



## GAME BIRD NEWSLETTER – Winter 2022-23

### 25 years of Sandhill and the next 25 years!

Sandhill became 25 years old last November! Richard founded Sandhill in 1997 and was the one of the UK's first game bird specialists. In recent years Richard has been a semi-retired partner offering consultancy to Sandhill when required. After 25 years of having bags of dead birds dropped at his door, Richard is hanging up his PM scissors and leaving the partnership. Along with this Richard is reclaiming his house as a residential property, meaning we are moving. Richard will continue to provide independent consultancy and maintain close links with the practice.

**Sandhill vets are moving!** As of late January, we will be moving to our new premises a few minutes down the road at Melmerby Business Park, HG4 5NB. After plans to build our own building in Topcliffe fell through, this move just across the A1 will allow us to expand with more space.

Our official move date is 30<sup>th</sup> January. Our phone number will remain the same, but please note our trading name and account details will change as of 1<sup>st</sup> February 2023 to *Sandhill Veterinary Services Ltd*. More details to follow later this month.

Despite the turbulent times with COVID and Avian Influenza, we look forward to the next 25 years of Sandhill and working with you all for years to come.

### Avian Influenza (AI) and The Game Sector

AI has caused significant interruption to the game sector and the outbreak doesn't appear to be going away with a continuation of cases over last summer. There was a significant peak of cases in poultry in the early autumn, much of this was attributed to our native birds (particularly sea birds) being endemically infected, then land cultivation bringing infected birds within close proximity of poultry units. Game releasing hasn't been blamed for direct transmission to poultry, however the large numbers of released birds are thought to potentially harbour AI.

Many of you will have heard of the shoots decimated by AI this autumn (particularly in Devon). There are however several shoots that were infected with AI and only saw mild signs and only restricted to one area. The shoots most severely affected shared common features including; very large numbers of game released in one area, high stocking density, floor feeding and significant mixing with wild birds in feeding areas.

We have experienced some cases of AI in released birds, however, thankfully Northern England and Scotland have seen fewer cases than in the South.

Cases in poultry appear to have slowed down since the peak in Autumn which is very good news.

**Moving forward it is highly likely that we are going to be affected by AI again to some degree this spring.** France is experiencing a large outbreak and it is unlikely that the UK will be free of AI. Therefore, egg and chick supply are expected to be limited or movements hampered.

Our advice:

- Consider multiple sources of birds to spread your risk (but do not mix sources together)
- Plan ahead and have a contingency plan in place – what will happen if you or your supplier falls within movement restriction zones and birds do not arrive or poults are unable to leave your site?



- **A movement licence or biosecurity audit may be required if you or your supplier falls within an AI zone.** Ensure you have all the paperwork in place NOW to speed this process up. You must be registered with DEFRA, have all the required records kept and be practicing good biosecurity.
- Consider keeping breeding birds over multiple sites (multiple holding numbers) and away from rearing activities to spread your risk should one site be put under restriction.

### French situation

Unfortunately, AI cases are rapidly increasing in the game dense areas in France. France report to have good numbers of breeding stock and this stock has been spread out over France and multiple countries to spread the risk and reduce the impact of regional restrictions. The French government has also implemented a contingency plan with strict measures such as firebreak culling and a ban on restocking ducks and turkeys to try and control outbreaks sooner which should help reduce the AI risk in the spring.

In addition, the European Commission has announced their intention to consider reducing the 90 day movement restriction (from EU states to the UK) to 30 days, this would significantly help streamline movements following an AI outbreak should this change occur in time.

Despite many clients relying on the French stock it seems inevitable that supply will be affected and our advice is to spread your risk with multiple sources and consider English produced birds or your own source of birds.

### Catching up

Catching up always poses a potential risk of catching up birds carrying disease, such as Mycoplasma (MG). **As of Jan 2023 DEFRA consider catching up VERY HIGH RISK (at a national level) but LOW RISK (to the individual shoot) and have allowed catching up to continue.** This national risk level is not a surprise as there is a **high chance of wild pheasants carrying AI**, wild bird positive cases have been identified in almost every region. That said, sensible catching up from 'known' sources can reduce risk

- Only catch up from shoots with no confirmed or suspected cases of AI, MG or Coronavirus. Also avoid birds that have had MG vaccines.
- Ensure birds are caught up professionally and promptly
- DO NOT mix multiple sources of birds from multiple shoots - this is very high risk.
- Keep birds in small numbers with lots of space. Larger group sizes increase disease spread.
- If possible, keep caught up / breeding birds on the shoot or on a dedicated site away from rearing activities. This way if one pen of birds were to go down with AI it wouldn't bring your whole enterprise down or stop you rearing.
- Monitor closely for signs of disease and act quickly. Treatment for Mycoplasma is most successful if started promptly and AI should be confirmed early to limit the spread of disease.
- **NEW DEFRA LEGISLATION: Once catching has finished and the catcher/holding pen is closed a statutory 21 day (following the last bird being caught) movement ban is now in place to monitor for signs of disease.**
  - **Bird numbers, mortality and subsequent movements must be recorded.**
- Practice excellent biosecurity. DEFRA approved foot dips must be used and a change of clothing and footwear is advised between different ages of birds and different sites.
  - Reducing the spread of AI within your site with excellent biosecurity is really worth all the effort, as compensation for a culled healthy laying pheasant at the start of lay is over £31 per bird. If all the birds die, then compensation will not be paid. Full compensation rates below:
  - [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1124782/Poultry\\_valuation\\_tables.zip](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1124782/Poultry_valuation_tables.zip)
  - It should be noted that compensation may not be paid if biosecurity is poor!
  - Consider using bird proof small nets (25mm) to improve biosecurity
- As AI and Mycoplasma can survive in drinking water, water sanitizers are advised at all times.



- We advise breeder vaccination against Avian Coronavirus which has been rife in recent years and typically presents as very acute high mortality after catching up and in the breeding period.

See our previous communication earlier in the week or the link below for the full DEFRA guidelines on catching up: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63bc1441d3bf7f263328b75f/amended-aipz-declaration-mandatory-biosecurity-housing-measures-England-from-090123.pdf>

### Spring Game Talks

Topcliffe talk – Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February, Topcliffe Village Hall.

Hexham talk – Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> March, Hexham auction Mart.

Grouse talk evening – Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> March. Venue TBC.

### Trusted Game Audits and Gamekeeper Training Courses.

Following the significant uptake last spring we will be carrying out Trusted Game Audits (game farms and shoots) and running BVPA Gamekeeper training courses again this year. Both of these schemes are national incentives and industry backed to help protect the future of our sector and look at improving standards - we encourage all clients to get involved. Please speak to us if you are interested.



### Sandhill Chemical and Supplement Sale

We now offer a full range of products and we believe we can offer a better product OR a cheaper direct equivalent to the range many of you are used to.

#### Summary of a few interesting products:

**Aquatabs** - A novel Chlorine-based water sanitiser. This unit is installed in the water line and one cartridge sanitises 360,000L without mixing, calculations, stock solutions or power sources. Once the cartridge is empty just screw in a new one.



**Fumagri** – A fumigation canister that can be used to dry disinfect feed bins (advised annually to kill mould and Salmonella), the hatchery/eggs and sheds. This fumigation is active against bacteria, viruses and moulds – particularly good for Aspergillus fungus control and may be used during rear in problem sheds (with birds locked out).

**Intra Calciferol** – Calcium, Vit D, Phosphorus and Magnesium product used to supplement laying birds to support shell quality. This product is particularly useful toward the end of lay and/or if you notice a drop in shell quality and strength.

**Kilcox Extra** – A cost effective multipurpose disinfectant that also kills 100% of Coccidial Oocysts (Bioocyst only kills 92%). Also DEFRA approved and effective against viruses (AI) and bacteria.

**Game rearing chemical packages now available, with detergents and DEFRA approved disinfectants available at a reduced rate when purchased together. More details to follow – please speak to us for more information.**

