The 9th International Symposium on Avian Influenza (ISAI) continued the tradition of bringing a great cross section of established and new influenza investigators together to discuss their research. We also were able to partner with the 3rd International Symposium on Neglected Influenza and the OFFLU Technical Meeting to provide an intense week of interaction on influenza in all animal species.

The host country for the Symposium is often challenged by an avian influenza outbreak occurring during the meeting: low pathogenic H7N2 in 2002, highly pathogenic H5N1 in 2006, and pandemic H1N1 in 2009. The United States experienced the largest animal disease outbreak ever in its history with highly pathogenic H5N8 and H5N2 resulting in the death or destruction of almost 50 million birds with the peak period of activity occurring the same month as the Symposium. This clade 2.3.4.4 virus was not restricted to the United States, with outbreaks also reported in Canada, South Korea, Taiwan, and many countries in Europe with wild birds as the probable source of introduction. This wild bird–fueled influenza outbreak in poultry highlights the importance of having the participation of both poultry and wild bird influenza experts at the same meeting. The continued spread of the goose/Guangdong/1996 lineage viruses as well as outbreaks attributed to mutation of low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) into highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in poultry seems to be increasing in regularity. Although avian influenza has always been an important poultry disease in modern times, with the chicken/Scotland/1959 virus as marker, a HPAI virus often emerged and was eradicated within a relatively short amount of time and in a limited geographic region. However, in the last 20 years we are experiencing more HPAI viruses becoming endemic in countries like China, Mexico, Vietnam, Indonesia, Egypt, and Bangladesh. The widespread distribution of H5N1 HPAI virus has resulted in the emergence of reassortant viruses and more opportunities of HPAI infection in wild birds. The importance of the spread of HPAI in wild birds is that it makes tried and true methods of prevention of disease between and within countries much less effective. The speed at which viruses can move between countries, either through legal or illegal trade or through wild birds, can stretch the veterinary resources of any country. We must continue to collaborate and learn from each other’s experiences, and this Symposium remains an important meeting that facilitates that interaction.

For the 9th ISAI, we dedicated the meeting to two pioneers whose careers have greatly contributed to our understanding of avian influenza: Nancy J. Cox for her One Health initiatives in avian influenza and Robert G. Webster for understanding the ecology of avian influenza viruses in wild birds. In addition, we are honored and grateful for the attendance of past dedicatees: Barnard (Barney) Easterday (5th ISAI, Emeritus Dean, University of Wisconsin), Charles W. Beard (5th ISAI, Previous Director of Southeast Poultry Research Laboratory), Richard Slemons (7th ISAI, Emeritus Professor, The Ohio State University), and David Halvorson (7th ISAI, Emeritus Professor, University of Minnesota).