

Bird flu pattern puzzles experts

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The way avian flu has spread into Africa and Europe is puzzling scientists who admit they don't fully understand how the virus is being spread.

The scientists thought they had clarified the role of wild birds in spreading the H5N1 virus from Asia, but then the virus moved into other locations following no apparent pattern and underlining how little scientists actually know, The International Herald Tribune reported Wednesday.

That lack of knowledge is preventing scientists from predicting where the virus will next strike.

"We know next to nothing about this virus; we have only anecdotal

information about where it exists and what birds it infects," Vittorio Guberti, head veterinarian at the Italian National Institute for Wildlife, told the IHT.

Scientists do not know which species are the major carriers of H5N1 and, while believing the virus can be carried on trucks, shoes and in fertilizer, they are not sure how important those routes are.

"Think about this," Guberti told the Tribune. This month "2 million ducks from Nigeria, where there is a big problem, will arrive in Italy. And we don't know a thing about them."

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