

Media Release from Alderney Wildlife Trust

Date: 22nd August, 2022

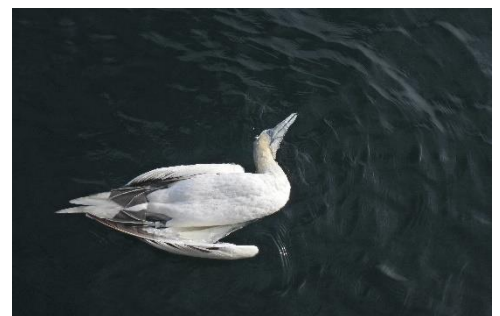
Avian Influenza Impacting Wild Bird populations in Alderney – making the best of a wildlife disaster



Since Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), otherwise known as Bird Flu, first reached the Channel Islands in July, the number of cases in wild birds has increased dramatically. On Alderney, the home to ~1% of the world's Northern Gannets we have seen an influx in recent weeks. The first cases of HPAI in poultry confirmed on the 16th August which led to the small flock being culled, but the disease is already rampant in the island's seabird populations.

The Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) is preparing for a significant increase in reports of this devastating disease, in particular in the Island's Gannet colonies - which are two of only three colonies within the English Channel. The small island of Alderney celebrates its seabird populations which are a vital part of the island's tourism and are the designation of an internationally important wetland in 2005. The AWT and other organisations have worked hard to monitor and ensure appropriate protection of these important breeding sites. Yet in less than three weeks at least 10% of the colonies' remaining gannet chicks were lost alongside an unknown number of adult birds. This means many hundreds of birds have already succumbed to the disease, with the threat of thousands more dying.

AWT staff are supporting the incredible work of the Island's Government, the States of Alderney, and the Alderney Animal Welfare to respond to reports of sick or dead birds on island and are gathering information on birds found at sea. Reports of dead birds at sea are normally very rare, but over the last three weeks more than 50 birds have been recorded, with the numbers increasing daily, whilst the French authorities and the Groupe Ornithologique Normand (GONm) are now reporting significant numbers washing up on the French coastline.

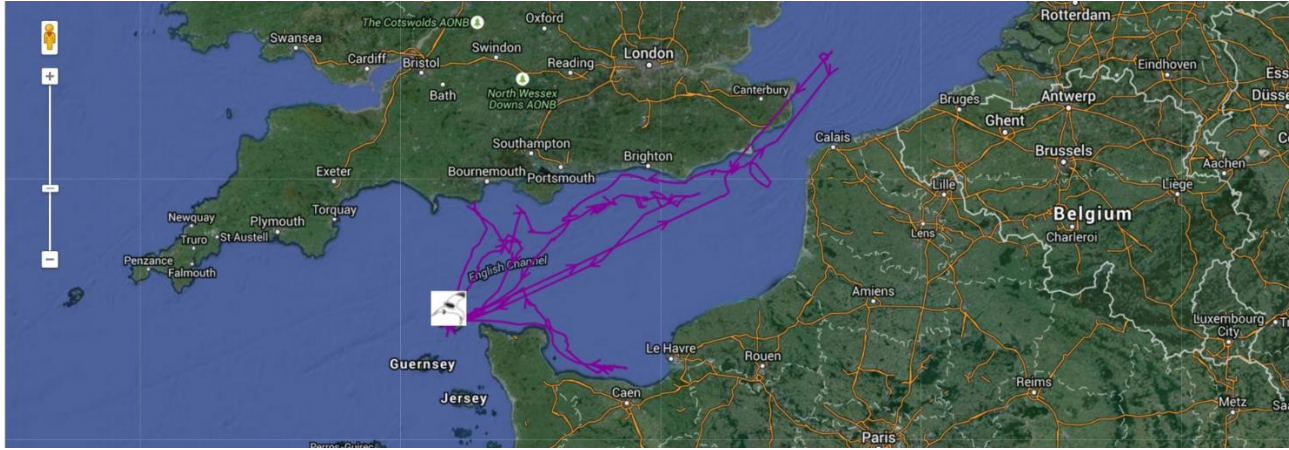


An increasingly common site of a dead gannet floating in the English Channel, this bird also carries a ring.

Named Gannets Found Dead

One of the first dead birds collected from this incident turned out to have been a bird which was fitted with a 3G tracker in 2015 as part of AWT's Track-a-Gannet programme. This gannet, tragically nick-named 'Alderney', flew the farthest north of all the tagged gannets that year, an impressive 358 km to the coast off Colchester. Yet it was found dead on Saye Beach in Alderney on the 22nd July and tested positive to HPAI. Another tagged gannet, sighted alive on Ortac in July, but sadly washed up on the French coast, was carrying a Geolocator which once recovered should make it possible to see where the bird had travelled over the course of a whole year. Gannets often travel down to the North African coastline for part of the winter and across much of the European coastline. These stories highlight that

behind the horrific statistics are many individual seabirds succumbing to a terrible disease.



The 2015 GPS track of the Gannet know as Alderney, part of the Track A Gannet (TAG) project - [Gannets - LIVE: Teaching Through Nature](#),

How can people help respond:

The British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) [Avian Influenza \('Avian flu'\) | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#) page provides vital and up-to-date information and guidance, please also:

1. If you are based on the south coast of England, PLEASE REPORT any sightings of dead gannets or sick birds to the DEFRA helpline: 03459 33 55 77.
2. If you are at sea in the English Channel, or notice a dead gannet on the coastline in the Channel area, please take a moment to record your sighting at [Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(Bird Flu, HPAI\) | Alderney Wildlife Trust](#). Please NEVER APPROACH OR HANDLE A SICK OR DEAD BIRD. This information will be shared with all relevant authorities, including the British Trust for Ornithology and will help us map the spread of the disease in our region. The BTO is working with Defra to support trained staff disposing of dead birds to record any bird rings discovered.

The impacts of HPAI are proving to be devastating and they are affecting wild bird populations which are already experiencing extreme pressures. For the small Island of Alderney, where detailed studies of the Island's Gannet populations have been undertaken for more than 15 years, it may just be possible to chart the progress of this disease and provide information which will help play a role in trying minimise the harm from events such as this when they happen again. It is vital that we work to build up the resilience within our wildlife necessary to enable them bounce back from these incidences – and so we do not lose this vital component of the English Channel's ecosystem.

'Since it was founded the Alderney Wildlife Trust has worked hard to ensure Alderney's seabirds thrive. Our team spends hundreds of hours each year studying these birds and working with government to ensure their protections and all of us are finding this current situation extremely distressing. Yet it is vital to ensure we don't allow the scale of this pandemic to overwhelm us and by working to record and better understand the impact of HPAI we may just help to ensure we don't see one of the crown jewels of British Wildlife disappear.'

Ends

Background

FOR FURTHER GUIDANCE - If you live in the Bailiwick of Guernsey please follow the government guidance issued: [States Vets publish guidance on bird flu following two confirmed cases in Guernsey this weekend - States of Guernsey \(gov.gg\)](#) or in the UK please contact Defra GB Helpline (03459 335577).

About the Alderney Wildlife Trust

The Alderney Wildlife Trust is one of the 46 [Wildlife Trusts](#) working across the British Isles. We are the youngest of the Wildlife Trust, forming 20 years ago and since then the AWT has received incredible support from a dedicated team of wildlife enthusiasts. This team isn't just limited to residents and AWT members, it includes people from all walks of life who have an interest in our island's wildlife, as well as supporters and organizations from around the world. We work with the local community to engage them with their natural environment in order to protect Alderney's wildlife for the future.

Our mission is to study, protect and champion Alderney's wildlife. We wish to see a thriving natural island where wildlife and natural habitats play a valued role in addressing our island's future and the climate and ecological emergencies that face us.

'Alderney is a very special place and by helping the work of the Alderney Wildlife Trust you can make a difference. After all, if you love where you live, you'll want to look after it' - Dr. George McGavin, Patron AWT

Alderney's Ramsar Site

In 2004, the AWT approached the SoA with a proposal to seek designation of an internationally important wetland (Ramsar) site, covering the incredibly wildlife rich west coast, Burhou and the reefs surrounding it.

Dedicated monitoring programmes of the species and habitats over the last 18 years have allowed us to identify trends that can help inform conservation actions, such as the implementation of the Burhou Puffin Friendly Zone. These projects also help us establish trends and identify the threats faced by Alderney's seabirds. Below the waves, marine habitat mapping is carried out in new locations each year to track changes in habitat, and monitoring programmes, targeted at non-native and climate change indicator species, help us identify the health of our intertidal environment. Recently, we have used data from the Ramsar work to advise protection measures for the Channel Islands' only population of Ringed Plovers, discover where Alderney's gannets feed during the summer and monitor the spread of non-native and climate change marine species for national databases.

Alderney's Seabird Population

Our Ramsar site supports internationally important populations of seabirds. This includes more than 1% of the global population of Northern Gannets (*Morus bassanus*), a species classified in the UK as 'Amber' under the Birds of Conservation Concern 4: The Red List for Birds (as of 2021). It is one of Alderney's largest seabirds and our two Gannet colonies located on Les Etacs and Ortac are some of the most impressive wildlife spectacles in the Channel Islands. Burhou islet (located XXX) is home to a fringe population of Puffins (*Fratercula artica*), made up of approximately 150 pairs during the breeding season, attracting numerous tourists to our island.

As well as being environmentally important and locally notable for bringing tourism to our island, these enigmatic species are also the key focuses of our PuffinCam and GannetCam livestreams. Since 2014, our PuffinCam cameras have been streamed online through the 'LIVE: Teaching Through Nature' website. There were more than 650,000 views of the site in 2020 alone, making it one of the most popular wildlife webcams in the region. The website provides schools and home learners with educational resources and enables those far from Alderney to experience the island's Puffins, and now Gannets, first hand. In 2021, a new camera joined these online resources

–
'GannetCam'. 'GannetCam' streams from the western cliffs of mainland Alderney overlooking the Les Etacs Gannetry. In 2021, 212,480 users accessed the AWT page on LIVE: Teaching Through Nature, with 148,992 unique page views.

Alderney is also home to a large number of other seabirds, including:

- [Shags](#)
- [Cormorants](#)
- [Puffins](#)
- [Guillemots](#)
- [Razorbills](#)
- [Fulmars](#)
- [Common Terns](#)
- [Storm Petrels](#)
- [Black-Headed Gulls](#)
- [Lesser Black-Backed Gulls](#)
- [Great Black-Backed Gulls](#)
- [Herring Gulls](#)

Notes to Media

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[Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(Bird Flu, HPAI\) | Alderney Wildlife Trust](#)