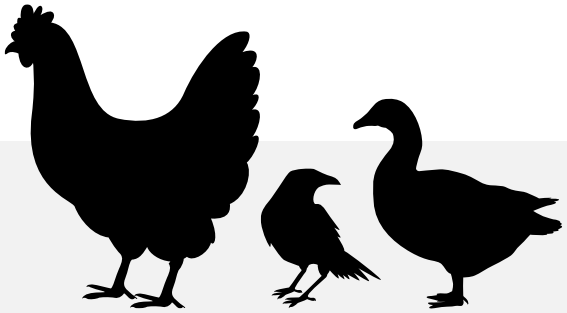
Cayman Islands Government

Avian influenza outbreaks in wild birds: description, response, and current situation



WOAH Webinar - April 15th, 2026

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Background

- Cayman Islands is comprised of three islands with ~90,000 population
- On the migratory bird flight path through the Caribbean
- No outbreaks of Influenza A(H5) confirmed historically
  - One suspected outbreak in 2023
- Following the 2023 incident passive surveillance was strengthened with the implementation of an avian influenza PCR test

Detection

- Notification of sudden death and clinically sick mixed bird flock to Department of Agriculture on 27th November 2025
- Included both farmed birds and wild birds
- Other animals on the farm included goats and a bull
- Laboratory identified sample to be positive via PCR for A(H5) on 28 November
- Whole genome sequencing determined sample was Influenza A(H5N1) clade 2.3.4.4b

Detection: Reflections

Worked well

- Strong collaboration between DoA and Laboratory colleagues
- Rapid laboratory pathogen detection and classification

Lessons learnt

- Refining our approach of pooling animal samples
- Protocols and availability of appropriate PPE when responding to notifications
- Consider passive surveillance testing algorithm during migratory season

Organization

- Early in the response we requested the support of the Hazard Management team and initiated the National Response command structure
- Strong intersectoral collaborative response across many groups
- Three levels of decision making;
  - Tactical Command Group, Strategic Command Group, Cabinet

Organization

Department of Agriculture
Cayman Islands Government

Department of Environment
Cayman Islands Government

RCIPS

Hazard Management
Cayman Islands Government

Department of Environmental Health
Cayman Islands Government

Department of Communications
Cayman Islands Government

Ministry of Health, Environment & Sustainability
Cayman Islands Government

CIMBL
Cayman Islands Molecular Biology Laboratory

HSA Public Health
Health Services Authority

Organization: Reflections

Worked well

- Strong response structure initiated early through out Hazard Management team and emergency response approach

Lessons learnt

- Defining roles and responsibilities
- Flexibility in roles and responsibilities
- Ensuring key individuals are included at each level of decision making

Aims

Our aims and objectives in responding to this national incident follow a **one-health approach of animal health, environmental health and public health**:

Primary aim: To contain and control Influenza A(H5N1) at the infected site

Secondary aim: To enhance our understanding of the transmission dynamics of avian influenza within our Islands and how the virus behaves in our environment in order to build resilience and strengthen our preparedness and early detection in any future incidents

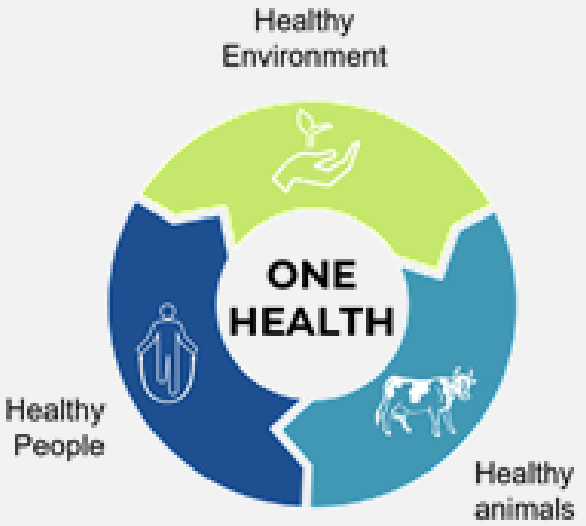


Image source: https://www.dedalus.com/uki/about-us/company/

Objectives

To achieve these aims, we had the following objectives:

i) Encourage the immediate reporting of sick/unhealthy birds for the expedited control and monitoring of infected populations

ii) Ascertain the extent of further transmission from the infected site through active or passive surveillance and monitoring among animal populations

iii) Implement on-farm biosecurity measures to prevent transmission to other animals, including ensuring that kept poultry do not interact with wild birds

iv) Protect human health and prevent zoonotic transmission by ensuring those responding follow IPC measures

v) Conduct testing and surveillance of any exposed persons to monitor for disease

vi) Raise public awareness of the risks to limit potential exposures among the general population

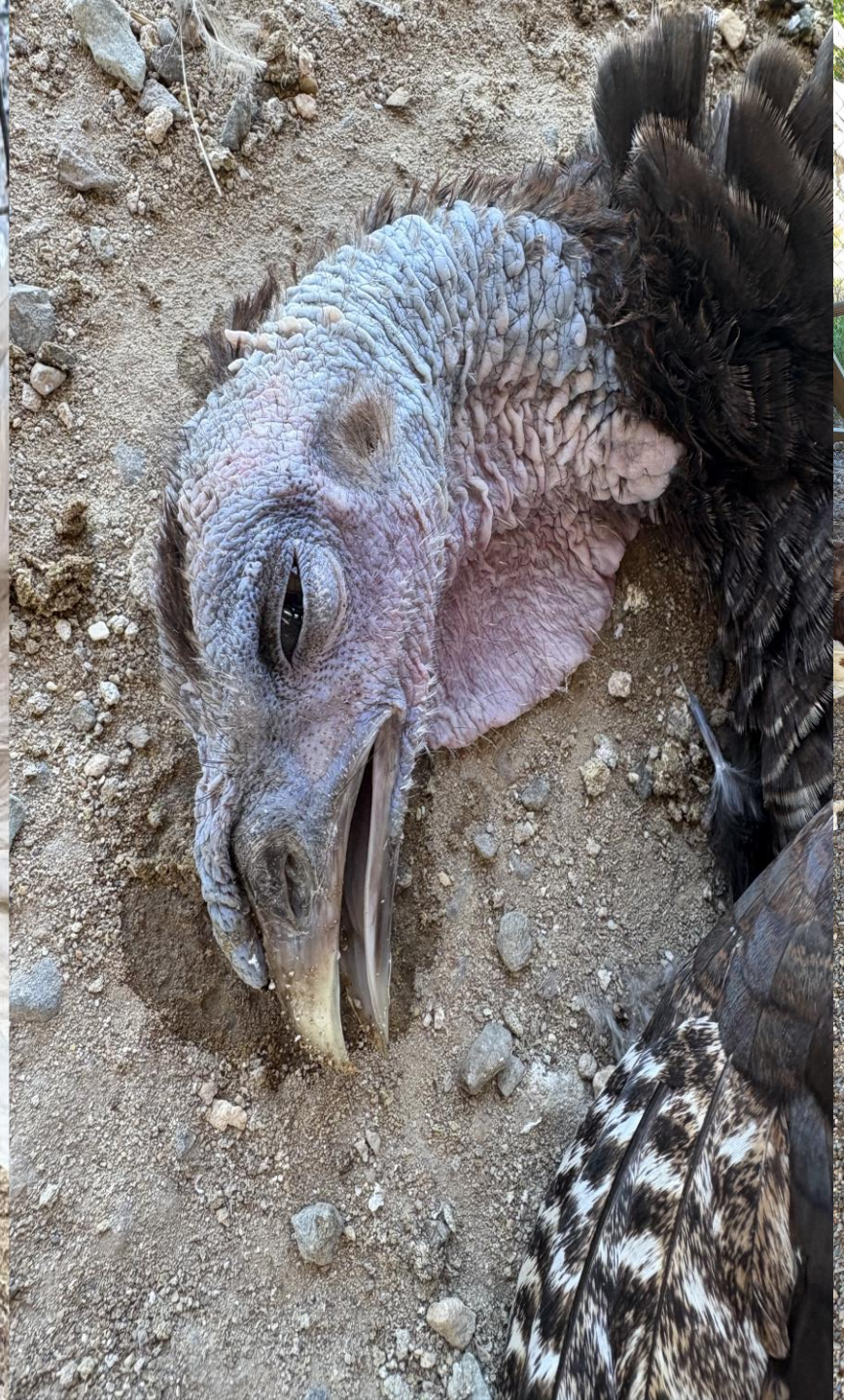
vii) Conservation of our wild bird populations through regular monitoring

viii) Preventing interaction between native wild birds and kept birds

ix) Monitoring and minimising disruptions to sensitive ecosystems

Containment

- Quarantine
- Depopulation – cervical dislocation
- Disinfection – performed twice with the use of Virkon S
- Vermin Control – baiting of rodents
- Vector Mediation (trapping, lethal gunshot)
- Movement controls – 3km zone, 10km zone, & Inter-island movement restrictions


Containment: Reflections

Worked well

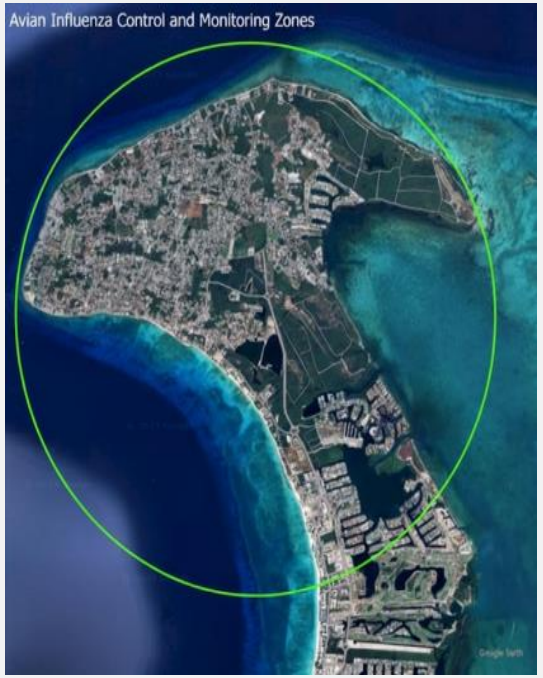
- Farmer notification
- Swift response
- PPE available
- Lab readiness
- Pre-training

Lessons Learnt

- Develop official plan
- Avoid complacency
- Back-up plan needed for large scale depopulation

Enhanced Animal Surveillance

- 3km zone
- 10km zone



Enhanced Animal Surveillance: Reflections

Worked well

- Pre-training of multiple department staff
- Communication
- Pre-established disposal SOPs

Lessons Learnt

- Need to enhance human-animal laboratory capacity
- Communication templates needed
- Cross-training needed to increase human resource numbers

Human Exposure and Surveillance

- Post-exposure prophylaxis for those exposed
- Public Health Surveillance
  - Active Surveillance – daily symptom monitoring for 10 days by surveillance officer
  - Passive surveillance – daily self-monitoring for 10 days
- Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)
- Altered the respiratory testing algorithm to expedite Influenza A(H5) testing

Protocols and Guidelines

- Clinical briefing to raise awareness among clinicians
- Management of exposed individuals
  - PPE
  - Testing
  - Surveillance
  - Treatment
- Adaptation of animal surveillance protocols with 3km and 10km radius

Source identification

- Farmer interviews
- Site inspection
- Migration patterns (Department of Environment)
- Blue-winged Teal

Source identification: Reflections

Worked well

- UK Support
- Intersectoral relationship & collaboration

Lessons Learnt

- Need to revive local One-health initiatives and committee

Current Situation & Future Planning

- Active surveillance ongoing, including all bird imports
- Passive Surveillance ongoing, including dead bird reports
- Task force and national plan going forward
- Procurement/stockpile plans, resource sharing/MOUs
- Cross training of personnel
- Hazmat transport from sister islands