



# Biosecurity?

An example of what NOT to do – biosecurity also extends to protection of clean water and good hygiene in pens to prevent infection between birds.

## With the growing challenges we are all facing, **Dr Mark Elliott BVSc VetMfHom MRCVS MLIHM PCH DSH RSHom**, asks whether our biosecurity standards are really up to scratch?

There have long been moves within gamekeeping to improve standards, and each generation has different challenges to face. Initiatives such as those developed by the BGA are a more recent take on matters and whatever one thinks about becoming a member, its efforts have certainly provided templates worth considering.

We have as individuals a responsibility when placing birds to ensure they are free of disease that might impact other wildlife; a responsibility to ensure our practices do not compromise the birds themselves; and a duty to those funding shooting to ensure they get the best return on their investment. All plain common-sense, but there is no point worrying about disease on your farm or shoot, unless you worry about disease around you as well.

### So what is biosecurity?

The concept of biosecurity is that a set of preventive measures is put in place to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases. Risks of small scale threats are analysed and planned for so that they do not blow up into a significant problem. The programme must be bought into by everyone so that co-operation achieves the plan's objectives, and any failures are interpreted and acted on to prevent recurrence.

Effective biosecurity is regarded as perhaps the most influential factor in the fight to reduce antimicrobial use on farms. Although appropriate veterinary interventions and medication are regarded as a vital component of proactive health control, it is better to avoid spread of endemic disease in the first place.

Fascinatingly, it has been shown in

a number of agricultural sectors that farms where vaccination programmes are practised often use as many – if not more – antibiotics than those that don't routinely vaccinate. This may be due to those who don't vaccinate being more motivated to keep on top of health and therefore operate more stringent disease controls, whereas those vaccinating can develop a sense of complacency.

Within our own industry this complacency may underly the current scenario we are currently experiencing with mycoplasma. The GFA/BVPA/NGO Working Party concluded that elimination of affected birds from the supply chain was the only way forward because vaccination, at best, masked the problem and certainly did not prevent spread. The difficulty with this disease and effecting biosecurity is that it already was the great deceiver – treated →

recovered birds can be carriers – so masking arguably adds to the problem. Tests for (and claims of freedom from) disease cannot be relied upon unless 100% of birds are tested at the right time with a 100% reliable test. Caught up birds might be from a clean shoot, or might have wandered in from the shoot down the road that had an outbreak. Strains vary in severity and species affected, and can probably be carried miles by wild birds anyway, even though they are not themselves made ill by the species strain. I have even heard it reported that flies blown on the wind can carry it five kilometres or more! Red mite infections in rearing sheds can survive from year to year, and these have been shown to carry the disease. Add to that the spread via humans on clothes, dirt and so on from contact and you have a huge dilemma.

**So what can be done?**

To tackle the problem there will have to be a consensus approach across the whole industry to eliminate wherever and whenever possible, accepting that no one person and no one method is perfect, but every effort must be made. I wrote on this, before the working party conclusions with possible solutions and actions to take,

“We should move towards being local businesses for local people in an effort to reduce spread of problems on a wider scale.”

in articles entitled *Mycoplasma: ever more difficult?* (KtB Spring 2017, page 41) and *Panacea or problem?* (KtB Winter 18/19, page 41). But consider some of these scenarios:

- When staff go to help out a neighbour biting or crating – are they clean both going and returning?
  - The guns that visit to shoot – where have they just been?
  - Are their boots cleaned between shoots? If they are then have the footwells in the car been considered? Do you allow them to drive their own vehicles around the shoot or do you use yours?
  - Pickers-up – where and when do they work their dogs? Many will cover a number of shoots in an area.
- These may seem a little over the top, but if we are serious about tackling problems, we must consider all of this. I have a number of times, after seeing a case of rotavirus or mycoplasma, driven two hours home, changed clothes, disinfected the car, and cleaned equipment before setting out to drive two hours back to another client just 10 minutes from the first rather than risk spreading infection. I always consider my rounds and modify them if I have any concerns. I try always to park in an appropriate place, do any *post mortems* in an agreed designated area and leave any disposable protective clothing on site for the site manager to dispose of rather than carrying it around with me.
- The lorry that delivers gas bottles – are the bottles disinfected between collection and delivery at the next client?

Unbeatable versatility for work.



Australia takes a robust approach to its own biosecurity, defining it as “protecting the economy, environment and people’s health from pests and diseases”. Preventing pest and disease incursions is a national priority. We need to think along the lines of industry concerns being a national problem. Why then are birds reared in Sussex released in Scotland, while birds reared in Yorkshire are sent south? All to save a few pence on a poult? It is almost impossible to know what diseases and rearing processes those birds have encountered and may carry, if they even came from the seller in the first place and were not traded. Health Passports are currently being proposed, and these are a great idea in principle but will depend on honesty at all stages, as well as education and understanding of diseases by all. It is important to recognise that some diseases in rearing are not always bad, and may well be a benefit, if they are well treated and birds have fully recovered before being sent out. Large scale movements over long distances without information make it nearly impossible to control disease spread. And apart from that, what about the carbon footprint and climate change?

It’s all been too lax in the UK for too long, but we are not the only ones at fault.

Consider imported diseases such as ash dieback devastating woodlands, larch tree disease is destroying forests in Scotland, African swine fever is making huge jumps in Europe that can only be explained by human activity, and the next global pandemic to remove human pestilence has long been feared to be a flu which with air travel could go global in days. Don’t even get me started on the madness that is the Pets Passport scheme, bringing in diseases that have not previously been in the UK just so dogs can go on holiday!

I hate the word ‘sustainability’ when it comes to considering management of the environment, as without humans the concept of sustainability wouldn’t be required – nature would do a pretty good job. However, I would like to propose that we all move to becoming more local businesses for local people in an effort to reduce spread of problems on a wider scale. We all take a step back and consider how and what we can do to protect “sustainably” not only ourselves, but those outside our perimeter fences. In doing so we will not only be helping ourselves, we may also be helping with the global efforts to prevent climate change as well. ●



Mark Elliott is a specialist gamebird vet within the South Downs Veterinary Consultancy. In his spare time he runs a busy small animal practice treating a high proportion of working dogs. He is also secretary to the NGO Deer Branch committee.

Contact 01243 779111, mark@southdownsvets.co.uk, www.southdownsvets.co.uk.



## RTV-X1110: Highly capable and remarkably versatile

The powerful and economic workhorse that’s ready for virtually any terrain or task

- Incredibly powerful and reliable 24.2 HP Kubota 3-cylinder, liquid-cooled Kubota OHV diesel engine for hill climbing power, low emissions and excellent fuel economy.
- All terrain control with VHT-X 2-range variable hydrostatic transmission plus dynamic engine braking for optimum traction and unrivalled hill control.
- Advanced, adjustable front and rear suspension system, power steering and class leading ground clearance
- Highly versatile - tow up to 590kg or carry 540kg in the hydraulic-lift cargo bed.
- Extremely comfortable with deluxe split-bench seats, digital easy-read instrument panel and ROPs protection as standard
- Heated cab & road legal options also available.

Contact your local dealer or visit our website for more details.  
www.kubota.co.uk T: +44 (0)1844 873190



For Earth, For Life  
Kubota

