



African horse sickness area status declarations 2024 John Grewar, Camilla Weyer and Lesley van Helden

This is the third report (the first report from 2022, with further details on the background of the system, is available [here](#)) on the use of African horse sickness (AHS) Area Status Declarations (ASD's) in South Africa to assist in the mitigation of the introduction of AHS virus (AHSV) into the AHS controlled area of South Africa. ASD's are the defined AHS risk level by state veterinarians (SV's) and are used when issuing movement permits when the origin of the movement is in the AHS infected part of South Africa. They fulfill movement requirements by ensuring SV's are involved with movement control and provide a foundational risk evaluation for their respective areas for AHS infection.

The definitions of various AHS risk status for areas are shown below – note that an *unknown* classification occurs where an ASD has not been issued – movements from these areas are considered in the same light as high risk ASD status areas.

2024 area status declarations

Since each ASD issued has a start and end date the status of each of the 126 state vet areas in the country

can be defined daily with a resulting area days at risk (ADAR) for each area.

Figure 1 depicts the ASD status on the 15th of each month during 2024. This is a generalisation of the whole year. A slightly shorter AHS risk season occurred compared to 2022 and 2023 with areas generally affected during the high risk season returning to lower risk in June, July and August. The Western Cape remained generally low risk. For a visualization of the full daily ASD status of the country please visit [here](#).

Acknowledgements

The South African Equine Health and Protocols NPC, under supervision of State Veterinarian Boland, are the authorized permit processing body and as part of this process obtain ASD status information from SV's around the country on behalf of State Veterinary Services in the Western Cape. We are grateful to our state veterinary colleagues across the country for assisting in the controlled movement of equids through the classification of their areas in respect to AHS.

High Risk	Low risk	Partial Risk
This is where the disease factors or recent history of disease precludes direct movement into the AHS controlled area. In this case movements into the controlled area can only take place using mitigated movement protocols like stop-over quarantine or vector protected quarantine at origin.	The risk of AHS is considered low enough to allow direct movements of horses to the AHS controlled zone. Permits are still required for these movements and all standard movement conditions must be met.	This occurs where, due to the season and/or size of SV areas, there are parts of an area that are considered AHS high risk and parts are low risk. Individual movements are evaluated in these cases to determine the proximity to known cases. AHS partial risk status is also allocated to areas by SV's where they would like to be consulted on each movement from their area irrespective of the AHS risk.

Table 1: Duration of classifications of ASD's for 2024 with values since 2022 for comparison

Year	Classified ASD (excludes unknown classifications)			
	Total	High risk area days	Low risk area days	Partial risk area days
2024 (46116 ADAR)	26460 (57%)	17102 (65% of classified days)	8249 (31%)	1109 (4%)
2023 (45990)	26437 (57%)	19241 (73%)	6194 (23%)	1002 (4%)
2022 (45990)	23870 (52%)	11958 (50%)	10073 (42%)	1839 (8%)

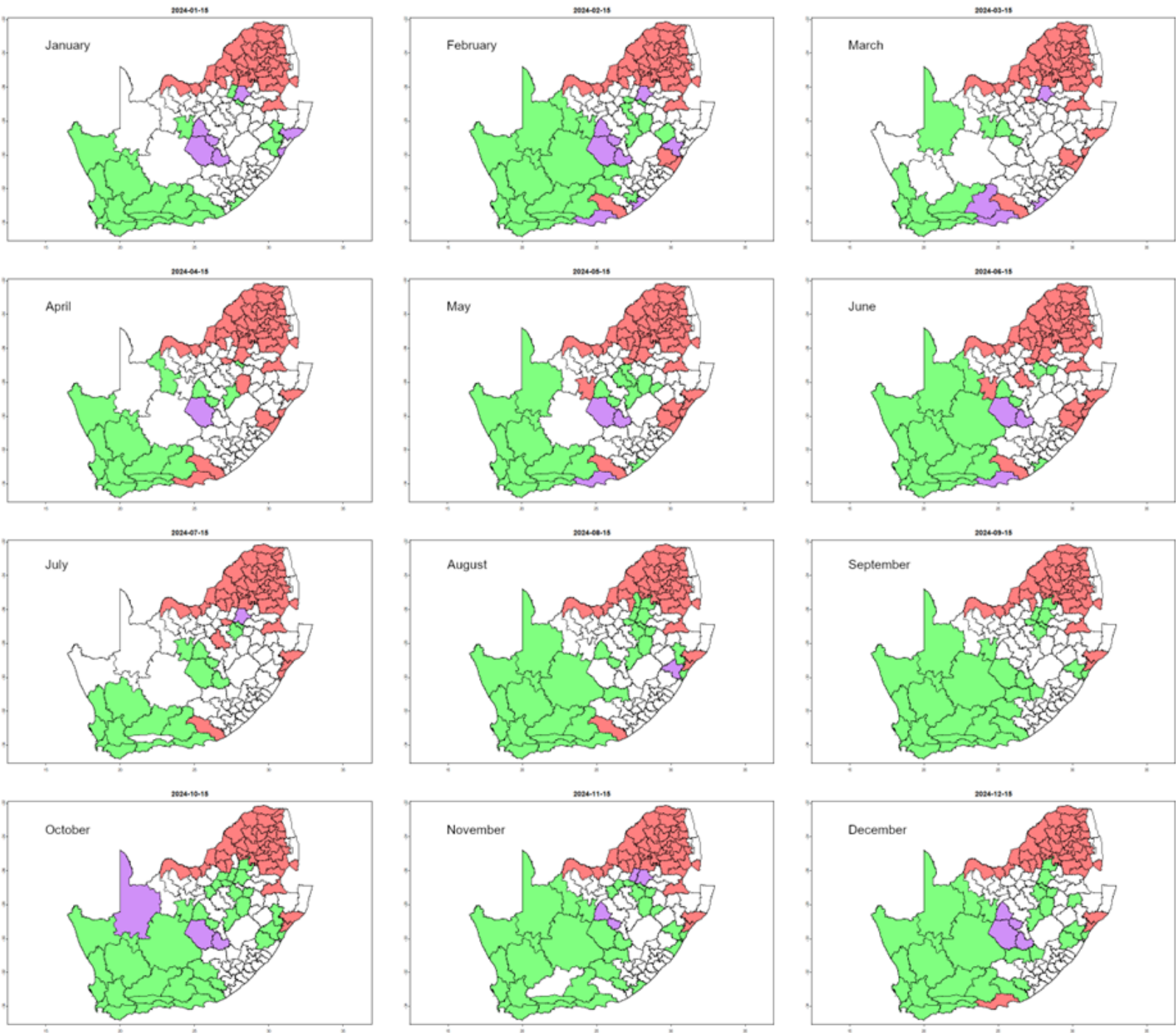


Figure 1: ASD for each SV area on the 15th of each month during 2024. Red indicates high risk, green low risk and purple partial risk. White regions are unknown risk and are effectively high risk for movement purposes when in the AHS infected zone.

Outbreak events

The presence of **high pathogenicity avian influenza H5N1** virus on **Marion Island** was confirmed. Samples collected between September and December 2024 arrived on mainland South Africa in February and PCR testing confirmed infection of six bird species, comprising **Wandering Albatross, King Penguin, Brown Skua, Southern Giant Petrel, Northern Giant Petrel and Sooty Albatross**. Fledgling Wandering Albatrosses have been worst affected so far, with the death of at least 150/1900. The mortality rate overall has decreased since January.

Rabies was confirmed in three **Cape fur seals** in **Cape Town**:

- ⇒ A seal at Three Anchor Bay beach was reported by a member of the public behaving strangely: appearing lethargic and making repetitive movements. It was later seen chasing people and aggressively biting and shaking a shirt. It was captured by the SPCA and died while being transported to their facility.
- ⇒ A seal pup came into Hout Bay harbour amongst many people and dogs. One dog caught the seal in its mouth and swam around in the water. The seal was captured by a local rescue organization and placed in an isolation cage, where it died overnight. The dog is well known in the community and has a full rabies vaccination history. The dog was vaccinated again and the owner warned to keep it out of the harbour.
- ⇒ A seal on Kommetjie beach showed head bobbing and weaving with a gaping mouth. It was aggressive when approached. It was caught by the SPCA and died en route to their facility.

A **bat-eared fox** appeared outside a farm house near **Vanrhynsdorp** and began chasing people and vehicles. The farmer shot the fox and its brain tested positive for **rabies**.

After **pigs** began dying in a communal farming area near Saldanha, **African swine fever** was confirmed to be the cause. There was previously an outbreak of African swine fever in this same area that was resolved in 2022.

A **cow** on a farm near **Swellendam** tested positive for **brucellosis**. The herd has been placed under quarantine and a programme of testing to slaughter out positive animals is underway.

Antibodies to an undefined **low pathogenicity avian influenza** virus were detected on an **ostrich** farm near **Albertinia**.

A **sheep** belonging to a small scale farmer near **Malmesbury** showed clinical signs consistent with **bluetongue**: oedema of the head and lips (Fig. 2), breaking of the wool, coronitis and small ulcers on the gums.

Salmonella Enteritidis was cultured from environmental samples taken on four broiler **chicken** farms in the **Caledon** and **Wellington** areas.

During a routine inspection of a livestock auction near **Gouda**, **lumpy skin disease** lesions were seen on a **cow** (Fig. 3) and **red lice** were observed on **sheep** in one of the pens.



Figure 2: Facial oedema in a sheep with bluetongue (M. Vrey)



Figure 3: Typical subcutaneous lesion of lumpy skin disease in a cow (M. Vrey)

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