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# Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes



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## Preface

This preface is not part of the Code but is intended to explain its purpose and to indicate the broad considerations upon which it is based. Similarly, the legislation quoted in boxes is not part of the Code but is included to highlight some of the legal requirements. You should be aware that the legislation cited in the Code and in the Annex is correct at the date of issue but may be subject to subsequent change.

The purpose of this Code is to provide practical guidance in relation to Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the Act) affecting birds bred and reared under controlled conditions for the purpose of release for sport shooting, together with birds retained for breeding purposes. Failure to comply with a provision of this Code shall not of itself render you liable to proceedings of any kind, but a failure to follow the Code can be relied on as tending to establish liability for an offence and compliance can tend to negate such liability.

No specific legislation regulates the breeding and rearing of birds for sporting purposes. All gamebird breeders and rearers must comply with the relevant laws relating to their operation. The Annex highlights other relevant legislation in addition to the Act and is not part of the Code.

During the production and rearing process, birds are protected from unnecessary suffering by Section 4 of the Act.

**To cause unnecessary suffering to a protected animal (which includes an animal under the control of man) is an offence under section 4 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.**

Section 9 of the Act requires that the birds' needs are adequately catered for (the duty to promote welfare or the 'duty of care').

**Section 9(1) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 states that:**

**A person commits an offence if he does not take such steps as are reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which he is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.**

**Section 9(2) states that:**

**For the purposes of this Act, an animal's needs shall be taken to include-**

- a. its need for a suitable environment;
- b. its need for a suitable diet;
- c. its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- d. any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and
- e. its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Other laws, including those relating to planning, registration, medicine controls, disposal of animal by-products and animal transport also apply. It is the duty of everyone involved in the production and rearing of birds to be aware of the relevant laws and codes and to abide by them.

This Code applies in relation to Wales. The powers to make and issue this Code are contained in sections 14 and 16 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. These powers are exercisable by the Welsh Ministers by virtue of paragraph 30 of Schedule 11 to the Government of Wales Act 2006.

**THIS WELFARE CODE WAS ISSUED ON 1 JANUARY 2011.**

## **Introduction**

This Code of Practice, which relates to Wales only, refers to all birds bred and reared under controlled conditions for the purpose of release for sport shooting, together with birds retained for breeding purposes. All personnel involved with gamebird management and husbandry are advised to be acquainted with the principles and content of this Code, insofar as they are relevant to their particular tasks and duties.

Whatever the species being produced or reared, or the methods used, the over-riding principle that should guide everyone involved is that all due consideration should be given to the health and welfare of the birds concerned. Those responsible for the birds should, therefore, be knowledgeable and competent in gamebird husbandry and management techniques. In order to achieve this, owners and keepers have a duty to ensure a bird's welfare as detailed in the 'five needs' in Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

Therefore birds must:

1. have an environment appropriate to their species, age and the purpose for which they are being kept, including adequate heating, lighting, shelter, ventilation and resting areas;
2. have ready access to fresh water and an appropriate diet to maintain growth, health and vigour;
3. be provided with appropriate space and facilities to ensure the avoidance of stress and to allow the exhibition of normal behavior patterns;
4. be provided with company of their own kind as appropriate for the species concerned; and
5. be adequately protected from pain, suffering, injury, or disease. Should any of these occur a rapid response is required, including diagnosis, remedial action and, where applicable, the correct use of medication.

The contents of this Code apply to birds up to and including the period when they are confined to the release pens. Once the birds are able to leave and re-enter the pens voluntarily they fall outside the scope of this Code. It is recognised, however, that as keepers will retain some responsibility for the welfare of the birds immediately post release and until they have adjusted to a free-living existence, the suitability of the release environment to meet the needs of birds must be considered.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Origin of stock**

1.1 Records should be maintained of the source of all hatching eggs and birds, in order to trace their origins should this prove necessary.

1.2 In order to minimise the risk of disease transmission and promote welfare, laying stock should, wherever possible, be maintained as a closed breeding flock. Where adult laying birds have to be brought in, particularly from the wild, all possible action should be taken to check the provenance and health of the birds for example by mixing with some sentinel birds, separate from the existing flock, well in advance of joining the flock. If healthy, these brought in birds may then be added to the flock before the start of the breeding season.

## **2. Incubation and hatching**

2.1 To reduce disease transmission the hatchery building should be physically and operationally separate from any rearing facilities. The layout should allow for the following operations to be kept separate:

- a. egg storage;
- b. incubation;
- c. hatching;
- d. preparation and loading of chicks or young birds for dispatch.

2.2 Buildings should be protected against entry of wild birds, rodents and insects, all of which may be vectors of disease.

2.3 Walls and floors should be of hardwearing, impervious and washable materials in accordance with good biosecurity practice. Floors should be well drained.

2.4 Any natural or artificial lighting, air-flow and temperature should be appropriate to the operations being carried out.

2.5 Eggs should be collected at least once a day and should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible.

2.6 A continuing hygiene programme should be agreed for the hatchery and all personnel and visitors should wear appropriate protective clothing.

2.7 Buildings and all equipment should be kept in good repair.

2.8 The following should be disinfected or fumigated:

- a. eggs between collection and incubation;
- b. incubators regularly;
- c. catchers and equipment after each hatch.

2.9 In order to minimise the risk of disease transmission, custom hatching (hatching eggs from external flocks), should be avoided wherever possible.

### **3. Inspection and husbandry**

3.1 Gamebirds should not be handled more than is strictly necessary; they are non-domesticated species and therefore may be more prone to stress than domesticated farmed poultry. Where handling proves necessary this should be done in an appropriate manner.

3.2 The breeding, rearing house or pen system should be designed and managed in such a way as to minimise aggressive behavior within the flock. This may be achieved by providing physical and sight barriers, scratching areas, perches and hiding places within the pens, together with other forms of environmental enrichment.

3.3 All gamebird breeders and rearers should register with a veterinary practice in order to deal with any incidences of poor welfare, disease problems or injuries that require attention. Expert advice should be sought from veterinary surgeons and other suitably qualified advisers whenever necessary, for example when the cause of a problem is not clear or when the treatment applied has failed to resolve the problem. Staff should be sufficiently knowledgeable to recognise normal behavior and the early signs of abnormal behavior associated with injury and disease.

3.4 It is good practice to devise and review annually a flock health and welfare plan in conjunction with your veterinary surgeon.

3.5 Good biosecurity is essential to prevent disease with appropriate disinfectants used at the correct dilution rates. Regularly changed disinfectant footbaths should be in use at all main entrances to the unit to improve biosecurity. Disinfectants should be used with regard to the safety of the birds. Staff and visitors should be aware of the need for suitable footwear and other protective clothing, and should use the footbaths. Keepers should keep a record of all visitors to the site.

3.6 All birds should be inspected for signs of abnormal behavior associated with injury and disease on arrival. Eggs should be checked, cleaned, washed and fumigated as necessary. Where problems are identified appropriate remedial action should be taken.

3.7 Birds should be checked at least twice daily during the breeding and rearing period for signs of disease or injury and to ensure that their welfare needs are being met and at least once daily at other times. This inspection should be carried out by knowledgeable staff. All birds suffering ill health, injury or subject to equipment failure must receive immediate and appropriate attention, including the involvement of a veterinary surgeon where necessary. In cases where euthanasia proves essential, this must be carried out humanely and should be performed by trained members of staff.

3.8 All birds should be adequately protected from predators. Any methods used must conform to legal requirements. Pest control procedures should be operated to ensure the health and welfare of the birds.

3.9 There should be a contingency plan to prevent or deal with emergencies such as fire, flood, storm damage, interruption of supplies or notifiable disease. A

prominently positioned Emergency Action Board should provide details of emergency procedures and also phone numbers of the emergency services, location of the unit and of local water sources.

#### **4. Food and water**

4.1 All gamebirds must have access to adequate supplies of clean, fresh drinking water at all times, unless advised otherwise by a veterinary surgeon. Provision of drinkers should be sufficient to allow the birds adequate space to obtain water with minimum disturbance and competition from other birds. Provision must be made for supplying drinking water in freezing conditions or in other circumstances where supply is limited.

4.2 Where a natural source is not available, insoluble grit should be provided in adequate quantities and of the correct size and type to help birds' digestion.

4.3 All captive birds must be provided with a nutritionally balanced diet. Feed should always be of the correct particle size and type appropriate to the age and species, to maintain them in good health and to satisfy their nutritional and foraging needs.

4.4 Any change in diet should be made gradually, and for a period of time some blending of the two rations represents good practice.

4.5 Provision of feeders should be sufficient to allow the birds to obtain adequate feed with a minimum of competition from other birds.

4.6 All grains provided should be of good quality and free from obvious animal, chemical and microbiological contamination, such as mould.

4.7 All feed should be stored in accordance with good practice and used in a timely manner to ensure that it does not deteriorate. All receptacles, bins and vehicles should be regularly cleaned.

#### **5. Management devices**

5.1 The use of management devices or practices that do not allow birds to fully express their range of normal behaviors should not be considered as routine and keepers should work towards the ideal of management systems that do not require these devices. Such devices and practices include mutilations such as beak trimming, procedures to prevent or limit flight such as brailling (placing a band on a wing to prevent extension of the wing), trimming of non-sensitive flight feathers and the use of bits, spectacles and hoods to prevent feather pecking, egg eating or aggression. Their use should be justified on a flock by flock basis and regularly reviewed in the flock health and welfare plan. Any device that is designed to pierce the nasal septum is illegal.

5.2 Bird breeders and rearers and those employed by them should be sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to demonstrate competent levels of management in

respect of bird husbandry. Bird welfare should not be compromised by the speed of operation in applying a management device.

5.3 The use of bits in young pheasants for short periods (3 to 7 weeks) to prevent injurious behavior should be justified and closely monitored on each premise. Bits should be made of suitable material appropriate to the size and age of bird and fitted and removed only by trained and experienced stockmen.

5.4 ‘Bumpa’ bits should not be used except in response to a specific need in consultation with a veterinary surgeon and only with particular care.

5.5 Beak trimming should not be practised in gamebirds except in circumstances where there is an overwhelming need to protect the welfare of the birds.

5.6 Plastic spectacles fitted to the beak to prevent feather pecking or egg eating may cause significant damage to the nasal septum and should not be used except in response to a specific need in consultation with a veterinary surgeon. Any type designed to pierce the nasal septum is illegal in birds.

5.7 Anti-aggression masks or shrouds should not generally be used as a form of bird management.

5.8 Outer primary feathers may be clipped to restrict flight but trimming growing feathers ('blood quills') must be avoided if it constitutes interference with a sensitive tissue and would, therefore, be a mutilation.

5.9 Brailing one wing to restrict flight should only be done with extreme care by a skilled operator or under his supervision and brails should be of the correct size for the birds concerned. Brails are usually only necessary in open pens. Their use in covered pens needs to be closely monitored and justified on a case by case basis. Any brail must be removed before release.

## **6. Housing and penning**

6.1 When birds are housed or penned, the accommodation should be well constructed and managed and of sufficient size to ensure good health and welfare. This is best achieved by:

- i. good design, including adequate facilities for the inspection of the birds, and their removal where necessary;
- ii. protection from adverse weather conditions, extremes of temperature and predators;
- iii. appropriate size, stocking densities and facilities, including appropriate environmental enrichment, to ensure good health and welfare;
- iv. flooring appropriate to the species kept, designed to avoid foot injury and managed to prevent the ground becoming too soiled; and

v. adequate lighting, heating and ventilation. Lighting should enable the birds to be inspected without difficulty, and should be available at all times to allow for inspection of the birds should this prove necessary. Fixed artificial lighting should have a dimming facility to allow birds to prepare for darkness and there should be a minimum continuous night-time dark period of 6 hours in every 24 hours.

6.2 Housing should be capable of being maintained in a clean and hygienic condition to avoid the risk of disease transfer. For temporary housing, clean ground and a location away from poultry or livestock should be selected and both housing and equipment used should be kept in good repair to avoid injury, escape and predation.

6.3 All housing and penning should be located so as to minimise disturbance to the birds and should be equipped with an inside and outside run (where appropriate) of sufficient size to allow them to exhibit normal behavior patterns. Consideration should be given to incorporating handling facilities when constructing pens.

6.4 All housing and penning for laying birds should have sufficient shelter to provide protection for all birds during periods of adverse weather.

6.5 Where a dry litter material is not available naturally, a non-toxic, non-irritant material should be provided and maintained in a clean and tangle-free form to allow for dustbathing and the dilution of droppings.

6.6 Sufficient perching should be provided for the birds, as appropriate to age and species.

6.7 All housing should be cleaned and disinfected between different batches of birds.

6.8 Gamebird breeders or rearers installing new systems and equipment should assess whether they can be managed in ways that meet the full requirements of this Code. If they, or existing systems, cannot, they should not be used.

6.9 Where gas heating is used it is important to ensure that the equipment is regularly serviced and is functioning correctly to avoid the risk of fire, build up of toxic gases and to ensure that the correct temperature is maintained in brooder houses.

6.10 All automatic systems should be regularly checked to ensure that they are working and a back-up system should be available in case of system failure.

6.11 Barren raised cages for breeding pheasants and small barren cages for breeding partridges should not be used. All laying systems used for the housing of birds should be designed and managed to ensure the welfare of the birds. Any system should be appropriately enriched.

6.12 Gamebird keepers should explore possible methods of enrichment with their veterinary surgeon or other suitable adviser. Laying birds should be provided with nest areas sufficient for the number of birds housed.

## **7. Disease treatment and record keeping**

7.1 Any bird suffering ill health or injury must receive immediate attention, including, where appropriate, the attendance of a veterinary surgeon.

7.2 Medicines for treatment should only be used when necessary or when prescribed by a veterinary surgeon. Preventative use of medicines should only be carried out where appropriate and in conjunction with good husbandry practices or when the birds are under the care of a veterinary surgeon who recommends a prescribed medicinal product.

7.3 Records should be kept for each flock and retained for three years to show:

- a. origin of eggs, chicks, breeding stock and date of arrival;
- b. egg numbers;
- c. hatchability;
- d. destination of day old chicks, eggs and young birds;
- e. any laboratory tests, results and post mortem examinations; and
- f. mortality.

Such records help to identify management and husbandry problems and their causes, and assist in improving the overall health and welfare of the flock. They also provide traceability in cases of disease outbreak.

## **8. Catching and transportation**

8.1 All consignments from the unit, transported for the purpose of an economic activity, must comply with the requirements of The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Wales) Order 2007. Game farmers should familiarise themselves with this legislation.

8.2 Birds must be moved only in containers appropriate for the size and number of birds that: do not cause injury: are secure: clean: well ventilated: and offer protection from the weather. Transportation in sacks is not permitted.

8.3 All personnel involved with the catching and transportation of gamebirds should be competent in catching and handling techniques to minimise stress. Catching and carrying too many birds at one time constitutes poor welfare practice.

8.4 The time in transit should be kept to a minimum while complying with all the relevant legislation. The maximum journey time for day old chicks is 24 hours provided they are not more than 72 hours old at the journey's end. The maximum journey time for all other birds is 12 hours.

8.5 To prevent disease spread and to aid good biosecurity all boxes, crates and vehicles should, where appropriate, be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected by appropriate methods between loads.

8.6 Birds that are unfit at the time of loading must not be transported.

## **9. Preparation for release**

9.1 At the time of sale for release purposes, all gamebirds should be in a healthy condition and must be fit for transport, well adapted and appropriately hardened off in respect of feather development, weather tolerance, diet and method of feeding. All birds ready for transport to release pens should have a final inspection to ensure that they are fit for release before being moved.

9.2 Release pens should be well prepared prior to the arrival of the birds, by ensuring they are of sufficient size, provide shelter and have adequate feeders and drinkers of a type familiar to the birds available on site. The siting of release pens should take into consideration the need to minimise the risk of subsequent harm or injury, for example by predators or vehicles.

## **Annex 1**

**Other legislation affecting gamebirds.**  
**This does not represent an exhaustive list.**  
**The legislation can be accessed at [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts)**

**Avian Influenza (Preventive Measures) (Wales) Regulations 2006** – those keeping 50 birds or more must provide details of species of bird, husbandry system in which they are kept, the number of species usually kept, number with access to open air, details on seasonal stocking variations and nearby open water. Any changes in stocking rate by an increase or decrease of 20% or more requires notification.

**Animal By-Products (Wales) Regulations 2006** – require various records to be kept on the disposal of animal by-products such as fallen stock and hatchery waste. In addition game and hatchery waste in the form of surplus chicks, live unhatched chicks or embryos must be disposed of in accordance with the **Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995** and the **Animal By-Products (Wales) Regulations 2006**. The Code of Practice issued by the Humane Slaughter Association also provides helpful guidance.

**Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2008** – By virtue of these regulations, as amended, pulling flight feathers from wings to restrict flight, together with wing tagging, was exempted from the general prohibition against mutilations contained in Section 5 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

**Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Wales) Order 2007 - This order implements Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005** (the protection of animals during transport and related operations). Please refer to this legislation and associated guidance for information on transport.

**The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2009** – require records to be kept on medicine usage, administration and disposal of unused medicines. Records must be kept for at least 5 years. Medicines and veterinary treatments must be stored and used in accordance with current legislation and codes of practice, and manufacturers' instructions should be followed. Records of all medicinal products must be maintained, and all withdrawal periods must be strictly adhered to so that any residues are eliminated.