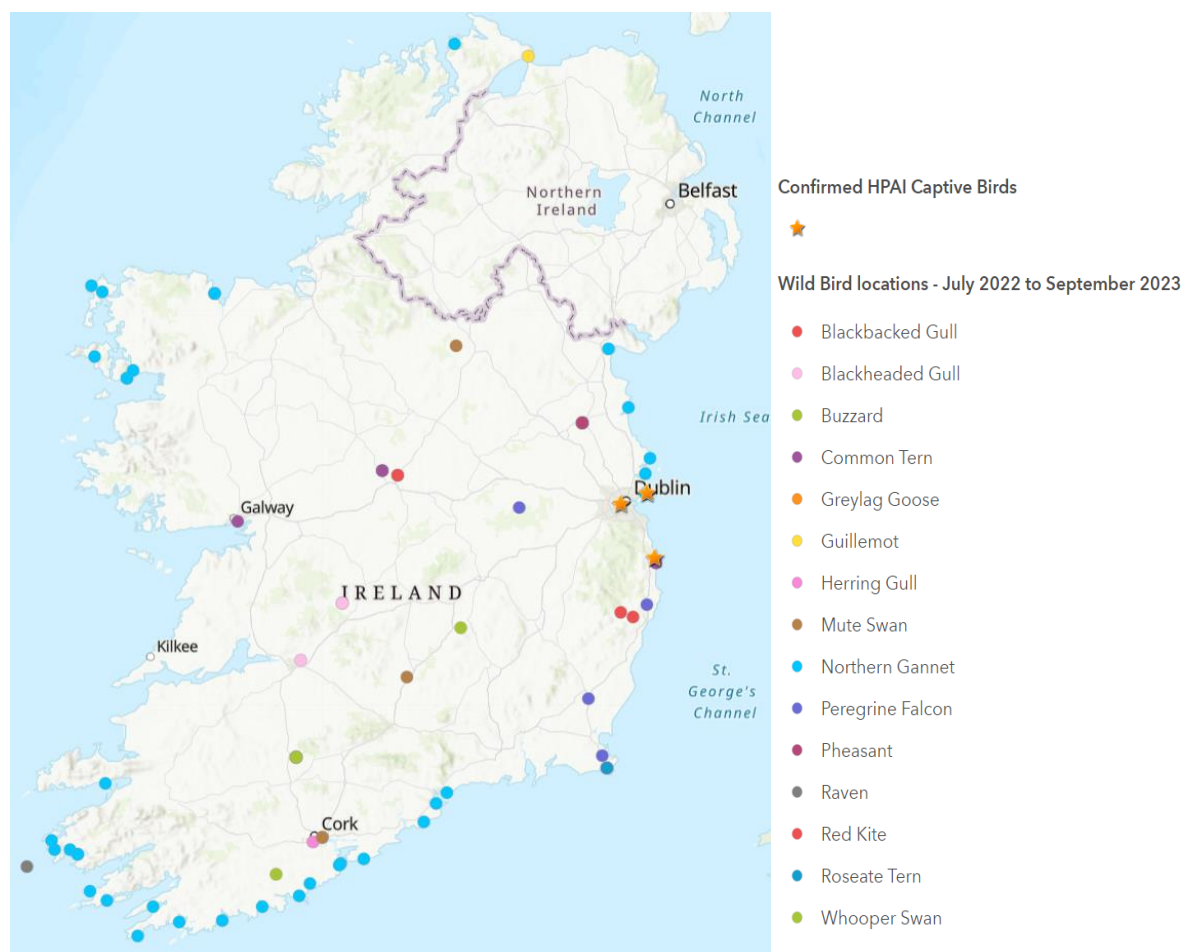


Figure 3 detailing the location of Avian Influenza outbreaks in poultry in Northern Europe (November-December 2023)

Avian Influenza situation in wild birds in Ireland

- In 2023 to date, 42 birds in 11 counties, have tested positive for Avian Influenza (41 H5N1, 1 H5Nx)
- The most recent case was reported on 11th September 2023, where H5N1 was recorded in a peregrin falcon that was found dead was submitted to Kilkenny Regional Veterinary Laboratory. On 15th September 2023 the CVRL confirmed the presence of avian influenza subtype H5N1 in samples taken from the birds.

Figure 4 Locations of H5N1 avian influenza cases in wild birds and outbreaks in captive birds in Ireland since 1st July 2022.



Interactive maps for Avian Influenza:

Ireland:

An interactive map (for illustrative purposes) courtesy of the Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis (CVERA) displaying the location of avian influenza cases in wild and captive birds is available to view [here](#).

UK:

An interactive map for Northern Ireland (for illustrative purposes) courtesy of DAERA is available to view [here](#).

An interactive map for England/Scotland/Wales (for illustrative purposes) courtesy of the APHA is available to view [here](#).

Europe/Global:

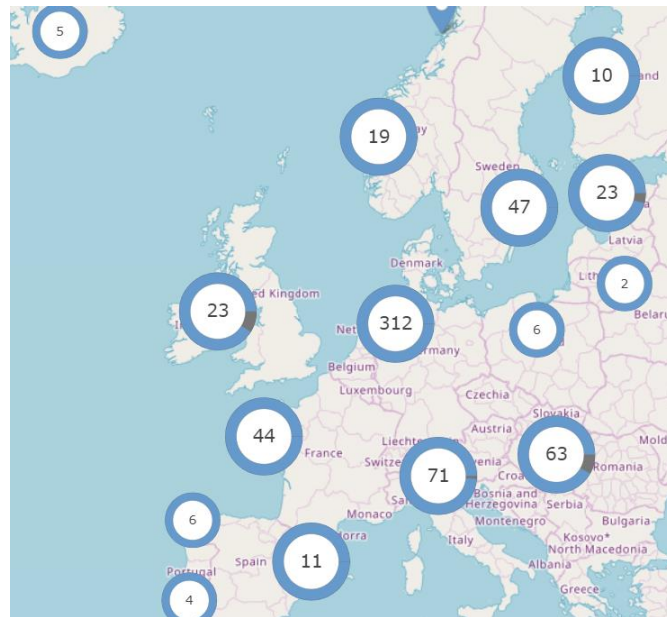
An interactive map for European and global cases (for illustrative purposes) courtesy of the EFSA is available to view [here](#)

Current Avian Influenza wild bird situation in the rest of Europe

Over the last 6 months (1st July 2023 to date); 674 outbreaks of Avian Influenza occurred in wild birds across several European countries.

In the UK, (1st July to date), avian influenza has been detected in almost 500 wild bird species; with 20 of these cases reported since 1st October 2023.

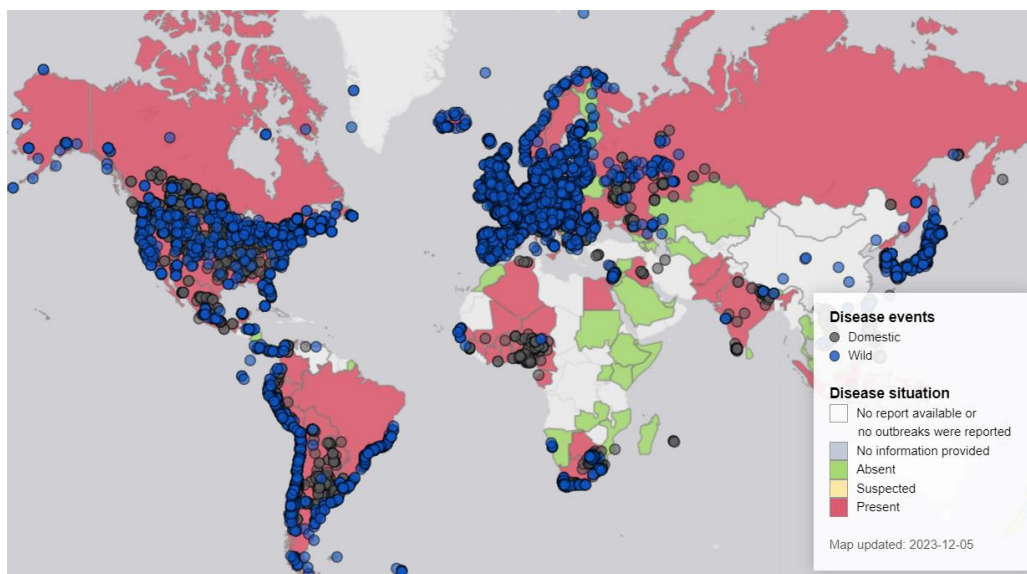
Figure 5 detailing the geographical location of Avian Influenza outbreaks in wild birds in Europe (01/07/23-07/12/23).



Current global Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza situation

HPAI continues to be reported in poultry and wild birds globally.

Figure 1 detailing the global distribution of Avian Influenza outbreaks in wild and domestic birds in 2023.



Strict Biosecurity is Essential to Prevent Outbreaks

All flock owners should ask themselves the following questions to help implement and maintain appropriate biosecurity measures:

1. Who has access to the poultry areas?

Only allow **essential** persons access to the poultry houses e.g. husbandry, veterinary care. Ensure that dedicated clothing or disposable personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn including disposable gloves and overalls. Clean and disinfect boots before entering and immediately upon exiting each poultry house. Wash hands each time upon leaving a poultry house. Dedicated personnel should be appointed to manage each site.

2. Have I checked the disinfectant points?

All disinfectant points must be maintained. **Read the label on the disinfectant which is approved for use against avian influenza.** Disinfectant footbaths must be changed regularly in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Contamination prevents the effective use of disinfectants. Footwear needs to be cleaned thoroughly before being disinfected in foot dips. Wait the recommended contact time before entering the house. Repeat checks with disinfectant points at entry and exit points to the premises.

3. Can wild birds get access to the poultry?

Inspect the housing thoroughly. **Ensure that there are no gaps where wild birds can enter the housing.** Check the gutters and roof. Can contaminated rainwater enter the house? Can wild birds get access to or contaminate the drinking water system?

4. Is the feed and bedding stored securely?

Feed and bedding attract wild birds so **secure storage** of both is essential. If using straw, ensure it is either double wrapped and covered with a birdproof cover or stored in a shed with no wild bird access. Remove wrapping outside of the house. Feed should be stored in a secure bin and any spills cleaned up immediately. Use wild bird deterrents.

5. What do I do about feed delivery/egg collection vehicles that have to come onto the holding?

Disinfect wheels, wheel arches and underbody of all vehicles coming before allowing them to enter the premises and prior to leaving the premises. **Do not allow any drivers to enter poultry houses.** Ensure that drivers wear disposable gloves and disinfect footwear upon arrival (ensure that there is a disinfectant point near the feed bin/egg storage area).

6. What about equipment?

Any equipment that is used to transport poultry or poultry products must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to being used on the farm e.g., trolleys, trays, pallets, cages etc. Disposable single-use egg trays or plastic Keyes trays which are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each use can be used for egg collections. Don't forget about other equipment such as feeders and watering equipment and clean and disinfect equipment and housing between bird placements.

BE VIGILANT

Check the feed and water intake and look for clinical signs of avian influenza.

Report any suspicions immediately to DAFM

Do not allow anyone on/off the premises pending investigation

Further information regarding Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza H5N1

- HPAI H5N1 is a notifiable disease both in Ireland and to the European Commission and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as the OIE)
- Outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 in poultry in Ireland impact upon our international trade in poultry and poultry products. The disease is highly contagious for birds, but risk of transmission to humans is considered very low. DAFM conduct surveillance for avian influenza.
- Avian influenza poses no food safety risk for consumers. Properly cooked poultry and poultry products, including eggs are safe to eat.
- **Wintertime (October onwards) brings with it a higher risk period for a potential outbreak of Avian Influenza in Ireland.** Colder weather and decreasing daylight can extend the survival time of Avian influenza viruses in the environment, and migratory wild birds (the natural hosts of many avian influenza viruses including H5N1) start to arrive in large numbers to overwinter in Ireland.

Reporting of Sick or dead wild birds to DAFM:

DAFM implements avian influenza surveillance measures in wild birds and poultry throughout the year and form part of our well-established Early Warning System for the detection of avian influenza. The submission of dead wild birds which are on the target species list for avian influenza surveillance for testing, based on a risk assessment, at the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory forms part of this programme.

Where the Department has sufficient epidemiological surveillance information in particular geographical areas, it will not necessarily collect dead birds for testing. When dead wild birds are not required for surveillance purposes, and are present on public land, it is the responsibility of the local authority to safely dispose of the carcasses.

Current protocols provide for the collection and sampling of dead wild birds in the following circumstances when required: if one or more bird of prey (including owls), three or more waterfowl (including gulls), five or more of any other species of bird are found

Sick or dead wild birds can be reported to DAFM via:

→ Avian Check Wild Bird App <https://aviancheck.apps.services.agriculture.gov.ie/>

→ local [Regional Veterinary Office \(RVO\)](#) or contact the DAFM disease hotline on 01 607 2512 (during office hours) or 01 492 8026 (outside office hours)

What can poultry owners do to reduce the risk of avian influenza?

- Flock owners should remain vigilant for any **unexplained signs of disease in their flocks**, and report any disease suspicion to their nearest Regional Veterinary Office

1. BE VIGILANT

Monitor your birds carefully for any clinical signs of disease. If in doubt, contact your veterinary practitioner for advice.

Signs of Avian Influenza may include:

- Death/high mortalities in a flock
- Depression/lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Respiratory distress (gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling)
- Swelling and blue discolouration of combs, wattles, neck and throat
- Gastrointestinal signs (inappetence, diarrhoea)
- Nervous signs
- Reduced egg production or no egg production

2. BIOSECURITY

A copy of the Avian Influenza (Biosecurity measures) Regulations 2022, accompanying guidance document and additional species specific biosecurity leaflets can be found [here](#).

Personnel and Visitors

- Wear disposable or dedicated outer clothing when in contact with your birds.
- Wear boots that can be disinfected, disposable gloves and wash hands after contact with poultry.
- Only allow essential personnel access to your birds.

Buildings and Equipment

- Regularly clean and disinfect hard surfaces such as paths and walkways.
- Provide clean boot washing and disinfection facilities at all entrances/exits and ensure that people use them.
- Clean and disinfect any vehicles or equipment that encounter the birds after use.
- Have suitable pest control in place.

Wild Birds

- Feed and water birds inside or at least under cover.
- Clean up any waste feed in outdoor areas frequently.
- Use netting or wild bird decoys or deterrents to keep wild birds away from poultry areas.

Management

- Keep ducks and geese separate to other poultry species.
- **The Department also reminds all poultry owners, including those who keep only 1 or 2 birds, of their legal obligation to register their premises with the Department. Registration is a legal requirement under Irish law. Legislation on registration can be found [here](#).**
- Use an [approved disinfectant](#) against avian influenza in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

Please consult the following resources for further information on AI:

- DAFM has a wide variety of biosecurity resources for avian influenza-please see: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e230-poultry/>
- DAFM avian influenza updates: [gov.ie - Avian influenza \(bird flu\) \(www.gov.ie\)](#)
- To register a poultry flock: [gov.ie - Poultry Register \(www.gov.ie\)](#)
- Regional Veterinary Office contact details: [gov.ie - Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine \(www.gov.ie\)](#)
- European Commission [Avian influenza \(europa.eu\)](#)
- World Organisation for Animal Health: [Avian Influenza - WOAHA - World Organisation for Animal Health](#)
- European Food Safety Authority: [Avian influenza | EFSA \(europa.eu\)](#)

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