



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 4/12/2006

GAIN Report Number: UK6015

United Kingdom

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Update on UK case of H5N1 in wild swan

2006

Approved by:

Besa L. Kotati
U.S. Embassy

Prepared by:

Jennifer Wilson

Report Highlights:

This report provides an update to GAIN Report UK6013: "UK confirms first case of H5N1" in wild birds. UK Government officials have confirmed through DNA testing that the H5N1-positive swan discovered in Scotland on March 29 was a migratory Whooper Swan, and not an indigenous UK Mute Swan, as was previously thought. There is a "working hypothesis" that the bird found in Scotland may have been migrating from the Baltic northward, but fell ill with the virus and died en route. However, another hypothesis is that the swan was wintering in the UK, and contracted the virus locally.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
London [UK1]
[UK]

Update on UK status regarding H5N1

UK Government officials have confirmed that the H5N1-positive swan discovered in Cellardyke, Scotland on March 29 was a Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, and not an indigenous Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*, as was previously thought.

Initial identification was hampered by the advanced state of decay of the carcass, and the species was only confirmed through DNA profiling.

In contrast to the mainly resident and sedentary Mute Swan, Whooper Swans are migratory. The Icelandic breeding population winters in north-west Europe, including Britain, Ireland, and the Baltic.

H5N1 was confirmed in several Whooper Swans in the Baltic in February and March. There is a "working hypothesis" that the bird found in Scotland may have been migrating north from the Baltic to breed, before becoming too sick to continue.

However, another hypothesis is that the swan was wintering in the UK and contracted the virus locally from another species of waterfowl.

According to the National Farmers' Union (NFU), UK sales of chicken and eggs remain at normal levels despite the bird flu case in Scotland. The UK's four largest supermarket chains: Tesco, Asda, J Sainsbury and Wm Morrison have reported no significant change to poultry meat or egg sales in light of the H5N1 bird flu strain having been discovered in-country.

The UK poultry industry is worth USD 2.7 billion annually and currently there are approximately 272 million poultry birds in the UK. The NFU represents 2,000 commercial poultry farmers.

Timeline: Bird flu in the UK

The discovery of bird flu in a dead swan on the Scottish coast is the first case of the H5N1 strain in wild birds in the UK. However, it is not the first time the virus has been discovered within the UK. Below are the key developments in the UK so far:

16 September 2005 A consignment of parrots arrives in quarantine in Essex from Surinam, in South America.

19 September Department of Health publishes its latest pandemic flu contingency plan. Scotland issues its own updated plan.

27 September A group of finches arrives at the same quarantine premises in Essex as part of a mixed consignment of birds from Taiwan.

14 October Some of the finches and parrots are found dead and tested for bird flu.

21 October The lethal H5N1 strain is confirmed in one of the parrots, but because the bird was in quarantine, the discovery does not affect the UK's disease-free status.

15 November Subsequent tests show the disease is most likely to have come from the finches rather than the parrot. A government report blamed the confusion on a mix-up of tissue samples.

29 March 2006 A mute swan found dead in the harbor at Cellardyke, near Anstruther, Fife, in Scotland is reported to the authorities.

30 March The swan is collected and taken away for laboratory tests.

31 March Samples from the bird are received at the main testing laboratories in Weybridge, Surrey, for further analysis.

5 April Laboratory tests confirm the presence of highly-pathogenic H5 avian flu in the dead swan. Further tests are carried out to establish whether it is the lethal H5N1 strain.

A two-day exercise to test the UK's bird-flu plans is abandoned so that resources can be switched to the Scotland incident.

6 April H5N1 is confirmed in the swan, and Scotland's contingency plan is put into effect. Tests on more birds are carried out.

11 April Dead bird identified as a whooper swan, not native to the UK, but scientists remain unsure whether it contracted the disease abroad or after it arrived in Britain.

Source of timeline: BBC News