International Animal Health Division

International Animal Disease Monitoring

Preliminary Outbreak Assessment

Ref: VITT 1200/HPAI-Hungary
Date: 24 January 2007

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5) in Hungary

Note: *Defra's International Animal Health Division (IAHD) monitors outbreaks of high impact diseases around the world. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is among those diseases of major concern.*

Disease Report

Hungary has reported a case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, virus type H5 in a commercial geese flock in the central county of Csongrad (see map 1). The first clinical signs appeared on 21 January and the entire flock is being destroyed. Laboratory investigations are underway to confirm the strain of the virus.

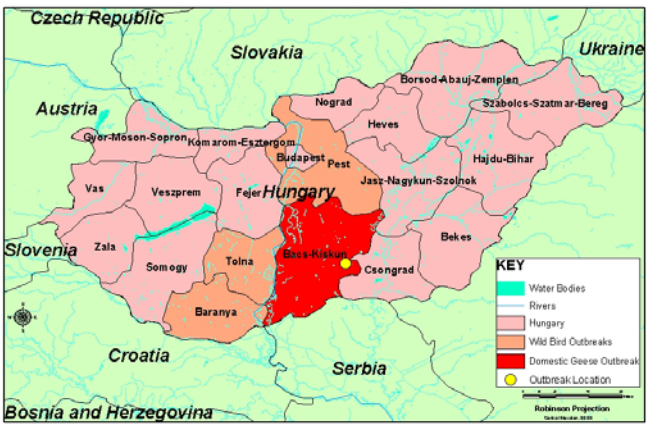
HPAI in Hungary
January 2007

The Hungarian authorities informed that there are no poultry within 1km zone from the affected premise. There are 57 poultry holdings within 3km zone and 850 small-scale farms within 10km zone.

Situation Assessment

Hungary reported cases of HPAI in wild birds in various locations in early 2006. Hungary also reported an outbreak of HPAI in free-range domestic poultry in Bacs-Kiskun county in mid 2006 (see map 2).

The TRACES electronic database indicates that there have been no imports of poultry or poultry products from Hungary to the UK for the past three months.



HPAI outbreak in domestic geese in Hungary
June 2006

There were no reports of HPAI in Europe in autumn 2006, compared to the autumn of 2005 when cases of HPAI were reported in Romania (wild birds and backyard poultry) and Croatia (wild birds). Furthermore, surveillance of wild birds which is currently carried out EU wide has not revealed any positive results for HPAI in wild birds, so far.

The autumn 2006 migratory season is now complete for most wild bird species.

In previous risk assessments we considered that if the virus should be present in the flyways of wild birds (e.g. in breeding grounds that stretch from the northern part of western Russia

to the near Continent) this would increase the likelihood for introduction of the virus to other north-west European countries and to the UK, particularly in areas known to host large concentrations of wild migratory waterbirds. However, migratory movements direct from breeding areas to the UK are less likely than flights in which birds stop at staging areas prior to arrival in the UK. Thus, any estimate of the likelihood of introduction of the virus to the UK during this migratory season should be reviewed in light of any detection of the virus in wild birds in north-west European countries en-route to the UK. Experience from 2006 suggests that it may take some time for the virus to perpetuate in susceptible wild bird populations and result in cases of the disease under the right conditions (e.g. overcrowding at limited habitats due to cold weather, stress).

It is unknown at present whether H5N1 infection has persisted in wild bird populations throughout the year in the EU or Europe in the absence of further introductions. If infection does persist either within wild birds or their environment, there is uncertainty as to whether it will remain confined to certain locations or extend geographically and / or become established in a wider range of wild bird species. One indication of such a development would be further sporadic detections, in particular during the period when resident wild waterfowl congregate in large numbers. The likelihood for further spread of the disease is difficult to estimate in the absence of targeted and practical surveillance studies. Nevertheless, this highlights the importance of continuing to maintain appropriate biosecurity standards with regard to preventing mixing of wild birds with domestic poultry.

Recent experiences have also suggested that other wild bird species (e.g. raptors, feral pigeons) can be affected by HPAI with a fatal outcome. It still remains uncertain to what extent these species may play in the epidemiology of the virus and its potential spread over wider geographic areas. It is important to continue to monitor for these types of dead birds which may indicate the presence of the virus in local wild bird populations.

As it currently stands, continued monitoring of developments and targeted surveillance of wild birds in the EU and the countries neighbouring the EU are vital, as is the analysis of the accumulated data in order to better understand the risks. Recent developments in the EU highlight that surveillance, complemented with appropriate policy advice on biosecurity measures proportionate to the risks are an effective way of detecting and minimising the introduction of the virus into commercial poultry operations.

Conclusion

Based on the disease report and situation assessment, the likelihood of the introduction of this disease from Hungary to the UK via legal trade before and after this outbreak is considered negligible.

On the basis of this outbreak which appears to be attributed to introduction from wild birds and experience from 2006, it could be expected that further cases may occur. Should the virus continue to be detected in eastern part of Europe, there may be an increased likelihood of the introduction of the virus to the UK from this area. However, direct movements to the UK are less likely from this region and risk should be reviewed in the light of potential detection of the virus in wild birds in north-east, central and southern Europe. These areas are mainly within the main flyway of waterbirds migrating from southern Siberia southwards via the Volga Basin and the Caspian Sea region.

References

European Commission, (2006). HPAI H5 confirmed in Hungary. Urgent fax 638. D1 BVG (07) D/410190. 24 January 2007.