# Conflict escalates between Marine and Wildlife Rescue and East Suffolk Council over avian flu swan deaths



The recent discovery of two dead swans near the Commodore Pub in Oulton Broad has sparked a contentious debate between wildlife rescue groups and local authorities, highlighting the increasingly complex challenges posed by the ongoing avian influenza crisis. These swans were found just as other troubling signs, such as erratic behaviour exhibited by living birds in the area, prompted heightened vigilance among local wildlife advocates and pubgoers alike.

Dan Goldsmith, a representative of Marine and Wildlife Rescue, became involved after a patron raised concerns about a swan acting bizarrely near the pub. Although this particular bird was eventually cleared of having bird flu, Goldsmith learned of the dead swans during his visit. Following his findings, testing by the Animal and Plant Health Agency confirmed that these birds had indeed succumbed to the disease. This incident underscored the severity of the avian flu outbreak affecting swans in the region, where a staggering number of bird carcasses—potentially as many as 35—were reported along just a five-mile stretch of river between Horning and Wroxham.

Despite the medical realities surrounding avian influenza, the council's subsequent response to Goldsmith's intervention raised eyebrows. An East Suffolk Council officer allegedly visited the pub and instructed the manager to report any future incidents exclusively to the council and disallowed any involvement from wildlife charities, citing concerns over the management of sick or deceased birds. Goldsmith expressed disbelief at the council’s position, remarking that their approach “defamed” his organisation. He further clarified that under current wildlife guidelines, all birds under suspicion of avian influenza must be euthanised, irrespective of who discovers them.

This situation has led Marine and Wildlife Rescue to suspend their intake of swan-related calls, a decision Goldsmith termed “untenable” in the face of the council’s perceived obstruction. While the council’s informal communication was defended as harmless and undertaken “in good faith,” the tension reflects broader issues involving wildlife management amid an escalating health crisis. The East Suffolk Council issued a statement asserting their adherence to national protocols when it comes to handling cases of avian influenza and noted that they collaborate with organisations such as the RSPCA for advice and assistance.

The gravity of the avian influenza situation in the East of England has prompted a regional declaration of an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone, mandating strict biosecurity measures aimed at safeguarding both domestic and wild bird populations. This directive necessitates housing birds indoors and implementing tight controls over outdoor environments, a step necessitated by the alarming rate of confirmed infections.

As the crisis unfolds, voluntary organisations like Marine and Wildlife Rescue are caught in a challenging position, navigating between compliance with health regulations and maintaining their operational integrity. Goldsmith's assertion that the council culture needs to change—acknowledging the vital contributions of wildlife charities—demands attention from local stakeholders. The controversy surrounding the Oulton Broad incident serves as a case study in the intricate balance of upholding wildlife health while managing human concerns and public health protocols.

This debate not only exemplifies the immediate challenges posed by the avian influenza outbreak but also signifies broader discussions on how local authorities, wildlife charities, and the community can effectively collaborate to safeguard both animal welfare and public health. As the situation develops, ongoing dialogue will be essential to ensure that the collective understanding and management of wildlife health remain a priority in the face of unprecedented challenges.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25170078.marine-wildlife-rescue-row-swans-oulton-broad/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-63250606)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25170078.marine-wildlife-rescue-row-swans-oulton-broad/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/community-and-safety/suffolk-trading-standards/animal-welfare/avian-influenza-bird-flu)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25170078.marine-wildlife-rescue-row-swans-oulton-broad/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/animal-disease-cases-england/bird-flu-regional-avian-influenza-prevention-zone-east-of-england)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.owl-help.org.uk/-avian-flu), [[6]](https://www.countryside-alliance.org/resources/news/defra-mandates-bird-housing-in-eastern-counties)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25170078.marine-wildlife-rescue-row-swans-oulton-broad/?ref=rss), [[7]](https://www.suffolknews.co.uk/bury-st-edmunds/news/bird-flu-prevention-zone-declared-across-great-britain-9279412/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.countryside-alliance.org/resources/news/defra-mandates-bird-housing-in-eastern-counties), [[4]](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/community-and-safety/suffolk-trading-standards/animal-welfare/avian-influenza-bird-flu)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25170078.marine-wildlife-rescue-row-swans-oulton-broad/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-63250606> - This BBC News article reports on the euthanization of swans exhibiting symptoms of avian flu on the Norfolk Broads. Wildlife groups, including the RSPCA and Marine and Wildlife Rescue (MWR), are actively searching waterways to find and euthanize severely ill birds. The outbreak appears to be particularly acute among swans, with some 35 bird carcasses found on a single five-mile stretch of river between Horning and Wroxham. MWR's Dan Goldsmith emphasizes the necessity of euthanizing these birds to prevent the spread of the disease.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/animal-disease-cases-england/bird-flu-regional-avian-influenza-prevention-zone-east-of-england> - This official UK government page details the declaration of an Avian Influenza Prevention Zone (AIPZ) in the East of England, including Suffolk, Norfolk, and parts of Essex. The AIPZ mandates enhanced biosecurity measures for all bird keepers to protect poultry and other captive birds from avian influenza. The page provides information on the declaration schedule, exemptions, and further guidance for bird keepers in the affected regions.
4. <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/community-and-safety/suffolk-trading-standards/animal-welfare/avian-influenza-bird-flu> - Suffolk County Council's page offers comprehensive information on avian influenza (bird flu), including the latest situation in England, biosecurity rules for bird keepers, and details about disease control zones. It explains the requirements for bird keepers, such as housing birds indoors and following specific biosecurity measures, to prevent the spread of avian influenza. The page also outlines the procedures when bird flu is suspected or confirmed, including the establishment of protection and surveillance zones.
5. <https://www.owl-help.org.uk/-avian-flu> - The Suffolk Owl Sanctuary's page addresses the regional outbreak of avian influenza (bird flu) in Norfolk and Suffolk. It outlines the precautions taken to ensure visitor safety, including the use of foot dips at all entrances to disinfect footwear and prevent unwitting transmission of the disease. The sanctuary operates strict cleanliness and bird health vigilance protocols to protect its captive-bred bird collection. The page also provides information on the raptor hospital's operations and the importance of reporting injured birds of prey that may be infected.
6. <https://www.countryside-alliance.org/resources/news/defra-mandates-bird-housing-in-eastern-counties> - This article from the Countryside Alliance reports on the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) mandating bird housing in Suffolk, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, the East Riding of Yorkshire, and the City of Kingston upon Hull. The mandate, effective from noon on 23 December 2024, requires all bird keepers in these areas to house their birds to protect them from highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). The decision was made in response to escalating local risk and confirmed HPAI cases in the mentioned counties.
7. <https://www.suffolknews.co.uk/bury-st-edmunds/news/bird-flu-prevention-zone-declared-across-great-britain-9279412/> - This article from Suffolk News reports on the declaration of an Avian Flu Prevention Zone across Great Britain due to rising bird flu cases. The nationwide prevention zone, effective from 17 October 2022, requires bird keepers to follow strict biosecurity measures, including housing free-range birds within fenced areas and fencing off ponds and watercourses. The article highlights the escalating number of confirmed cases and the government's response to protect poultry and other captive birds from avian influenza.