



Veterinary Services And Environment Department

Information Campaign Falkland Islands Avian Influenza

What is Bird Flu?

Its full title is Avian Influenza. It is a virus which causes a disease in birds, including poultry, pigeons and wild birds. Like other viruses, these are lots of different strains of the bird flu virus and these are given different names, such as H5N8, which was first recorded in 2016. The 2021 – 2022 virus is termed H5N1.

What is the Risk to the Falkland Islands?

Since the beginning of 2022, the increasing intensity of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 outbreaks has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of seabirds in the Northern Hemisphere, around the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean and Southern Africa. It is possible that the HPAI H5N1 will arrive in the Falkland Islands, with migratory birds as the most probable vectors – i.e. birds who may carry and transmit the disease. Migratory birds returning from the north and that mix with wild birds in the Falkland Islands could transmit the virus, and this coincides with the arrival of penguins and other flying seabirds for the breeding season. This means we must be prepared for possible bird flu outbreaks ahead of the bird migration in October.

How does bird flu spread?

It is spread from bird to bird through contact with infected saliva or droppings. Wild birds are often more resistant to bird flu than domestic birds and can carry and spread the virus without showing symptoms. Transition pathway is via faecal-oral route, water contamination, direct contact and respiratory droplets. Domestic poultry are susceptible to the virus.

Can bird flu affect people?

Very few strains of avian influenza have been recorded as infecting humans, and those which can transmit to humans don't do so easily. The risk to public health during an outbreak is usually extremely low. Those working in close contact with birds, such as with domestic and commercial poultry or bird researchers, have a higher exposure to risk. Bird flu is not transmitted through properly cooked food. Cooked poultry and eggs are safe to eat in areas where outbreaks have occurred. To minimise the risk further, if you do see sick or dead birds, do not touch them, their droppings, or any water nearby.

Is it safe to visit Camp?

At this stage there is no evidence of avian influenza within our wild bird populations or domestic poultry. It is safe for tourists and the local community to visit the countryside. The Falkland Islands Government Veterinary Services will respond to any reports of unusual wild bird deaths. The situation will be continually monitored and assessed.

How damaging is bird flu to our wild birds?

The potential impact to Falkland Islands wildlife birds is significant. In the UK and generally the Northern Hemisphere there has been an unprecedented series of outbreaks, which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of seabirds.

How long does the avian influenza virus survive in the environment?

The disease spreads by movement of infected birds, and from bird to bird by contact with contaminated body material, fluids, and faeces, either directly or through contaminated objects and surfaces. Avian influenza isn't typically considered to be an airborne disease. At low temperatures, the virus can survive for days, weeks, or even months in the environment. The virus also survives longer in ponds and damp environments. But this is also dependant on virus strain, the surface type, and other variables.

What are the typical symptoms of bird flu?

The symptoms of bird flu include:

- Neurological issues such as loss of coordination and balance,
- Trembling head and body,
- Sudden and rapid increase in the number of birds found dead between visits,
- Swollen head,
- Closed and excessively watery eyes,
- Lethargy and depression, unresponsiveness, lying down, drooping wings, dragging legs,

- Twisting of the head and neck,
- Haemorrhages on shanks of the legs and under the skin of the neck,
- Respiratory distress such as gasping (mouth breathing), nasal snicking (coughing sound), sneezing, gurgling or rattling,
- Discoloured or loose watery droppings, bright green in some species.

What should you do if you see any signs of bird flu in wild birds?

If any of these signs are noted or there is concern of mass mortality at the site:

- Do not approach the site or make landings,
- Do not touch birds,
- Do not collect dead birds unless specifically tasked to do this,
- Report your observations to the Veterinary Services (see details under FAQ 'How do I report? And who do I contact?'),
- Ensure all clothing, boots and equipment is cleaned and sanitized.
- Do not travel to or enter another bird colony or poultry flocks.

What should you do if you see any signs of bird flu in your poultry?

- Do not touch the birds or collect eggs,
- Do not pick up any dead or sick birds,
- Report your observations to the Veterinary Services (see details under FAQ 'How do I report? And who do I contact?'),
- Ensure all clothing, boots and equipment is cleaned and sanitized.
- Do not travel to or enter another bird colony or poultry flocks.

What should I do if I am a Science Field Worker or Researcher handling wild birds?

- At this stage, field research can proceed.
- This may change if an outbreak of avian influenza is confirmed and specific sites may be closed for access or all field research stopped.
- All scientists working in the field and with wild birds must apply high standards of biosecurity measures before entering a wild bird colony.
- On departure from the field research site all equipment must be cleaned and disinfected and clothes wash.
- All scientists working in the field and with wild birds should not mix with poultry, this is to reduce any risk of virus transfer from wild birds to poultry.

Field Biosecurity. What does biosecurity mean?

- For avian influenza and other avian disease, biosecurity refers to procedures used to prevent the introduction and spread of disease-causing organisms to your birds/flock. Good biosecurity is the essential defence against diseases such as avian influenza and is key to limiting the spread of avian influenza in an outbreak.
- Good biosecurity measures will include boot scrubbing and dipping in a footbath with a biocide such as Virkon. The Veterinary Services can be contacted for further advice.

What is the Falkland Islands Government doing?

- The Falklands Islands Government is constantly assessing the situation for Avian Influenza and will keep the public informed and updated where there is any change to the risk.

- The Falkland Islands Government has reviewed the contingency plans and mitigation measures are being implemented.
- Additional biosecurity measures will be implemented.
- Additional biosecurity equipment such as footbaths and Virkon have been procured from the UK and due to arrive early October ahead of peak tourist season. These will be deployed at strategic locations.

How do I report? And who do I contact?

- If you see any unusual wild bird or domestic / commercial poultry behaviour you should report these to the FIG Veterinary Services at: email – tross@naturalresources@gov.fk telephone: 27366 or out of hours 55366.
- It is essential that you try and gather as much information as you can while first and foremost keeping yourself safe. Your observations will be valuable. An initial phone call to the Veterinary Services would be useful and then a full report to follow. The report template is attached.
- Please do not collect or touch any dead birds, if you see any unusual bird behaviour keep your distance to 20 meters. Ensure your boots and clothing are cleaned and disinfected as soon as you can. Washing boots in sea water is a good initial biosecurity measure.



Falkland Islands Government

Report for suspected disease outbreak in wild birds

Please send completed reports to by email to Veterinary Services:

tross@naturalresources@gov.fk

Please make an initial phone call to the Veterinary Services in Stanley: 27366, or out of hours 55366

- Report Details

Reporter's Name	Date of the visit:	Time of the visit:
Location of Event	GPS Latitude/longitude	General description settlement/island/beach
General observations and reasons for concern		
Length of observation and distance from wildlife		
Phone Number		
Email address		

- **Event Details**

Primary species affected:		Secondary species affected:	
Numbers Adults Dead / sick showing signs of bird flu		Numbers Adults Dead / sick showing signs of bird flu	
Numbers Chicks Dead / sick showing signs of bird flu		Numbers Chicks Dead / sick showing signs of bird flu	
What is the general behaviour of the birds where observations took place – e.g. feeding chicks, resting, moving to/from colony		What is the general behaviour of the birds where observations took place – e.g. feeding chicks, resting, moving to/from colony	
% of colony affected		% of colony affected:	
Number of colonies		Number of colonies	
Photos and video attached (Yes/No)			
Any additional relevant information (environmental conditions etc)			
Date of symptoms/ first death?			
When did you last visit site?			

- **Land Use**

Tourist location, farmed or other site use	
How is the site accessed? Overland, walking, boat access	
Who is the land owner?	