



# Avian Flu: FAO IN ACTION



Photo: AFP

## Conservationists and scientists agree wild birds play role in avian flu

### FAO/OIE conference on role of wild birds a success

Over 300 delegates from over 100 countries ended a successful two-day conference in avian influenza and wild birds recognizing that they do indeed play a role in the transmission cycle of the disease and calling for global surveillance to help pinpoint the precise nature of that role.

Organised by FAO and the Paris-based World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), from 30-31 May in Rome, the International Scientific Conference on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds was funded by the governments of France, Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland, and brought together a wide range of experts from the worlds of wildlife protection, and conservation, virology and animal health.

The major international conference was called to exchange scientific information on avian flu, assess the risk of introduction of the HPAI virus to as yet uninfected areas, and to propose mitigation and preventive measures.

The conference presented state-of-the-art scientific knowledge in the areas of:

- Ecology and virology
- Surveillance, sampling and analysis
- Risk analysis (migratory routes, disease dynamics, human risk and risk for domestic poultry)
- Disease management

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## Funding and donor contributions

Out of a total of USD 308.5 million needed for its three-year contribution to the Global Programme for the Progressive Control of Avian Influenza, HAO had received (as of 1 June 2006) a total of USD 49.2 million, with a further USD 22.9 million agreed but not yet received, for a total of USD 72.1 million.

Japan	12.4
Sweden	10.1
FAO	9.2
Asian Development Bank	6.5
Germany	6.3
United States	6.3
France	6.0
Switzerland	3.7
Norway	3.7
Viet Nam Joint Programme	2.0
Australia	1.9
United Kingdom	1.3
Saudi Arabia	1.0
Spain	0.48
Netherlands	0.48
New Zealand	0.34
UN Development Group Office	0.19
Jordan	0.05
UN Ass Prog for Afghanistan	0.025

NB. The figures concern only funding to FAO and do not include bilateral support to affected countries/ regions.

## Overall funding situation – 1 June 2006

	US dollars (millions)
Funds received	49.2
Funds agreed but not received	22.9
Total of funds received and agreed	72.1
Funds promised	35.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>107.4</b>
<b>Funding Gaps</b>	
Including funds received	259.3
Including funds received and agreed	236.4
Including funds received, agreed and in the pipeline	201.1

## Equipment and goods provided by FAO

FAO has invested donor funds in five major categories: supplies & equipment, human resources, training, studies and support services (as at 1 June 2006):

Investment category	US dollars (millions)
Laboratory and veterinary supplies and equipment .....	11.4
Human resources (missions by veterinarians, economists, and project planners and managers) .....	8.0
Training (laboratory, epidemiology, wildlife, policy and strategy) .....	1.6
Studies (diagnostic reference, field epidemiological studies, wildlife field studies) .....	0.7
Support services (general operating expenses) .....	3.8
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>25.5</b>

## Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities – SFERA

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) needs change over time and it is difficult to predict shifting logistical needs and the budgetary requirements to meet them. This is why many of FAO's activities and initiatives under its avian flu programme are financed through the multi-donor Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation Activities (SFERA), set up in 2003 as a rapid and flexible mechanism that allows FAO to meet countries' needs by advancing non-earmarked\* working capital against donor commitments to avian influenza.

Donor contributions to SFERA maximise the efficiency of allocating funds to priorities which will change over time. Already, the SFERA mechanism has played a pivotal role in shaping FAO's initial emergency response to the avian flu crisis, helping the organization to develop a strategic programmatic response to serve as a guide for actions to be undertaken by the animal health and emergency operations departments of FAO under the overall leadership of governments concerned and in close collaboration with all stakeholders.

Through SFERA and the substantial contributions received for its avian flu activities, FAO was able to mobilize technical advice, back-up and supervision for both the establishment of an animal surveillance and monitoring framework and for the delivery of operational inputs and services.

### Fund composition

As of 15 May 2006, donor contributions/pledges to SFERA totalled USD 23.63 million (see table below – all figures in USD millions)

FRANCE	5.88
JORDAN	0.05
NORWAY	3.51
SAUDI ARABIA	1.00
SWEDEN	9.49
SWITZERLAND	3.69
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>23.63</b>

Through SFERA, FAO's Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD) is able to establish priorities, manage available funds in a flexible manner, and avoid time-consuming negotiations with individual donors, especially when unexpected events occur which require immediate response, as was the case with avian influenza.

\* Funds that are not tied by a donor to a given country or type of intervention.

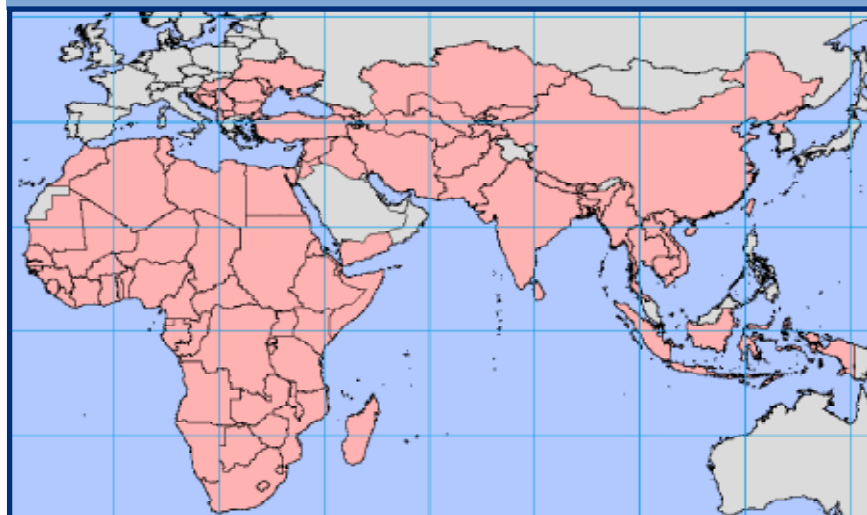


Vaccination of poultry in Viet Nam.

Photo credit: FAO/H. D. Nam

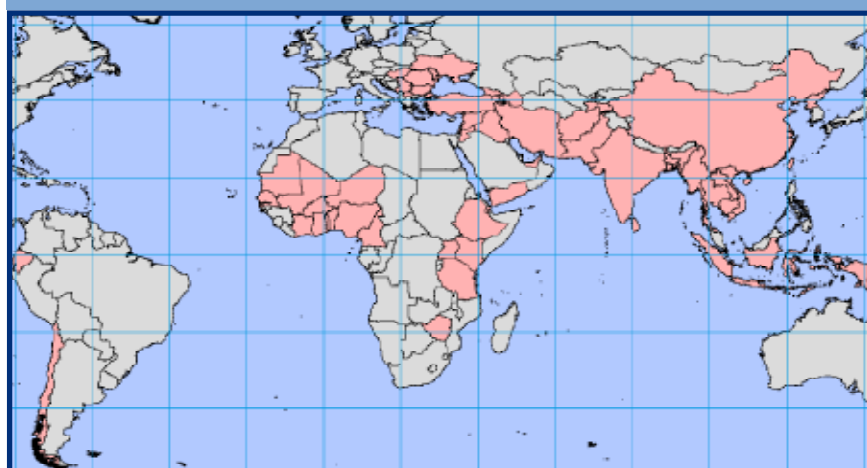
### Countries to which FAO has supplied goods and services since February 2004

(shaded in pink)



### Countries in which FAO staff and/or consultants have carried out missions since February 2004

(shaded in pink)



## Operational highlights

- Two FAO consultants are currently in Côte d'Ivoire to follow up on previous missions and assist the national authorities with planning. FAO has provided or is providing equipment and goods worth more than USD 760 000, more than half of which is for the procurement of vaccines. FAO is also assisting with the organization of a national vaccination campaign.
- A FAO staff member is currently in Djibouti to assess the situation and advise national authorities. This is the third mission to Djibouti in the past two months. Funds totalling USD 20,000 have been sent through UNDP for HPAI operations in Djibouti.
- Forthcoming workshops and training:
  - wildlife and epidemiology training workshop in Tunis (12-16 June);
  - joint workshop for participants in the North Africa and Near East TCPs in Beirut (27-29 June);
  - wildlife and epidemiology training workshop in Amman (9-13 July).
- ECTAD is preparing presentations for the forthcoming Vienna Senior Officers' Meeting aimed at encouraging new donor pledges to enable the Organization to meet its requirements under the Global Programme.
- The regional coordinator of FAO's four TCP projects begins the assignment at the start of June, strengthening ECTAD's operational capacity in Latin America and the Caribbean. The coordinator will be based at FAO's Regional Office in Santiago but will travel extensively around the region.



## News Reports

### Plan for global wild bird tracking system

**Flying backpackers**, communications satellites and a network of computers would monitor the movements of wild birds on their annual migrations under a plan proposed by FAO.

The 6.8-million-dollar plan could also provide the world with crucial advance warning of the occurrence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus, which causes bird flu. Deploying teams of national and international veterinary and wild bird experts on the ground, it would fill a huge gap in scientific knowledge about where, when and how wild birds associated with HPAI – principally aquatic and shore birds – migrate.

The plan involves capturing thousands of wild birds before they migrate, testing sample birds for disease, and fitting some of them out with tiny backpacks weighing less than 50 grams each. After the birds are released, the sophisticated telemetry equipment inside the packs would track their every movement.

A system of radio beacons and satellites would then feed data into the computers of ornithologists, ecologists, virologists and epidemiologists round the world.

The project is in line with recommendations made at the 30- 31 May international scientific conference on avian influenza and wild birds organized by FAO and the Paris-based World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

The conference concluded that wild birds do play a role in transporting HPAI over long distances but that human activities such as poultry production and trade are principally responsible for spreading the disease. It noted, however, that there was a basic need for better understanding of wild bird migration and the associated risks of virus introduction. And it also called for telemetry and satellite technology to be used in such studies.

Under FAO's plan, the backpacks would show the migrating birds' exact whereabouts when they stop over for rest and recreation on their long journeys. Mobile, ground-based teams would then re-test the sample birds for disease and, in the case of a positive return, have a good idea of where the infection originated and where it might head next.

Early warning would give governments and producers more time to respond to potential threats – with great benefits for the poultry industry and society at large.

A small part of the money to fund the project is already on hand, but FAO would need the help of donors and governments to get it up and flying.

### Wild birds play role in avian flu Poultry key to winning the battle

**Wild birds** do play a role in the transmission cycle of avian flu, but they are not the only ones to blame in the complicated mosaic that is avian flu. This was the consensus opinion expressed by over 300 wildlife and bird experts meeting in Rome this week, laying to rest a dilemma that has divided experts.

Participants at an international conference on avian flu and wild birds organised by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) from 30 to 31 May in Rome also agreed that only a concerted global effort to monitor the situation will help throw light on much of the mystery still surrounding the reasons for the appearance of the disease in some locations and not in others.

They recognised that wild birds play a role, albeit unclear, and



Photo: AFP

therefore must share some of the responsibility for the current concern surrounding outbreaks of the deadly H5N1 strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), but were equally united in their conviction that the war against the disease must be fought above all at the level of poultry.

Over two days, a mix of veterinarians, virologists and conservationists attending an international conference on avian flu and wild birds debated apparently unrelated issues such as migratory bird flyways, poultry farming systems and global trade, and concluded that the answer to the cycle of avian flu outbreaks lies in a combination of all three. They also agreed that it is crucial to know if wild birds can act as permanent reservoirs of HPAI

Delegates to the conference called for greater surveillance of wild birds and their interaction with domesticated poultry, which are currently the bird species most open to fatal infection from avian flu and which, they agreed, should be the focus of control efforts.

In an overview of the evolution of H5N1 avian flu in wild birds, Robert Webster of the Tennessee-based St Jude Children's Research Hospital who has 30 years experience in the field of influenza, told delegates that H5N1 is important to study with regards to wild birds because it is known "to break many rules". Among others, it can be transmitted directly to humans from wild birds, it can be highly lethal in some wild bird species, and it is transmitted to members of the domestic and wild cat families.

While the movement of wild birds is impossible to control, delegates agreed that keeping a watchful eye on their movements and gathering timely and reliable information on avian flu outbreaks could help the international community be better prepared to limit the disease in birds and take steps to prevent its possible onward transmission to humans. They also called for global coordination of the surveillance and research work being carried out by various research institutions and networks worldwide.

Since the current avian flu crisis exploded in late 2003, over 200 million poultry have died of the disease or have had to be culled so far. Slightly more than 200 persons have contracted the disease of whom more than half (127) have died, indicating that the disease does not easily attack humans but that if it does it is very likely to be fatal.

Commenting on the conference, which observers say not only avoided an open rift between animal disease specialists and conservationists but united both in a common stance on the need for concerted research, Joseph Domenech, Chief of FAO's Animal Health Service and Chief Veterinary Officer, and Gideon Bruckner, Head of the Scientific Department of the World Health Organisation (OIE) said their conference had identified the gaps and the need to continue and intensify research, in particular with regards to the species which can be involved (in spreading the avian flu virus) and to establish the possible existence of a permanent reservoir of avian flu viruses..