

26 December 2021

Compiled by NEBBS  
group coordinator

Sending Seasonal Greetings and many thanks for your continuing involvement!

### **Current Avian Influenza cases and concern**

Many cases of Avian Influenza have been confirmed in wild birds within the UK in recent weeks (Weeks 43 – 50 of 2021), also in northeast England. In our region the species involved have generally been swans (Mute, swan sp.) and geese (Canada, Barnacle, Greylag, goose sp.) with two confirmed cases in black-headed gulls (Sunderland area, week 49). Several other species have been noted with the disease within the UK, quite notably some birds of prey.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has issued a ‘Declaration of a Captive Bird (Monitoring) Controlled Zone (Avian Influenza) – Near Washington, Sunderland, Tyne & Wear’ from 9 p.m. on 11 December 2021. This Zone has a radius of 3 km and is centred on grid reference NZ3328056024 (Washington Wetland, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust).

See this web link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1040130/captive-bird-controlled-zone-IP44-DPR2021-110-AIV2021-50.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1040130/captive-bird-controlled-zone-IP44-DPR2021-110-AIV2021-50.pdf)

On 25 December 2021 at 9:33 a.m. two dead ringed swans (most likely Mute) were reported to me from North Shields Fish Quay Sands – a most unusual sighting. Today, Sunday 26 December, between 3:06 and 3:34 p.m. I received reports of a dead mute swan and pink-footed goose from Seaburn (Tyne and Wear, south). These sightings are of note and are being reported to Defra.

Current Government advice regarding wild birds includes the following:

- Do not touch or pick up any dead or visibly sick birds that you find.
- In Great Britain, 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).
- We then collect some of these birds and test them to help us understand how the disease is distributed geographically and in different types of bird, not all birds will be collected. Wild birds are susceptible to a range of diseases and injuries and not all dead birds will have been infected with avian influenza.

Further Government advice includes the following:

Disposal of dead wild birds found at domestic premises

- After contacting the Defra Helpline (03459 33 55 77) to report the dead wild birds, if the birds are not required for surveillance purposes, follow the advice below for their disposal.

Disposal in household or municipal waste refuse:

- if possible, wear disposable protective gloves when picking up and handling dead wild birds (if disposable gloves are not available, a plastic bag can be used as a make-shift glove). When the dead wild bird has been picked up, the bag can be turned back on itself and tied. It should then be placed in a second plastic bag, tied and disposed of in the normal household waste (lidded bin outside)
- place the dead wild bird in a suitable plastic bag, preferably leak proof. Care should be taken not to contaminate the outside of the bag
- tie the bag and place it in a second plastic bag
- remove gloves by turning them inside out and then place them in the second plastic bag. Tie the bag and dispose of it in the normal household refuse bin

The website for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has an Avian Influenza web page ...

<https://www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/take-part-project/health-safety/avian-flu>

This web page includes the following information (see seven bullet points below):

- The current risk of incursion in wild birds is considered to be HIGH. In winter 2021-22 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 was confirmed in wild waterbirds and birds of prey in Britain. Weekly findings in wild birds in Great Britain are listed (here). Locations of any control zones currently in force can be viewed on the government interactive map. NI and GB-wide Avian Influenza Prevention Zones (AIPZ) have been put in place.
- If you find dead wild swans, geese, ducks, gulls or birds of prey, you should report them to the Defra helpline - see below. For surveillance, all reports are encouraged, although only some will be collected and tested.
- Birdwatchers can be of great assistance in staying alert for unusual cases of mortality or sickness in wild birds. If you notice unusual mortality in Great Britain, i.e. five or more wild birds dead in the same location, you should report them by calling the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77 (Mon-Fri 8am to 6pm) and selecting option 7, or by emailing [defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk). In Northern Ireland such wild bird mortality incidents should be reported to the DAERA Helpline: 0300 200 7840.
- Currently reports are encouraged when any number of dead wild waterfowl (swans, geese or ducks) or other dead wild birds, such as gulls or birds of prey, are found. Not all birds may be picked up for testing, but collating this information may reveal patterns of mortality.
- It should be stressed that HPAI is a disease of birds. It is of great concern for the poultry industry but does not appear to be a major issue for human health in the UK. Whilst deaths have occurred in other countries, the numbers of cases have been very low and have been confined to people in very close contact to infected poultry. The advice is that there is no danger from eating well-cooked poultry and there is certainly no danger from normal birdwatching activities. Sensible basic hygiene should be used if you do come into closer contact with birds.
- Low Pathogenic (LPAI) forms of Avian Influenza are endemic in both poultry and wild birds but may develop into High Pathogenic (HPAI) forms, which can kill birds quickly. Some strains of avian influenza can pass to humans, but this is very rare and Public Health England advises the risk to public health from the H5N8 and H5N2 strains of bird flu is very low. More information can be found on the Government website.
- AI in wild bird populations is most likely to be encountered in winter, when wildfowl arrive in the UK. There is potential for transmission between wild birds and poultry during this period if the latter are housed outside; transportation of livestock provides another route of transmission between commercial premises.

### **Avian Influenza - In conclusion**

The NEBBS Group Coordinator recommends that, in this current period, our NEBBS beached bird surveyors should refrain from handling beached swans, geese and ducks, and should also take particular care with gulls and birds of prey. These species should still be recorded as we go about our surveys, please, and let me know a.s.a.p. if such specimens are found – so they may be reported to Defra (or perhaps surveyors may be able to do this themselves?).

### **Finally**

At this time, surveyors should please collect all fulmars (with complete abdomens), and similarly with little auks and kittiwakes. We may also collect some guillemots, razorbills and puffins, ringed specimens and other birds of interest. The next **Dove Marine Lab** days are planned for 11 and 12 January with student Matthew Livsey. Please let me know if you would like to attend.

Kind regards, Dan Turner (Group coordinator). Email [dan.m.turner@btinternet.com](mailto:dan.m.turner@btinternet.com)