



CMS / Museum Koenig Avian Influenza Seminar
Animals, people and disease:
A cross-cutting issue for biodiversity conservation
Bonn, Germany; 23 May 2008

Highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 represents a unique threat in terms of its wide-ranging impacts on agriculture, economies, livelihoods, actual and potential effects on human health, and wildlife conservation. To date, there have been several hundred human cases of infection with the continuing possibility of viral mutation or recombination into the next human influenza pandemic strain. Over 200 million domestic poultry have died or been killed in attempts to control the disease thus far, actions which have impacted on both sub-national and national economies. There is significant risk to food security, in many countries, given that poultry (including eggs) represent the world's single most important source of animal protein, and that the disease can reduce income at various economic scales.

In terms of consequences for wildlife, the disease has had a doubly negative impact for waterbirds (the natural hosts of low pathogenic avian influenza viruses) both as victims of the disease and proposed vectors – which in some instances has led to inappropriate lethal forms of control and purported destruction of wetland habitats. It is quite likely that public perception of waterbirds, fuelled by misleading media coverage, has also been negatively affected, with adverse consequences for biodiversity conservation.

Habitat loss or degradation, contact between domestic and wild populations, and introduction of infection into novel areas by translocation of infected domestic animals have all contributed, to a greater or lesser extent, to the current problem of HPAI H5N1 for wildlife. The spread of this disease thus provides a classic example of how and why diseases emerge in wildlife populations. These anthropogenic contributions together with factors such as climate change ensure that the enhanced frequency of emerging and re-emerging wildlife diseases will provide increasing challenges for conservation policy-makers in future years.

The global response to HPAI provides an important opportunity to learn and to build capacity for wildlife disease surveillance and habitat management in order to reduce associated risks. This will assist in controlling both novel and existing wildlife health problems as well as reducing impacts on human populations through the emergence and spread of zoonoses.

In the context of both the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the issues raised by wildlife diseases are cross-cutting. They affect conservation of protected areas, *ex situ* conservation policies (e.g. breeding programmes associated with species recovery projects), as well as being an important element of many of CMS's daughter agreements, and in a range of CBD programmes of work.





The Second Technical Meeting of the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds sought to bring together the lessons learned from the previous few years of dealing with HPAI H5N1 in wildlife. The conclusions and recommendations from that meeting, which will be formally launched at the seminar, distil relevant internal experience into lessons learnt and proposals for international good practice. Many of these recommendations are relevant in the wider context of responses to wildlife diseases.

Objectives of the seminar

The seminar has the following objectives:

- to launch the proceedings of the 2007 Aviemore Avian Influenza and Wildlife Workshop on 'Practical Lessons Learnt';
- to summarise the current situation with respect to the spread of HPAI H5N1, including its socio-economic and other impacts;
- to outline the key recommendations from the Aviemore workshop regarding responses to HPAI H5N1;
- to summarise the range of issues both for human and wildlife populations raised by emerging and re-emergent diseases, how the impacts of these are often enhanced by unsustainable land-use and other policies, and outlining the consequences of these for both human well-being and biodiversity conservation; and
- to summarise the extent to which wildlife disease – as a cross-cutting conservation issue of growing importance – is currently addressed within the policies, plans and programmes of CBD and CMS and to make recommendations for further action drawing from relevant experience in addressing threats from HPAI H5N1 that may assist governments and others address these wider issues.

