

Catching up and Mycoplasma gallisepticum (MG) update - 2021

We have seen significant reductions in Mycoplasma cases in game birds in recent years. This has been down to several factors, all firmly based around the BVPA Mycoplasma in game birds recommendations.

One of the greatest risk factors for Mycoplasma outbreaks is using infected caught up birds for breeding particularly where bird numbers are very high after shooting has finished. Both of these allow MG to keep circulating. The disease status of these birds is often impossible to definitively ascertain, even with blood or PCR testing, so birds may still be infected with MG, but test negative.

Can you be sure that the birds you are catching up are the same ones you put down? Probably not, as birds are known to wander; tagged birds have been shown to travel up to 15 miles over a winter. Birds never fully clear an MG infection and birds can carry MG without showing symptoms.

We have seen these reductions in MG outbreaks despite having never used any MG vaccines and still advise clients against their use. MG vaccines do not stop the spread of MG (through the egg or bird to bird), but just mask the clinical signs; we have been involved with MG outbreaks in vaccinated birds. We also find infected chicks from MG vaccinated birds do not respond to treatment as well as non-vaccinated. Therefore these vaccines may be dangerous and not advised if you really want to control this infection long term - not to mention very expensive! We are pleased to see the popularity of MG vaccines decreasing over the country.

We do advise vaccination against Avian Rhinotracheitis (ART) and Coronavirus (IB virus) as these are common diseases of breeding birds that can be well controlled with vaccination.

Obviously this year poses a significant risk, as bird numbers are still very high on the ground and the temptation to keep these birds or catch up is great. We understand this may come as some financial reward to offset a difficult year, but the downstream consequences of this may far outweigh this short term gain.

Our advice would be to not catch up if this is not your normal practice and only breed from caught up birds if you can be very sure of the origin of the stock and its disease status. Even then, catching up is a risk. Birds should be closely screened for disease and a vet diagnosis should be sought upon the suspicion of disease.

Please speak to us if you are considering catching up or taking caught up birds for breeding so we can discuss the health status of the birds, management and vaccination options.

See <https://www.sandhillvet.co.uk/newsletters/> newsletter section for '*BVPA recommendations for Mycoplasma in game birds*', '*Mycoplasma advice*' and '*Sandhill GFA game bird breeding article 2020*'.