

Avian Influenza in game ducks in Ireland

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Abstract

Ducks are recognised reservoirs of Avian Influenza viruses generally without displaying any symptoms. As part of active AI surveillance programmes in Ireland non-notifiable Avian Influenza was detected in game ducks during 2021. In one of the premises, duck samples tested AI positive by ELISA and after a follow up investigation, H6N8 viral RNA was confirmed by real-time PCR. Recently another game duck premise tested AI positive by serology. Concurrent H3N8 and H5N2 LPAI infections were detected by molecular and sequencing methods. Interestingly H3N8 virus was present in the cloaca, oropharynx, and tissues, with low CT values. However, H5N2 LPAI was detected only in cloacal swabs with higher CT values, suggesting different stages of progression of both infections. Ducks remained healthy throughout that period. Pheasants and partridges of the same premises tested negative for AI by both serological and molecular methods. This shows once more how ducks can harbour AI viruses without displaying any symptomatology which could potentially transmit AI to other susceptible species such as chickens.