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## Germany

### Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

### AI Update: AI Confirmed in Cats and Suspected in a Beech Marten

**2006**

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**Report Highlights:**

As of March 10, three cats were confirmed with high pathogen Avian Influenza (AI). A beech marten was confirmed with AI but the pathogenicity test is still pending. The cats and the beech marten were found in the area where the majority of cases in wild birds occurred. The total number of confirmed cases in wild birds rose to 175. Domestic poultry is not affected. The confirmation of high pathogen AI in cats has again spurred the discussion about vaccination.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Unscheduled Report  
Berlin [GM1]  
[GM]

## AI confirmed in cats

The German Federal Research Institute for Animal Health (Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut, FLI) confirmed on March 2, that a cat that was found on February 28 died from the high pathogen strain of H5N1 Avian Influenza. On March 8, two additional cases in cats were confirmed. The cats were found on the Baltic island of Ruegen near the area where the first dead swans were found. It is believed that the cats contracted the virus by feeding on infected dead birds. In the past, cats have been reported contracting the virus in experiments and in a zoo in Asia, where cats and cat like animals were fed with infected poultry meat.

Horst Seehofer, the German Federal Minister of Food, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection, said these findings worry him because it shows that while the risk by the virus itself has not increased, it has “geographically” come closer to the general public. People in the developed countries usually do not have close contact with wild birds, but they do have close contact with cats.

As a precaution, since March 4, all cats have to be kept indoors and all dogs have to be kept on a leash in all protection and surveillance zones<sup>1</sup> throughout Germany. Failure to comply is subject to fines starting at 1 Euro and up to 25,000 Euros, depending on the severity of the infraction (i.e. a child, whose dog breaks free will face lower fines than someone who makes a TV statement that they will not comply).

As an additional precaution, access to poultry stables is restricted to farm workers, veterinarians, and officials in the protection and surveillance zones.

This incident has again spurred the discussion about vaccination. Minister Seehofer repeated that his Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection (BMELV) opposes a precautionary vaccination of poultry at the current stage, because current vaccines mask a possible outbreak of the disease. He argues, that vaccinated birds can not be distinguished from infected birds. In addition, he contends that the current vaccine may prevent birds from dying of AI but will not prevent them from spreading the virus. He does not oppose vaccinating birds in Zoos, which do not have contact with other birds or poultry and never enter the food chain. Seehofer announced that Germany will intensify the research and development of new vaccines in order to eventually be able to also vaccinate domestic poultry.

The BMELV opposition against precautionary vaccination under the current conditions is shared by the German Poultry Industry Association (Zentralverband der Deutschen Gefluegelwirtschaft, ZDG) and the German Farmers' Union (Deutscher Bauernverband, DBV). On the other hand, the Green Party and one member of the SPD favor the vaccination especially for small holdings, poultry for breeding, and zoo animals.

## AI in a beech marten

On March 2, a beech marten (Latin name: *Martes foin*) was found with clinical symptoms but still alive on the Island of Ruegen. It was caught and killed. The FLI has confirmed the presence of H5N1 in the animal. While the pathogenicity test is still pending, FLI expects to find the high pathogen strain of the virus, because the animal was found in the center of the AI outbreaks. If this is confirmed it will be to first such cases in a marten-like animal world wide.

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<sup>1</sup> As a result of a reported suspected AI case, routinely, a 3 km protection zone is established for 21 days and a 10 km surveillance zone for 30 days.

**Table: Confirmed H5N1 cases in Germany by State  
as of March 10, 2006<sup>2</sup>**

State	Wild birds	Other
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania	150	3 cats, 1 beech marten
Bavaria	11	
Brandenburg	5	
Schleswig-Holstein	5	
Baden-Wuerttemberg	3	
Lower-Saxony	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>4</b>

Source: FAS/Berlin based on information from the Federal Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Consumer Protection (BMELV)

<sup>2</sup> Includes cases with pending pathogenicity test