



Game Bird Newsletter 2018

As another shooting season draws to a close the industry is still dominated by the concerns of last year, Avian Influenza and antibiotic usage.

Avian Influenza

Since the identification of Avian Influenza virus H5N6 in wild birds in January the whole of England is in an Avian Influenza prevention zone. Further isolates have been identified in England and these can be seen on the DEFRA website. They are at present, all associated with areas of high concentrations of wild waterfowl and wild birds.

The immediate impact on the game bird industry is an increased level of bio-security and measures to prevent spread into the commercial and non-commercial poultry industry within the UK. Coupled with this is an increased vigilance for signs of disease within birds both farmed and wild. More information and up to date maps etc. can be found at www.gov.uk/guidance/avian-influenza-bird-flu

Antibiotic use

The bio-security measures required under the Avian Influenza protection zone include efforts to reduce the transmission of the virus by the faeco-oral route as this is a common route of spread of disease. These measures are good management practices for the industry to adopt whilst it tackles the challenge of reducing antibiotic use within the game bird sector. With Avian Influenza, we are to a degree, at the mercy of the weather, migratory patterns and an ever-evolving virus challenge. However, with antibiotic use on our game bird enterprises we can and must make the changes necessary to address this issue.

The figures released following information supplied by ourselves and other game bird vet practices has shown a 36% reduction in antibiotic use in 2017 compared to 2016. This reduction comprises a 53% reduction in those administered in feed. These achievements exceed targets; however, there was a slight increase in the amount of antibiotics administered in the water. This has been a voluntary and industry led reduction, however as we are starting from a very high level compared with other species. For example, in 2016 the game bird sector used approximately the same amount of antibiotics as the whole of the broiler and turkey industry. Further significant reductions are not only desirable but essential to avoid harsh restrictions or a potential ban on the use of antibiotics within game birds.

This coming season will see more downward pressure on antibiotic use and plans should be in place to improve all aspects of your enterprise to reduce reliance. Rotating rearing fields and good release pen design are important as these are areas of high use. Badly positioned/poorly maintained and managed release pens account for very significant levels of antibiotic use, incurring medicine costs, bird mortality and condition loss.

We need stronger partnerships going forward of chick/poult supplier-shoot-vet to help promote best practice, minimise disease challenge and hence reduce drug usage and give us a healthy industry in the future. Better communication between vet practices involved in different stages of the supply chain, allowing better knowledge of health status and prior medication of birds at delivery to shoots is to be welcomed and encouraged within the vet practice – game bird industry.

Carcase Disposal

This is another area of concern within the industry with instances of poor carcass disposal practices particularly on the rearing field and release pens and in some instances on shoots. At a time when the industry is under public scrutiny all areas of management need to be ‘best practice’.

We wish you the best of luck in the coming season. If you have any points that you wish to discuss then please contact us.

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