

Avian Flu.....What a mess

On the 18th of August we had a case of H5N1 in the [redacted text] area, a breeder of Pheasants, which if you know are kept in large cages open to the elements and unfortunately seagulls which are spreading the disease by settling on the cages looking for food, defecating (pooing) over the food and infecting the pheasants, so they have to be culled and the whole place disinfected at least twice before they can get more stock. At this point the APHA team put a 3klm control zone where all movement is stopped until checks have been done at all premises, they also have a 10klm surveillance zone again where until all chicken etc are checked the zone will not be lifted, how this affects racing pigeons,,,they can exercise once a day .no training or racing and that despite there being no cases of Racing pigeons catching or carrying the virus . I have been coming up to a brick wall when trying to get anyone to discuss lifting this ban and allowing us to race, when one understands that all lofts just outside the zone are flying over it every week with No cases of H5N1.The SHU had a zoom call with APHA and the Scottish government but only one question on racing pigeons was asked and the reply was while we know that Racing pigeon have a very low chance of getting

H5N1, were stopping them flying anyway while the zone is active. I contacted one of their top vets [redacted text] from APHA at [redacted text] office asking if we got our local Defra vet to check out our birds here reply was No as Birds (not racing pigeons) can be carriers and may not be showing any symptoms, this was just scaremongering , racing pigeons have had no cases of carrying the H5N1 virus however Ducks are the worse carriers plus Geese but her letter if looked at quickly left the reader thinking pigeons are carriers of this disease , I wrote her on two occasions to show me her data also she said there was no way to check the racing pigeons but I have another very helpful APHA vet tell me there is a blood test which is done in the specialist centre in Weybridge but they would not test health racing pigeons, further I know there is a swab test kit available which can take 36 hours for humans so logic tell me we can swab test pigeons but even with no cases in racing pigeons and a chance to test they will not change policy that is a Government thing , yet the lady in charge up here [redacted text] should be covered by science and i`m sure with no disrespect meant her knowledge regarding Racing pigeons will be very limited and she will be guided by vets/ avian scientists my local APHA vet tells me she is the only one who can help the racing pigeon fanciers regarding this

ruling on us, when you know that three months ago the East of Scotland beaches were covered by thousand of dead sea birds , the Government minister came on STV and said there little we can do with H5N1 avain flu other than monitor the situation, so a total shut down of the known carriers and at risk birds ie Duck, hens, pheasants ,geese , this TSD(total shut down) only requires all keeper of ARB (at risk birds) to be housed inside with no contact with the outside. I know there are other factors she has to look at but while we have no avain flu human vaccine (one on the way), we must be carefull , How long does it take the APHA vets to check a 10k zone well a lot longer than it should if the vets had proper system of collating and checking anyone with birds ! I received a phone call asking if the APHA vet could come and check my racing pigeons , I said yes sure who else are you checking ? oh he said I just get a email and phone up who ever is on the list , well either i`m getting picked on or someone could do their job better there are eight pigeon lofts in **[redacted text]** , four within eye sight of my house , I told him to get his Boss to call me so I can arrange for all loft visits at the same time , saving the vets valuable time , I also asked could my own Defra vet not check my birds , No he stated,I also spoke to another APHA vet and said I was not trying to be a awkward only trying to save time

*and even offered as a retired gentlemen well versed with contacting people my valuable time free of charge to get this situation quickly resolved asap.i am sending this letter to **[redacted text]** for her comments and hopefully some constructive resolution to my problem, our final race of the year is on Thursday basketing for a Saturday race , which I am under no illusion **[redacted text]** could not let us race as her vets are miles behind but with no science against racing pigeons she could allow us to have one last race this year, if not resolved this year then something has to happen before next year as another lockdown on my birds is affecting my mental health, I did not sleep for days after this happed as it seemed I could not control anything and could be shut down for months, there has to be a sensible way out of this if the science says our birds are clean then let them race , they do not touch land from race point eg Edinburgh flying right past the Bass Rock and home to **[Redacted text]** to their loftsno bird flu as it cannot be passed in the air, racing pigeons are flying up and down the whole of the uk and there has not been one case with a racing pigeon, let us enjoy our sport we have to put up with people shooting our birds Hawks attacking them at every turn , cats and now an invisible H5N1 , I will send copy to the RPRA so they can talk to their English government person , surely if we*

can get our birds checked and they are H5N1 clear they should be allowed to race, we only have around 30 lofts in the whole of [redacted text] so quite easy to keep tabs on.

Again thank you for your time but please go with the science. Not Oh just shut them down.

Your sincerely

[redacted text]

Racing pigeons won more Dickens medals(same as VC) in the last war than any other animal for their courage even today they are used to save lives at sea with their wonderful eyesight..

Parliamentary Question: S6W-22250

Issue Date: 16-10-2023

Question: To ask the Scottish Government how many gamebird rearing and release facilities have been found to be infected with highly pathogenic avian influenza in 2023.

MSP: Colin Smyth

Parliamentary Question: S6W-22251

Issue Date: 17-10-2023

Question: To ask the Scottish Government what information it holds on how many gamebirds, broken down by species, have been destroyed at rearing and release facilities due to highly pathogenic avian influenza infection in 2023.

MSP: Colin Smyth

Parliamentary Question: S6W-22252

Issue Date: 17-10-2023

Question: To ask the Scottish Government what information it holds on how many release facilities where cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza infection have been detected (a) had already released gamebirds into the natural environment and (b) were open to wild birds either by being unroofed or through pop holes being open, in 2023.

MSP: Colin Smyth

Parliamentary Question: S6W-22254

Issue Date: 16-10-2023

Question: To ask the Scottish Government what measures have been implemented to manage non-native gamebird releases where there is potential for highly pathogenic avian influenza transmission from infected gamebirds to (a) native wild birds, (b) other wildlife, (c) dogs and (d) the shooting community.

MSP: Colin Smyth

Parliamentary Question: S6W-25794

Issue Date: 11-03-2024

Question: To ask the Scottish Government, further to the answer to question S6W-22254 by Gillian Martin on 30 October 2023, whether it will provide an update on what measures have been implemented to manage non-native gamebird releases where there is potential for highly pathogenic avian influenza transmission from infected gamebirds to (a) native wild birds, (b) other wildlife, (c) dogs and (d) the shooting community.

MSP: Mark Ruskell