

Defend the Flock YOUR BIOSECURITY BULLETIN

Fall 2024

Q&A with Dr. Julianna Lench



We sat down with Julianna Lench, DVM, MPH, DACVPM, National Coordinator for APHIS' Wildlife Services, to get the scoop on wild bird mitigation and the spread of HPAI.

Dr. Lench, can you tell us a bit about your background?

I am a veterinary epidemiologist and currently serve as the national coordinator for the APHIS Wildlife Services National Wildlife disease program. I've been with USDA since 2016.

How is the National Wildlife Disease Program mitigating the spread of HPAI from wild birds?

We will sample between 38,000 and 45,000 migratory wild birds this year to understand where avian influenza exists in the country and detect any changes in the virus itself. We learn about the scale and scope of the ongoing outbreak and identify changes in risks or patterns of distribution, and then we provide that information to our agriculture and wildlife partners.

Why are flocks at increased risk of HPAI during migratory season?

Migratory wild birds are the natural reservoir of avian influenza viruses, but domestic birds can be exposed to the virus through fecal contamination. Starting around Labor Day each year, hundreds of thousands of birds migrate north to south. Because of the sheer volume of birds flying overhead during

fall migration, we typically have increased detections of avian influenza. So, we encourage farmers to do everything they can to protect their flocks from wild bird contact and maintain high biosecurity during the fall migration.

As a backyard bird owner, what are some steps I can take to limit my flock's interaction with wild birds?

Wild birds go where there's a nice place to rest or an easy meal, so try to decrease those enticing stopovers. Build secure areas with fencing and overnight areas where the birds are protected from predators and from wild birds. Clean up any spilled food to avoid drawing wild birds into the area. And be especially vigilant about visitors who might unknowingly transmit disease. The steps we recommend are listed below, and you can get detailed guidance about How to carry them out in the [Defend the Flock Resource Center](#).

LIMIT YOUR FLOCK'S INTERACTION WITH WILD BIRDS



- 1 Secure Buildings
- 2 Manage Ponds and Basins
- 3 Reduce Food Resources
- 4 Cover Waste
- 5 Remove Standing Water

Report Sick Birds If you see signs of illness, take action right away!

Veterinarian	<input type="text"/>
Cooperative Extension Office	<input type="text"/>
State Veterinarian/Animal or Poultry Diagnostic Lab	<input type="text"/>
USDA	866.536.7593



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What else can I do to keep my flock safe during the upcoming migratory season?

In this HPAI outbreak there have been instances of poultry-to-poultry transmission. To support biosecurity, do not share equipment between farms and do not have workers go back and forth between farms. Also avoid visiting areas with high densities of wildlife and bringing the same equipment back to your farm. For instance, if you're a duck hunter and go out to a field or a wetland, there are points of biosecurity and cleaning that we recommend coming back. Do not share instruments, boots, ATV's or any field equipment like that without sanitizing them. There's a high risk of transmissions from areas with a high population of migratory waterfowl.

As a commercial bird owner, how can I ensure my flock stays healthy?

Be vigilant about washing trucks and truck wheels because any contact from farm to farm could be responsible for moving the virus. And certainly sanitize workers' boots and other equipment.

As a young future farmer/flock owner, how can I learn more about HPAI?

We encourage our future farmers to practice the best animal care that they are able to: great nutrition, clean water, protecting from wildlife of all sources – wild birds, but also any predators. Young farmers can also be proactive in 4H or other learning groups by sharing resources from [Defend The Flock](#).

Can people get HPAI?

The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention considers the risk of H5N1 to humans to be low. For additional information on their assessment and monitoring activities, visit their website: [H5N1 Bird Flu: Current Situation Summary | Avian Influenza \(Flu\) \(cdc.gov\)](#)

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What else should I know about reducing the risk of HPAI?

There are free printable resources at [Defend The Flock](#) that you can post up to reinforce biosecurity practices around your property. The other point I'd like to make is this:

It's impossible for the USDA to have eyes on the ground everywhere, so we really rely on the public to make us aware of any wild bird mortality events (large instances of sick or dying birds). Oftentimes, it's birders or duck hunters or wildlife enthusiasts who see those first. So please, if you see something like that, we need you to report it to state wildlife agencies for investigation at 1-866-4-USDA-WS or 1-866-487-3297.

For more information about how to keep your flocks healthy, follow **Defend the Flock** on **Facebook** and **Twitter** and visit www.aphis.usda.gov/animalhealth/defendtheflock.

