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AVIAN INFLUENZA BIOSECURITY ADVICE FOR SHOOTS AND PARTICIPANTS



INTRODUCTION

Game management plays an essential role in the conservation of wildlife, the rural economy, and the overall wellbeing of the countryside. However, the risk of avian influenza (bird flu) across the UK presents a serious threat to kept birds, wild game and other wild bird species.

This guide provides practical advice on biosecurity measures designed to help prevent the introduction and spread of avian influenza within gamebird release, and shooting environments. Not every measure will apply equally to all shoots, but each shoot and participants should carefully consider which precautions are appropriate for their circumstances.

A basic risk assessment based on the specific activities and situation should be carried out to help identify specific risks and the most appropriate course of action to mitigate the risks.

It is a legal requirement to comply with any avian influenza disease control or wider preventative measures that may be in place, such as those imposed under an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone.

Anyone keeping or planning to release gamebirds should check for any such requirements relevant to their location and planned activity, and must adhere to them.

RELEASE PENS

Shoots should follow the relevant sections of the Code of Good Shooting Practice and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust advice on sustainable gamebird releasing.

Preparing for release

Many shoots will release gamebirds. Whatever type of species or approach is taken, all relevant steps should be taken prior to release to prepare the pen/release area.

The Veterinary Pheasant Pen Scoring System is a valuable tool for assessing the condition of a pheasant pen. Those who release birds are strongly encouraged to use this matrix (you can find it on the BASC website by searching 'pen scoring system') to evaluate their release pens and identify any relevant improvements.

Key considerations:

- Do not mix birds from different sources in the same pen or release area.
- Locate pens away from open water and areas regularly visited by wild waterfowl.
- Store feed securely to prevent access by pests and other species.
- Clean and disinfect all equipment (e.g. drinkers and feeders) before use.
- Avoid moving equipment between sites. If unavoidable, thoroughly clean and disinfect it first.
- Both prior to and during the time birds are kept within a pen, active pest control of species such as rats, which can spread infectious material, should be carried out. This can be done by the careful location of tunnel traps.
- Seek advice from your gamebird vet on biosecurity measures suited to your site.
- All those looking after birds should be trained and briefed to follow biosecurity measures.

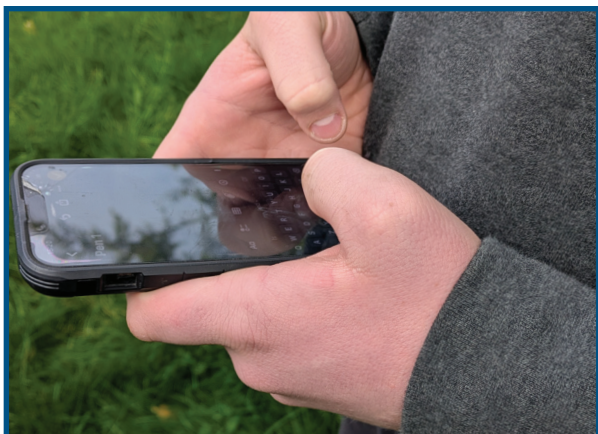


Access and movement

- Restrict access to essential people only.
- Where possible access should be restricted, e.g. by locking gates, and appropriate signage such as 'Biosecurity Area – Authorised Access Only' displayed.
- Clothing should be clean and kept separate from that used in other bird areas.
- When entering each pen or release area either dedicated footwear (for that pen) or foot dips containing Defra-approved poultry disinfectant at the correct dilution rate should be used. Foot dips should be covered when not in use and replenished/replaced at appropriate intervals.
- Where necessary footwear should be cleaned, e.g. with a brush, before disinfecting.
- Prior to entry to a pen or other area where birds are kept, the exterior of any vehicles should be cleaned and disinfected.
- The exterior of vehicles in regular use on shoots should be cleaned and disinfected each time they re-enter the site.

Record keeping

- Relevant records such as dates birds are put into a pen, any changes in behaviour and signs of disease or mortality should be kept.
- While keeping access to the pens/release areas to essential 'personnel' only, details of anyone who does visit these areas should be kept, including dates, times and full contact information.
- Records should be kept in a consistent and easily legible format and be readily available in case a veterinary investigation is required.
- Carcasses of any dead birds should be correctly disposed of, following appropriate biosecurity.
- It is a legal requirement with very limited exceptions that anyone keeping birds must register their details. If you rear or release birds, you are required by law to register your activity on the relevant register.



Feeding and watering

- There must be a suitable amount of feeding stations for the number of birds kept. The specific amount will depend on several factors.
- An Avian Influenza Prevention Zone can include specific requirements such as the ratio of feeding stations to number of birds kept.
- Feeders should be covered to prevent contamination by wild bird droppings. Suitable covered feeders include Manola/top hat feeders and hoppers with slits, pan feeders or spirals. Open troughs should not be used.
- There should be sufficient drinkers in the pen. Bell or similar type drinkers should be used in preference to open drinkers. Whatever type is used, efforts should be taken to prevent soiling by birds.
- Drinkers and feeders should be checked daily and cleaned as appropriate to remove any fouling.
- Stands can be used under drinkers to prevent ground becoming wet and muddy.
- Where appropriate, both drinkers and feeders should be moved to prevent the build-up of faecal matter.
- Feeders should be located in areas where they will be used by gamebirds with an effort to minimise access by other species.
- Spilled food which could attract wild birds should be collected.
- Pheasants kept in release pens should not be fed within 50 metres of a water body regularly frequented by ducks and other waterfowl.
- Using deterrents such as flags and scarecrows can sometimes help discourage avian predators from areas where gamebirds are kept.
- Daily checks should be carried out in and around the release pen, with any signs of illness or mortality recorded and acted upon as appropriate.
- There should be no delay in contacting your gamebird vet for advice. Early intervention can address issues in a timely and effective way.





If avian influenza is suspected in kept birds, there is a legal requirement for their keepers to report this.

If avian influenza is suspected in wild birds this should be reported in line with requirements in place at the time.

Post release

For disease classification purposes, birds would generally be considered released, and therefore wild, once they are spending the majority of their time outside the pen or are encouraged to disperse to other areas to feed, e.g. by lifting the wire, opening the door etc.

Much of the approach taken around the release pen remains applicable to managing gamebirds living wild on the shoot, such as avoiding feeding them in areas where wildfowl frequent.

Those running shoots should remain vigilant during their daily activities and report any suspected cases of avian influenza in dead wild birds, in accordance with the requirements in place at the time.

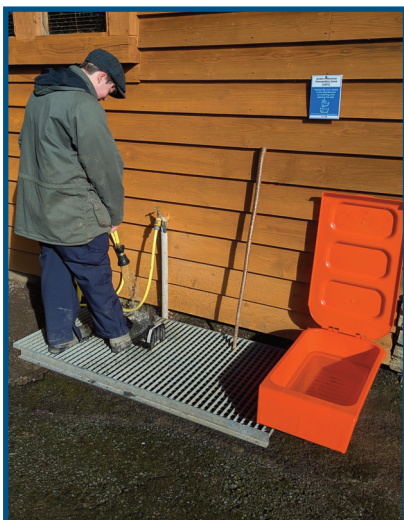
SHOOT DAY BIOSECURITY GUIDANCE

Before the shoot

- Check if any disease control measures or Avian Influenza Prevention Zone restrictions are in place for your area and shoot.
- The relevant agencies in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales provide up-to-date information on their websites.
- You can sign up for APHA animal disease alerts or also check the interactive map.
- Advise all participants of required biosecurity measures, including measures such as cleaning of vehicles and footwear, required before entering the shoot.
- Prepare any equipment, and ensure footbaths, brushes, and disinfectant are ready. Also ensure there are adequate hygiene facilities e.g. handwashing facilities for participants.
- If you and/or your dog have been on areas such as known infected sites you/they should not then work on/visit other shoots until you are satisfied you have eliminated the potential for spreading avian influenza.

On the shoot day

- Restrict access to sensitive areas, such as where laying birds may be kept, to essential personnel only.
- Provide covered foot dips with disinfectant at the correct dilution rate and ensure vehicles accessing the shoot are cleaned and wheels disinfected beforehand.
- The Animal and Plant Health Agency notes that dogs are not known to become infected with avian influenza from retrieving shot wildfowl or gamebirds. However, scavenging species such as foxes have previously been infected.
- Take precautions: do not feed uncooked shot or culled birds to dogs and prevent dogs from eating dead wild birds.



After the shoot day

- Footwear should be cleaned and disinfected using foot dips before leaving the shoot.
- It may not always be possible to clean vehicles before leaving, but they must be cleaned before attending another shoot or visiting locations where birds are kept.
- Clothing and footwear should be cleaned between attending different shoots.
- When taking game home, ensure it is kept in an appropriate area, e.g. plastic tray, which can easily be cleaned, and then correctly processed.
- Shoot vehicles and equipment that are in regular use on individual shoots should be regularly cleaned and disinfected each time they re-enter the site.

Shoots and individual participants can find further information, including legal requirements, resources and support from their respective membership organisations.

The Code of Good Shooting Practice

The Code of Good Shooting Practice applies to all forms of game shooting in the UK; walked up, driven, wild bird or reared.

Endorsed by the following 11 organisations, the code provides a clear framework to ensure high standards of conduct and sustainable shooting. It embodies fundamental respect for quarry species and care for the environment.



The Code of Good Shooting Practice can be found at
codeofgoodshootingpractice.org.uk

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