Avian Influenza 2016-17 – updated 25/1/17

Summary
United Kingdom: 5 confirmed outbreaks in commercial poultry and 17 in wild birds.

We are not winning and need to take the requirements of the AI Prevention zone order more seriously.

Red tags confirmed poultry cases; Green tags wild bird isolations as of 25/1/17 Each tag is primarily county based.

The number of reports of AI has been increasing globally each year over the last decade. In the last couple of months, there have been a high number of reports in both wild birds particularly waterfowl and poultry in Europe.

The two pictures below are taken from the OIE website showing the number of global outbreaks for the last year and an enlargement from this to show Europe.
For the last 13 months.
Clinical Signs
So far, no laying stock have been infected. As far as I can surmise from Defra and OIE reports the clinical signs that triggered a suspicion of Avian Influenza were a sudden increase in the number of sick birds and a sudden increase in the number of dead birds seen each day.

Housing
Regrettably, some poultry keepers are not taking the requirement to keep poultry separate from wild birds seriously enough. Housing is ideal but preventing access by wild birds to feeders and drinkers is essential. Preventing access to wild bird faeces is also essential.

Foot dips for all staff entering poultry premises and a brush to clean off mud and faeces is essential.

Sources of Infection
Whilst migratory wildfowl are most likely responsible for the introduction of the virus to the UK. Further spread will occur when sick or dead waterfowl are eaten by scavengers such as birds of prey, gulls, crows, rooks, magpies and jackdaws.

The map of the UK outbreaks shows that all of Great Britain is potentially affected.
The virus is excreted in the faeces which will contaminate the soil and vegetation as well as water in ponds, lakes and streams.

Infected waterfowl or scavenging birds can then spread the disease further. If you have crows or gulls around your flocks, you are at risk.

At this time of the year, the virus may persist in the soil and faeces for several weeks.

Your responsibility
You have a duty of care for the health and welfare of both your own birds and those within a 10Km radius of you. The likelihood is that you will not even know of the existence of these poultry farms.

Diagnosing infection in a small flock of 20 birds could be risking the lives of many hundreds or thousands of chicks in a local hatchery. This is simply due to the inability to sell or export poultry from an infected area.

The loss of your birds may be financially bearable but the restrictions imposed in an infected area could jeopardise the livelihoods of other poultry keepers.

Failure to take AI seriously could decimate poultry keeping as we know it.

Time line for current outbreak
1. Avian Influenza caused by several different subtypes of virus has been spreading globally over the last few years.
2. December 1st, HPAI (subtype H5N8) affecting wild birds (over 150 reports) and commercial poultry (35) reported in Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iran, Israel, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Southern Russia and Ukraine.
3. Wild birds affected – Tufted ducks, Common Pochards, mute swans, gulls as well as other waterfowl, gulls and raptors.
4. December 6th, Avian Influenza Prevention Zone: all poultry should be housed where practicable and all efforts should be made to minimise contact either directly or indirectly with wild birds or their droppings.
   a. Poultry should be kept confined in areas that prevent access by wild birds or their droppings.
   b. If housing is not possible then take all practicable steps that minimise contact with wild birds whilst ensuring the health and welfare of your flock. If in doubt, discuss with your veterinary advisor or Defra.
   c. Visitors should be banned, foot dips and protective clothing or clothing that is kept specifically for use when looking after your birds should be worn.
d. Feeders and drinkers should not be accessible to wild birds. All feed spillages should be promptly cleaned up.

e. Prevent access to any areas where wild waterfowl are present. Do not walk around ponds, lakes, canals or other water courses and then back to your poultry without changing clothes and footwear.

f. Discourage the presence of scavenging birds such as gulls and crows.

g. Check for the presence of mice and rats who could carry infected material into the pens and instigate control measures.

This order is due to be revoked on January 6th. However, this will depend on the avian influenza situation in the UK and Europe. The order could be extended.


7. December 20th, markets, shows and gatherings of poultry are banned in England, Wales and Scotland. Applies to:-

- “birds of the family galliforme (including pheasants, partridge, quail, chickens, turkey)
- birds of the family anseriforme (including ducks, geese, swans)
- birds that are reared or kept in captivity for the production of meat or eggs for consumption, the production of other commercial products, for restocking supplies of game or for the purposes of any breeding programme for the production of these categories of birds” https://www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu#bird-fairs-markets-shows-and-other-gatherings


**Definitions and clinical signs**

The severity of the disease (formerly known as Fowl Plague) caused by avian influenza type A viruses varies with both the subtype of the virus and the species infected. For the purposes of clarity these definitions apply to the disease caused in fowl (chickens) under defined laboratory conditions.

- **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)** – often characterised by sudden high mortality and many depressed, sick birds in a flock. Additional signs include runny eyes and nose, gaping beak, coughing, sneezing, gurgling, rattling, swollen heads, purple colouration of the skin, comb and wattles, diarrhoea, anorexia and less eggs laid.

- **Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI)** – disease and infection unrecognised to mild and variable signs that can easily be missed such as depression, inappetence, low but elevated mortality, mild respiratory signs, swollen sinuses and egg production problems.

The following definitions are encompassed in UK law (Avian Influenza and Influenza of Avian Origin in Mammals (England) (No 2) Order 2006).

These measures are designed to prevent the spread of disease and protect poultry and captive birds.

- **Prevention Zone** – areas where extra biosecurity measures are required to protect poultry and captive birds from avian influenza or other notifiable disease.

- **Protection Zone** – an area of 3Km radius centred on the premises where an outbreak of notifiable disease has been confirmed. The measures that apply in this area are detailed in the enabling government order.

- **Surveillance Zone** – an area of 10Km radius centred on the premises where an outbreak of notifiable disease has been confirmed. This area encompasses the Protection Zone. The measures that apply in this area are detailed in the enabling government order.

- **Housing** – where practicable poultry should be confined to their housing. Hygiene and disinfection procedures should be put in place or enhanced as applicable.

- **Gatherings of poultry** – this includes:
• fairs, markets, shows, sales or exhibitions
• vehicles used for pigeon racing

- **Poultry** – as defined in Council Directive 2005/94/EC “means all birds that are reared or kept in captivity for the production of meat or eggs for consumption, the production of other products, for restocking supplies of game birds or for the purposes of any breeding programme for the production of these categories of birds”. This would include fowl, turkey, ducks, geese, guinea fowl, quail and gamebirds in rear and release pens.

- **Wild bird** - as defined in Council Directive 2005/94/EC means “a free-living bird which is not kept on any holding as defined in point 8”. This includes gamebirds that have been released.

**Conclusions**

AI is showing us just how knowledgeable the UK poultry owning population is about disease spread, biosecurity and collective responsibility.

It is not what is written on a piece of paper but what you do every day that counts. AI will exploit any deficiency that is provided.

I would suggest that you plan for at least one or two avian influenza outbreaks in the UK for the next 10 years.

All measures that you put in place now to protect your stock will be beneficial for years to come.

I realise that I am sending this to the converted. Feel free to use this to persuade others that doing nothing is not an option.

D.G.Parsons MRCVS
25/01/2017