

Barnacle Goose Task Force meeting

2 August 2022

“Avian influenza”

1. *Introduction*

Impact on Barnacle Goose population (Greenland and Svalbard), what we need to do when we reach winter.

2. *Summary of HPAI situation by country (can each country input their own info.)*

Iceland (Snorri & Bjarni): Maybe others will join the EGMP from Iceland, that know more about barnacle goose. Not much happening here during spring and summer, but recently there have been cases of dead and or sick birds in southeast Iceland – about 60-80 birds effected.

During a meeting in April/May, it was discussed, if we need to take actions towards hunters, eg that they send in information about dead birds. Otherwise no new updates.

A handful was tested during spring/migration season, few of them was positive, but the numbers are higher now. But we need to gather more information from the institutes that do the testing.

Rae: Anything done on productivity at the breeding grounds? Snorri: Yes, I think but maybe just once, so hard to compare/look at changes.

More information on other goose species would also be helpful.

2020: 11,600 breeding + non-breeding birds on Iceland. The total number of nests in 2020 was estimated to be 2400.

Ireland (Sean): We are not the authority for testing, but testing are done at sites. And we have positive test in 3-4 of the major flocks on the west coast. Also positive test in greylags and swans, but barnacle geese are hit the hardest. Seabirds are not as hard effected.

Mortality of 820 barnacle geese in flocks which tested positive for HPAI, and an estimated total mortality of c. 1700 barnacle geese in Ireland during winter 2022-23 (estimated total is confirmed mortality plus inferred mortality based on within season declines in some populations).

Scotland/UK (Rae): The situation in Solway is that around 15000 barnacle geese have died, signs of the disease on migration and on Svalbard. For the Greenland population we will know more when they come back and we do the flyway count. No dead birds anywhere else than on Islay. Estimate on Islay, is that we lost about 1000 birds, but we had many sea eagles who took the carcasses, so large uncertainly. Other goose species was tested positive, but nothing like the barnacle goose, only a few 100 for the other species.

Unfortunately, we still have large outbreaks in seabirds.

We expect the impact to continue during the winter in the goose populations. Therefore, we try to do more monitoring, eg. testing in the different populations.

Low productivity of sea eagles - seems as the influenza doesn't hit the adults.

Farmers got more grass.

Derogations has stopped, but not wildfowling on greylags and pinkfeets, but we need to think about it on Islay this winter, and what monitoring we need to do.

Norway (Ingunn): we got funding to Larry Griffin, doing 18 days of bird registration during March-May, result in 32% being effected (out of xxx counted).

Mainland Norway, here we are not aware of any infections, but the seabirds are, as well as fox.

Farmers in Vesterålen, saw that there are fewer geese, and the fields are more green. The farmers are concerned about the population.

3. *Mitigation measures*

Not a lot we can do to stop it at the moment, but any thoughts, have anything been tried?

Des: Vaccination for wild birds, Eg. habitat based vaccination. Suggested by vets in the UK.

Rae: Trying to reduce disturbance, to avoid moments in the flocks and further spreading. Eg. we have suspending ringing seabird colonies. So managing the humans, instead of the birds.

High number of humans – higher number of avian influenza (but very early results/rumours).

In Ireland, we have had similar restrictions in terms of human disturbance.

4. *Research needs*

Include avian influenza in the models, but hard to separate mortality from shooting and sickness – “the numbers game”.

We lost many geese on Islay in March, where we do count from the ground, whereas we do aerial count in areas outside Islay. We need to bring the count data forward eg end February.

We also need to find out who do the count, as WWT have changed strategy.