

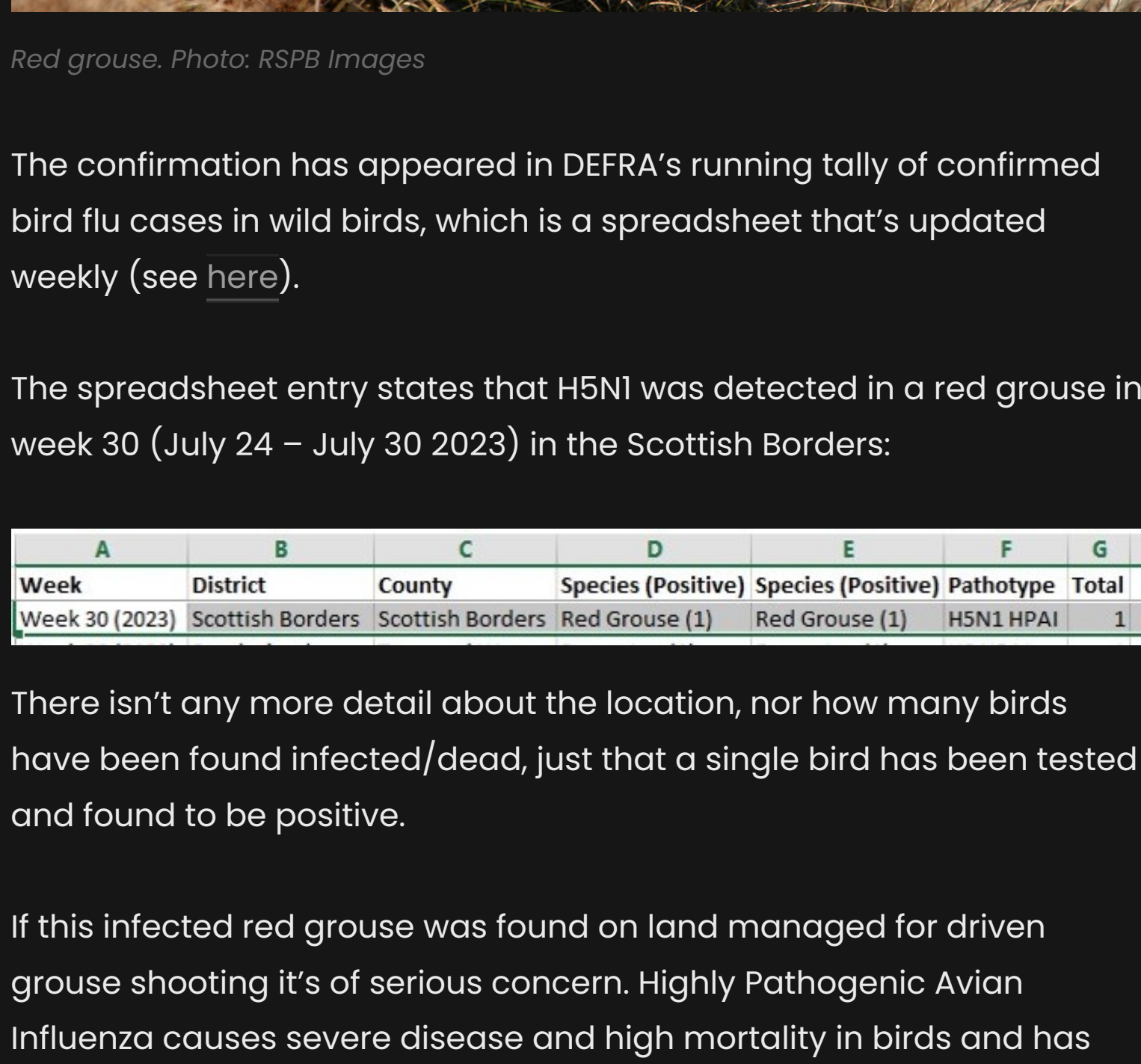
Raptor Persecution UK

Highly pathogenic avian influenza confirmed in red grouse in Scotland

RaptorPersecutionUK
August 10, 2023
News

golden eagle, white-tailed eagle

A case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), otherwise known as bird flu, has been confirmed in red grouse in Scotland, according to DEFRA.



Red grouse. Photo: RSPB Images

The confirmation has appeared in DEFRA's running tally of confirmed bird flu cases in wild birds, which is a spreadsheet that's updated weekly (see [here](#)).

The spreadsheet entry states that H5N1 was detected in a red grouse in week 30 (July 24 – July 30 2023) in the Scottish Borders:

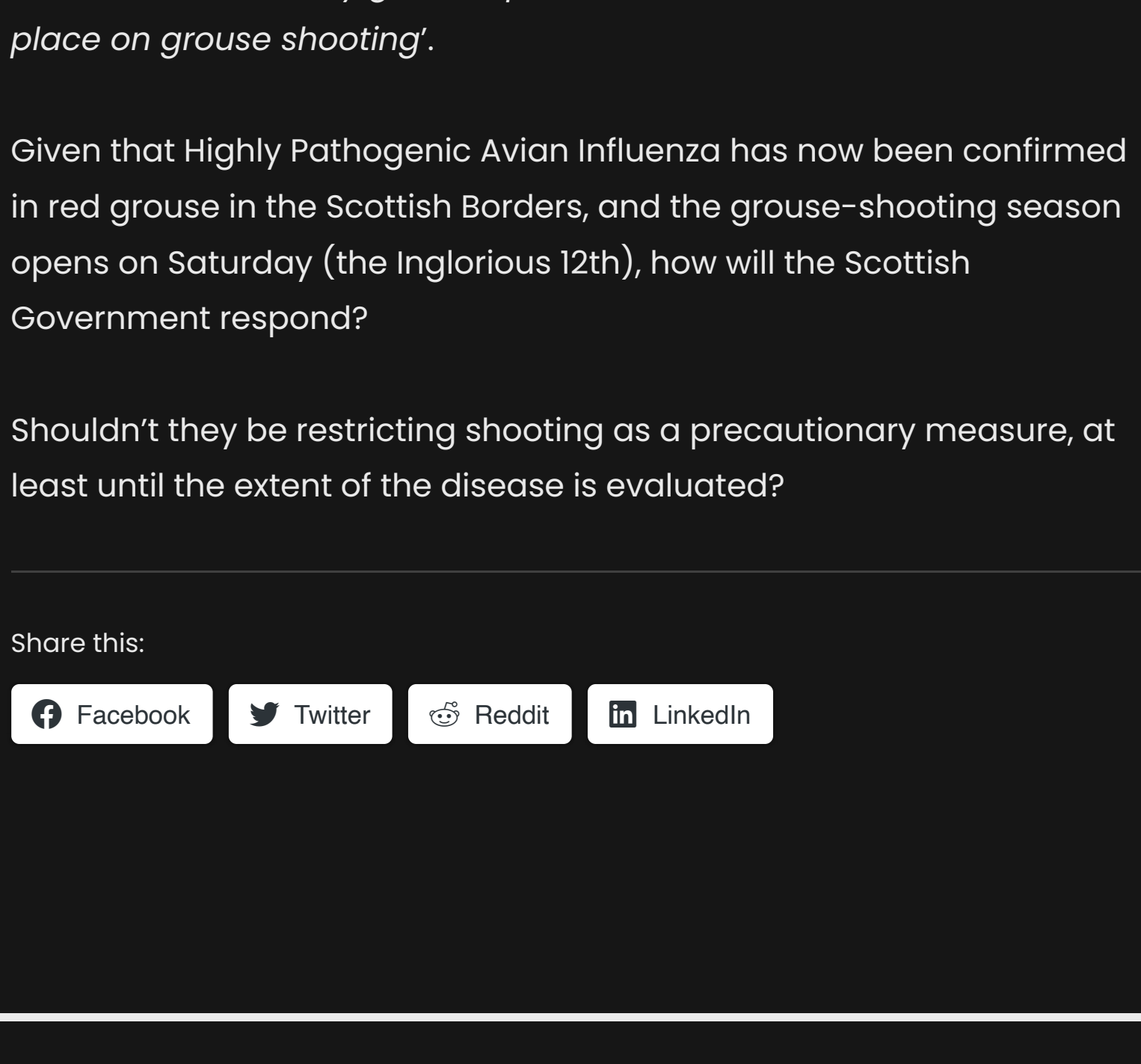
A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Week	District	County	Species (Positive)	Species (Positive)	Pathotype	Total
Week 30 (2023)	Scottish Borders	Scottish Borders	Red Grouse (1)	Red Grouse (1)	H5N1 HPAI	1

There isn't any more detail about the location, nor how many birds have been found infected/dead, just that a single bird has been tested and found to be positive.

If this infected red grouse was found on land managed for driven grouse shooting it's of serious concern. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza causes severe disease and high mortality in birds and has already killed tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of wild birds in the UK, impacting on the populations of globally significant species.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is transmitted by the spreading between birds of nasal secretions and droppings, and it also spreads to birds of prey via the predation of infected birds. Some UK raptor species have already been badly affected, including golden eagles and white-tailed eagles (e.g. see [here](#)).

We know that many driven grouse moors are (mis)managed to produce an artificially-high density of red grouse for shooting. Another highly contagious disease, Cryptosporidiosis (Bulgy Eye) is rife on [many intensively-managed driven grouse moors](#). It was first detected in wild red grouse in England in 2010 and then spread rapidly, via communal medicated grit trays, and by 2015 had affected high density red grouse on half of the 150 grouse moors in northern England. It has also been detected in Scotland, although the extent of the spread in Scotland is not known because the shooting industry is keeping quiet, and, for reasons unknown, NatureScot isn't undertaking any surveillance of the disease (see [here](#)).



A grit tray on a grouse moor containing red grouse faecal droppings – a disease reservoir. Photo: Ruth Tingay

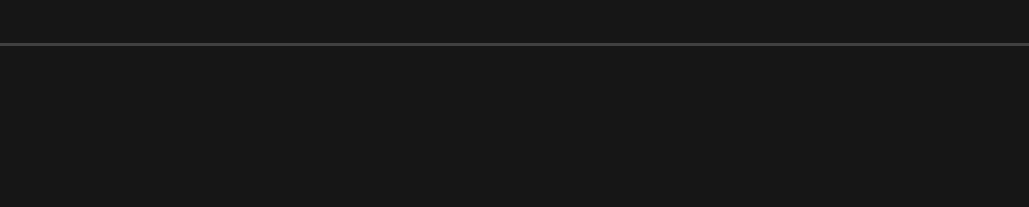
If the highly contagious Cryptosporidiosis disease can spread so rapidly via red grouse secretions and droppings found in grit trays on the moors, then so can Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.

Last year I argued that it would be 'irresponsible' for grouse-shooting to go ahead during the avian flu epidemic (see [here](#)). In response, the Scottish Government said: *...there have been no recorded cases of avian influenza in any grouse species, and there are no restrictions in place on grouse shooting*.

Given that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza has now been confirmed in red grouse in the Scottish Borders, and the grouse-shooting season opens on Saturday (the Inglorious 12th), how will the Scottish Government respond?

Shouldn't they be restricting shooting as a precautionary measure, at least until the extent of the disease is evaluated?

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5 thoughts on "Highly pathogenic avian influenza confirmed in red grouse in Scotland"

alsere32

August 10, 2023 at 10:01 am

Well they will not stop the idiots shooting that's not on at all old boy so I for one will be praying non of these gentlemen come to any harm.

Reply

Stephen Lewis

August 10, 2023 at 10:09 am

I'm dusting off my 'mealy-mouthed-claptrap-detector' for the inevitable dispiriting responses from DEFRA and/or NatureScot. There is more chance of a successful hen harrier nest inside a grouse butt than DGS being stopped this year methinks.

Reply

David Jardine

August 10, 2023 at 10:31 am

It would be interesting to hear from the shooting industry what biosecurity measures are being adopted in response to confirmed cases of HPAI

Reply

andrew

August 10, 2023 at 10:49 am

they will just keeping throwing cage reared partridges onto the moors

Reply

John L

August 10, 2023 at 11:27 am

I don't think this outbreak will have any effect on the shooting as I understand avian flu was already widely prevalent in wild birds before this recent reported case.

However there should be some concern for those who will be working on the grouse moors in the coming months once the shooting season starts and who could come into contact with infected birds – particularly the "pickers up" who will be handling the shot birds. The advice to date has been not to touch or handle any dead birds found in the countryside.

I hope there is a rapid response from the likes of DEFRA / NatureScot / Natural England which provide clear guidelines for the shooting industry to minimise the risk to those who will be working on the grouse moors.

Likewise, this should be of concern to NGA, the Scottish Game Keepers association and bodies such as BASC and GWCT etc who should also rapidly advise their members on suitable safety precautions prior to the 12th August.

It would be an absolute tragedy if someone or their working dog contacted this illness as a result of touching infected game. Because that "someone" is most likely to be a member of a rural community who only helps on the shooting estates during the shooting season and uses the money earned to supplement their income.

Reply

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