



**Joint Position Statement**  
(as at 09.09.2005)

**Avian influenza**

**Its significance for the conservation of wild birds and the role of hunting**

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The Avian Influenza (AI) virus is known to cause epidemic die-offs in domestic poultry as well as in wild birds and has been reported from different parts of the World. Since the mid-1990's there has been increased focus on outbreaks of AI, due to the fact that the highly pathogenic virus strain HP-H5N1 has been demonstrated to be able to infect humans and has done so in different South-East Asian countries since 1997.

Recently, the HP-H5N1 strain has been detected in poultry and wild birds in South-West Siberia, far away from places where it was found previously (China and South East Asia), indicating a significant move westward of the virus.

The fact that migratory bird species, such as ducks, geese, cormorants and gulls, have been infected points in the direction of the theoretical possibility that migratory birds may act as a reservoir and, next to other vectors, as a possible source of spreading the H5N1 virus over long distances.

AI may result in significant mortality in wild bird populations (ecological aspect) and has severe consequences for commercial production of domestic poultry (economical aspect). The H5N1 strain further constitutes a serious potential risk for humans (public health aspect). There is therefore an immediate need for stakeholders and parties at all levels to monitor the situation in order to detect and measure the spread, and where needed to take appropriate measures to reduce the risk of transmission of AI.

WHO, FAO, OIE, and the EU already monitor the situation closely, and other organisations and bodies – in particular *Wetlands International*, *BirdLife International*, the AEWA and CMS Secretariats, as well as CIC (assisted by FACE) – take part in this process.

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The situation can *currently* be summarised as follows:

1. There are no confirmed cases of outbreak of *A/* HP-H5N1 West of the Ural Mountains.
2. There is no direct evidence that migratory birds are the vector to spread the disease. Wild birds may be seen more as the victim than the threat.
3. Some European countries have taken steps to ban or restrict outdoor keeping of poultry to reduce the risk of becoming infected by wild birds.
4. The E.U. and its Member States are alert and intensify surveillance and monitoring, but generally regard the risk of wild birds bringing *A/* to (West) Europe as remote to low.
5. CIC, FACE and other parties with particular interest in wild birds are alert and monitor the situation continuously.

The CIC *Migratory Birds Commission* participates (also on behalf of FACE) in an international *task force* (together with *Wetlands International*, AEWA, CMS, RAMSAR and *BirdLife International*) with the immediate target:

- To survey the situation;
- To encourage appropriate research and monitoring;
- To gather quality information on the role of wild birds in *A/* epidemiology;
- To avoid that wild birds are blamed unjustifiably and to prevent so that unjustified measures are taken to restrict / ban the sustainable use of birds and their habitats;
- To position hunters as qualified stakeholders at all levels.

What can hunters and their organisations do?

1. Currently there seems to be no reason for bird hunters to worry excessively about the remote risk of infection through handling or consumption of birds hunted. Hunting can therefore in general continue as usual. However, hunters are recommended to follow strictly any regulation or advice from relevant authorities concerning the risk of infection or spread of *A/*.
2. Through their outdoor activities hunters can help in detecting possible die-offs, or immediately reporting birds with abnormal behaviour or any other indication of infection, as well as providing samples of birds harvested for official monitoring programmes.
3. At national level, hunters' organisations should urge and possibly assist relevant authorities to intensify survey, research and cross-border networking, as well as developing appropriate policies to address the situation.

CIC and FACE will continue to monitor how the general *A/* situation might develop and ensure international co-ordination and allocation of resources for proper research and survey.