



POSITIVE CURRENTS

Forgotten Stories and Future Voices
of the Firth of Forth

Positive Currents Blog 1: Avian Flu in the Forth

It seems poignant to be opening our long time planned "Positive Currents" exhibition, which celebrates history and heritage of the Forth and its islands, just as the outbreak of avian flu has been confirmed in Fife, and the extent of its impact continues to unfold. Despite this unfortunate news, we'd like to stress and encourage you to still explore the Forth and its offerings this summer. In this blog post, we take a look at how organisations are responding to the outbreak, and what you can do to help while still making the most of the Forth coast and its islands.

What is avian flu?

Avian flu is a type of influenza that can cause disease in birds and has been present in British bird populations at low levels for years. It is a highly infectious virus, which can spread through the saliva and faeces of birds. More recently, a highly pathogenic strain (High Pathogenicity Avian influenza or HPAI), H5N1, was detected in the UK in October 2021. The country is currently facing the largest and longest outbreak of avian flu seen in decades.

Over the last month, Scottish seabirds such as guillemots, gannets, and gulls have seen an increase in infections, likely due to the summer breeding season bringing large populations back to the islands. Over summer, the Forth islands are famously densely packed with seabirds, and while this offers a fabulous opportunity for birdwatchers, it also increases the risk of infection spreading among the populations.



The Isle of May is a popular destination for its puffin colony among other seabirds.

How are local organisations responding to avian flu?

On the 27th of June, [NatureScot](#) announced the closure of their national nature reserves (NNR), the Isle of May and Noss, to public landings to curb the risk of infection spreading. Landings on Bass Rock and access to other nature reserves have also since been restricted.

While there had been no confirmed cases on the Isle of May when this decision was announced, by reducing access and foot traffic on the islands, this preventative measure will decrease the biosecurity risks to the seabird populations.

Tour providers, such as Anstruther Pleasure Cruises in Anstruther and those operating out of the Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick, have also altered their seagoing experiences to avoid landing on the Forth Islands. The tours around the islands still ensure incredible sightings of seabirds and remind us how important it is to protect these incredible creatures and their habitats.

What can we all do to help?

- Don't pick up or touch injured or dead birds.
- If you see three or more dead waterfowl, report them to the Defra helpline (03459 33 55 77) and inform your local authority to have dead birds removed (Fife Council: 03451 55 00 22).
- Support conservation charities and local tour operators, who are continuing to support and educate about local seabird populations.



Bass Rock is home to up to 150,000 gannets during the summer. © Maggie Sheddan

Positive Currents

The Scottish Fisheries Museum and the Scottish Seabird Centre have joined forces to create an exciting new exhibition celebrating the spectacular natural history and heritage of the Forth estuary, from past, present and future perspectives. From wildlife to industry and landscapes to human relationships, many of these stories continue to be relevant to our present and will influence our future.

Positive Currents: Forgotten Stories and Future Voices of the Firth of Forth is open at the Scottish Fisheries Museum from 1 July – 11 September 2022 and at the Scottish Seabird Centre from 17 September – mid-November.

Events and activities running alongside the exhibition will invite local young people aged 16-24 years to co-create dynamic content, which will feature in the display.

This exhibition is the product of the *Cry of the Forth* project, funded by [National Lottery Heritage Fund](#) and the [Association of Independent Museums](#) (AIM), and is part of [Scotland's Year of Stories 2022](#).

For more information on avian flu, visit the Scottish Seabird Centre website [here](#).