



Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd
Welsh Government
Ty Hywel
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Copy to: Julie James, Minister for Climate Change

16 June 2022

Dear Minister,

Urgent need for Welsh Government-led response plan to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in wild birds

Over the last fortnight, HPAI has intensified rapidly in wild birds in Scotland, with multiple deaths (many not yet confirmed as HPAI but strongly suspected) across a range of species including great skua, gannet and sandwich tern, and symptoms shown in sick seabirds, especially terns, along the North Sea and Channel coasts of England, France and The Netherlands. RSPB Cymru is keen to ensure that Wales is adequately prepared for what seems likely to arrive, and ask that Welsh Government convenes people with the relevant knowledge and responsibilities to support the development of a WG response plan for HPAI.

The populations being affected are long-lived birds with naturally slow reproductive rates. The capacity of their populations to recover from elevated adult mortality is low: they cannot breed fast enough to make-up losses, and so significant and long-term population declines are a possibility. Given that many species of seabirds in the UK are already in decline, we feel a sense of urgency. Clearly, these developments risk accentuating the nature crisis and have potential consequences for human and poultry health, as well as for the wildlife tourism businesses in our coastal communities.

The seabird colonies in Pembrokeshire, Anglesey and Pen Llŷn are of international importance, and include Grassholm (one of the largest northern gannet colonies in the world), the Pembrokeshire islands which together hold almost half the world's Manx shearwater population, The Skerries off Anglesey that is the largest and most productive Arctic tern colony in the UK, and Gronant in Denbighshire which has been the most productive little tern colony in Britain in recent years. HPAI could have significant consequences for the conservation status of these birds. In addition, there are growing concerns around raptors, and we are acutely aware that

Pencadlys RSPB Cymru
Castlebridge 35-19 Cowbridge
Road East
Caerdydd
CF11 9AB

Email: cymru@rspb.org.uk
Facebook: RSPB Cymru
Twitter: @RSPBCymru
Instagram: [rspbcymru](https://www.instagram.com/rspb.cymru)
[rspb.org.uk](https://www.rspb.org.uk)



Mae'r RSPB yn aelid o BirdLife International, partneriaeth o gyffwrdd cadwraeth sy'n gweithio i sicrhau cartrefi i fyd natur o amgylch y byd.

The RSPB is part of BirdLife International, a Partnership of conservation organisations working to give nature a home around the world.

Noddwr/Patron: Ei Mawrhydi y Frenhines / Her Majesty the Queen **Cadeirydd y Cyngor/Chair of Council:** Kevin Cox **Llywydd/President:** Miranda Krestovnikoff **Cadeirydd Pwyllgor Cymru/Chair, Committee for Wales:** Professor Sir Adrian Webb **Cyfarwyddwr, RSPB Cymru/Director, RSPB Cymru:** Alun Prichard

Mae'r Cymdeithas Frenhinol er Gwarchod Adar (yr RPSB) yn elusen gofrestrdedig: Lloegr a Chymru rhif 207076, yr Alban rhif SC037654 Cyfeiriad cofrestrdedig: The Lodge, Potton Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654 Registered address: The Lodge, Potton Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL

birds returning from higher latitudes in autumn, to sites such as the Dee and Severn estuaries, may provide another focus of concern.

We urge Welsh Government to develop a national Response Plan for HPAI in wild birds in Wales, as recommended by the United Nations FAO and Convention on Migratory Species¹ and the FAO good emergency management practice². This would include immediate measures that we could take in the current situation, in addition to longer term measures, and including building better resilience in key populations and species via the Wales Seabird Strategy. We believe that this requires effective action across government, and note that Scottish Government has convened a group to work on its national response plan.

We suggest that key stakeholders include Natural Resources Wales, APHA, eNGO seabird colony managers (e.g. RSPB Cymru, Wildlife Trusts in South & West Wales and North Wales) and BTO Cymru (which manages licensing of ringers and others who handle birds). We have already shared our own briefing to staff/volunteers and risk assessments with NRW and Wildlife Trusts Wales.

Among the measures that we believe need to be considered, as part of a response plan, are:

- Surveillance and monitoring – the recent die-offs in wild birds elsewhere in Britain highlight a lack of coordinated surveillance. It may be necessary to address this in Wales to adequately inform the implementation of a response plan, access regulation, and to better understand the epidemiology of the virus and its ecological impacts. This may include provision of protocols and PPE to staff, and arrangements for collection and transport of samples. For the safety of the public and staff/volunteers on nature reserves, it would help to have consistency across Wales/the UK.
- Carcass testing and collection – the FAO/Convention of Migratory Species report gives advice on carcass collection, but there is mixed messaging in the UK about how useful that is, in what situations it should be done and how to dispose safely of the carcasses.
- Biosecurity measures for workers, staff, visitors etc in and around HPAI outbreaks.
- Consistent messaging to the public regarding not touching dead birds, reporting to APHA (and equally, not to scare people regarding birds visiting gardens etc).

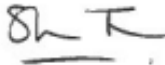
¹ https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/uploads/avian_influenza_0.pdf

² <https://www.fao.org/3/cb3833en/cb3833en.pdf>

- The minimisation of disturbance during localised HPAI outbreaks in wild birds to minimise induced movements and added stress on sick birds. This may include temporary restrictions on licensed research activities and, later in the year, wildfowling etc.
- Understanding the interfaces between any future Wild Bird Response HPAI Plan and arrangements for domestic birds including Surveillance and Protection Zones.
- In the longer term, stronger and better funded species conservation measures that might be implemented to maximise the resilience of vulnerable populations – seabirds, waterfowl and others – in advance of future outbreaks. This could be delivered via species measures in the Wales Seabird Strategy that is under development.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope that a virtual meeting can be convened within the next week.

Yours sincerely



Dr Sharon Thompson
Head of Policy & Advocacy

cc.

[christianne.glossop](#) [REDACTED]

[marc.williams](#) [REDACTED]

[matthew.murphy](#) [REDACTED]

[chris.jenkins](#) [REDACTED]

[qosia.siwonla](#) [REDACTED]

[rachel.taylor](#) [REDACTED]