

Surveillance for HPAI in Australasian Gannets at Farewell Spit

Northern Gannets (*Morus bassana*) have been severely impacted by high pathogenicity avian influenza HPAI with tens of thousands of birds having died since 2022. Serological investigation detected H5 antibodies in apparently healthy birds, indicating that some birds had recovered from HPAI infection – most of these had black (rather than pale blue) irises. In July 2024 an Australasian Gannet (*Morus serrator*) was photographed off Albany, Western Australia that had dark irises, but there have been no reports of mortality events at any Australasian Gannet colonies in either Australia or New Zealand, and HPAI has not been recorded in any wild birds in either country. This presented something of a conundrum – is HPAI present but undetected or is something other than HPAI responsible for dark eyes?

We are monitoring gannets at the Farewell Spit colony, having recorded several ‘dark-eyed’ birds during the 2024-25 breeding season. With support from the Project Assistance Fund we are catching, swabbing and banding (metal NZNBBS bands and readable engraved laminate plastic bands) birds. So far, no HPAI has been detected from swab samples. A population of marked birds is now available for study which can assist in assessing impacts should an outbreak of HPAI occur in future, as well as facilitating repeat sampling of individual birds to determine whether the virome changes over time.

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‘Dark-eyed’ Australasian Gannet with readable red band, Farewell Spit. Photo: David Melville