

Bird flu latest - Wild birds and H5N1 in France

Avian Flu H5N1 continues to rear its head in wild (and farmed) birds across the EU. In the latest case, the French national reference laboratory (AFSSA Ploufragan) has confirmed (July 29th) the presence of highly pathogenic H5N1 in two swans found dead in a lake at Diane Capelle (Moselle). This location is only 10 km from Assenoncourt, where H5N1 was confirmed in three dead swans at the end of June.

The statutory EU disease control zones have been established and two additional districts are now within the observation zone originally established at the beginning of July.

Meanwhile in this country Defra is urging all bird keepers to continue to practice good biosecurity and remain vigilant for signs of disease. All bird keepers, say the men from the Ministry, should feed and water their birds under cover in order to minimise the risk of contact with wild birds and anyone keeping birds outdoors should review their contingency plan for housing or separating their birds.

And despite much pressure from the likes of The Organic Research Centre for producers to have access to preventive vaccination for organic and other outdoor poultry Defra is still set against the idea. The Defra contingency plan only calls for vaccination as a strategic tool once “stamping out” and biosecurity are seen to have failed as control measures.

Defra continues to focus on wild birds as the threat vectors for H5N1 spread despite the growing body of evidence pointing to international trade and intensive poultry rearing as the vectors and “manufacturers” of the virus.

Defra is now asking wild bird reserves in the South East of England, East Anglia and Northamptonshire to undertake patrols for dead wild birds. This follows the recent detection of avian influenza H5N1 in France, Germany and the Czech Republic and subsequent consultation with ornithological experts.

The areas identified for increased surveillance are those into which birds migrating from the affected parts of Europe are most likely to arrive, says Defra.

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