PROPOSED WELFARE GUIDELINES FOR FREE-RANGE AND SMALL SCALE
POULTRY KEEPERS, EXHIBITION AND SALE POULTRY

THE POULTRY CLUB OF GREAT BRITAIN (PCGB)

Poultry includes large fowl, bantams, domestic ducks, geese and turkeys

1. Responsibility for welfare
Responsibility for the welfare of poultry lies primarily with their owner or the owner’s agent to whom the birds have been entrusted

2. Husbandry

Housing
a) The poultry house must be well ventilated, ventilation is best sited near the apex to avoid draughts
b) Site the house with its back to the prevailing wind
c) Provide shelter from the wind and weather on exposed sites, including for waterfowl
d) Secure from vermin, predators (e.g. mice, rats, foxes, magpies) and thieves
e) Floor space of at least 12”(30cm) square per large fowl, 8”(20cm) square for bantams, depending on breed
f) Cockerels are not needed for egg production
g) Have only one male per breeding pen to avoid damage to the females
h) Perches can be provided for chickens over the age of 8 weeks old in order to keep them clean and free of damp conditions. All perches should be a minimum of 2”(4cm) wide, not round, to avoid twisted keels/breast bones. Length of perches should allow at least 8”(20cm) per large fowl and no more than 24”(60cm) high for heavy breeds and turkeys
i) Solid floor for waterfowl
j) Dry litter (shavings or straw) provided on the floor
k) Nestboxes: site in darkest area, allow one per three large fowl (12”(30cm) square individual box), either partitioned or communal, with litter (shavings, straw or shredded paper, not hay due to mould)
l) Use a safe and DEFRA approved disinfectant such as Virkon

Feeding
a) Keep feeders and drinkers clean, all protected from wild birds
b) Use commercial feed suitable for the species and age of the birds plus a little whole wheat
c) Provide mixed grit
d) If not completely free-range, maintain vegetation in the run area, or provide dry deep litter and hang up vegetables or nettles
e) It is illegal to feed household scraps to domestic poultry

Beak, claws and spurs
a) Keep these the correct shape by filing or trimming carefully.

3. Health

Positive signs of health
a) dry nostrils
b) a red comb (some breeds have naturally dark ones)
c) bright eyes (colour varies with breed), equal sized pupils
d) shiny feathers (all present, except for Naked Necks and some HF breeds)
e) good weight and musculature for age
f) clean vent feathers with no smell

g) smooth shanks unless they should be feathered according to breed

h) straight toes

i) the bird alert and active

j) no skeletal deformities

**Parasites**

a) Control external parasites (e.g. red mite, northern fowl mite, lice, scaly leg mite) with licensed products

b) Control internal parasites by regular worming with Flubenvet (the only licensed wormer as of 2009)

**Vaccination**

a) Use the appropriate vaccine if there is a virus problem in your area

b) Contact your vet for information

4. **Buying in new stock**

a) Check vaccination status

b) Preferably see the parent stock

c) Check the positive signs of health (see above)

d) Isolate for 2-3 weeks

e) Check previous worming programme

f) Give a vitamin supplement in the water for a few days to counteract stress

g) If adding to an existing flock, either introduce at night or add new stock slowly by having a wire partition for a few days so they can be seen but not attacked. Try and make sure that additions are at least 18 weeks old or at least the same size as birds in the existing flock

5. **Breeding**

a) If using a broody, check her for external parasites, move her in the dark to new quarters with some pot eggs to a deep bed of straw or shavings, separate from all the other birds, and protected from predators. Wait until she has settled in for a day or so, then set eggs (chicken or waterfowl as long as the incubation period is the same) under her. Let her out once a day to defecate and provide water and wheat in her coop then provide chick crumbs for the newly hatched chicks. If rearing artificially, provide day-olds with chick crumbs, water and heat for about 5 weeks, depending on outside temperature. Rear waterfowl and chickens separately

b) Waterfowl need lower protein feed from 4 weeks to avoid joint problems

c) Rear males and females separately as soon as they can be distinguished

d) Rear only similar sized birds together

e) It is recommended that breeding male birds kept in adjacent pens have solid divisions to prevent injury from wire netting when they are disputing territory with the next cockerel

6. **Sexing and Identification**

a) Feathers in 10-12 week old cockerels come through pointed and shiny, female feathers remain rounded, except Silkie when waiting for comb development around 14-15 weeks will determine the sex

b) Drakes sound harsh, ducks quack. Ducklings and goslings up to 4 weeks old and after 6 months old can be vent sexed by an experienced person

c) The PCGB has a Ringing Scheme which is invaluable for record-keeping and proving parentage. This is permanent identification. These are closed rings and must be applied at the correct age so they do not fall off (may be 4-8 weeks of age depending on breed). Ringing may be helpful in identifying pure breed flocks in the event of national disease
A tattoo matching the ring number may be applied under the wing (white paste is available for dark skinned birds) for extra security.
d) It is important to check that rings are moving freely and to keep them above the spur in males.

7. Selling stock
a) Ensure stock is as unrelated as possible
b) Ensure stock is healthy and correctly marked for the breed
c) Inform the buyer if birds have been vaccinated

8. Transport
a) Cardboard boxes: ideally one for each bird and sufficiently large for the bird to stand up and turn round: put newspaper then a layer of shavings in the base: use stout ones, make ventilation holes by making two parallel cuts about 1” (2.5cm) apart across at least two corners and push the centre section inwards. “Weave” the top so that it is secure and then tie with string like a parcel. Ideally use only once and do not lend
b) Make ventilated wooden boxes or poultry baskets to suit size of bird but varnish them so they can be disinfected. Litter and size as (a) and do not share
c) Boxes should be placed on the back seat of a saloon car and not in the boot unless the back seat is folded down. Estate cars, hatchbacks, saloons and vans should have sufficient ventilation by opening windows or the use of air conditioning
d) A plastic poultry crate can be used of the appropriate size (e.g. taller for turkeys) for transporting birds in numbers as it is easy to clean and disinfect. It is also airy and food and water containers can be easily attached. If a trailer is used for transport, make sure there is adequate ventilation for the birds both when travelling and when static
e) Food and water must be provided for journeys over 8 hours. Therefore always carry poultry food and water in case of breakdown or delay
f) Fill in and carry with you a transport declaration certificate form (available from PCGB) for journeys outside your local authority area

9. Handling
a) Preferably get your chickens used to being handled by handling them at night when they are perched and sleepy, but don’t startle them with a bright torch
b) Put both hands around the wings and thighs with the bird facing you, lift the bird towards you, slide your left hand (if right handed) under the bird, palm up, clamp your fingers with the legs between them, one or two fingers between the legs and take the weight of the bird on your forearm – your right hand is then free to examine the bird. Never carry a bird by the legs or by one wing. Small waterfowl can be carried for a short distance by the base of both wings, one-handed
c) In a free-range area, use a fishing landing net (minimum 24”(60cm) in diameter) to catch the bird (bigger nets for turkeys and geese), pick up the bird with both hands around the wings and thighs as in previous point
d) Ducks: catch with net then transfer to left hand as above, holding the legs firmly as they wriggle more than chickens
e) Geese: catch with net, put arm around body with its head behind you, hold legs taking the weight on forearm
f) Turkeys: catch with large and strong net: pick up with arm around body to control wings, head behind you, hold legs firmly as these are very strong
g) When judging soft feather section birds put your hand on the back of the bird to guide its head towards the front of the pen, then put both hands around the wings and thighs as above. Turn the bird on its side to prevent damage to wings and avoid feet getting
caught on the front of the pen. The bird should be transferred to the other hand for judging wings
h) Judging HF: as (g) except for Oxfords and certain Asian HF which should be facing away from the judge
i) Judging waterfowl: as g), but runners and heavy ducks need extra care, Muscovies have sharp claws, geese are not always all handled
j) Judging turkeys: beware strong legs and wings, take care when lifting mature stags out of top opening pens

10. Restriction of flight
a) Light breed chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys may if necessary have their outer flight feathers (primaries) painlessly cut on one wing using the covert feathers as a guide, once the feathers are fully grown. This is to allow lower fencing between breeds and avoid undesirable mixing of breeds. These feathers will re-grow to normal length at the next moult. Exhibition chickens with clipped wings are downgraded by judges
b) Call and bantam ducks fly well and are permitted (Animal Welfare Act 2007) to be pinioned by their experienced keeper at 1-7 days old by removing the metacarpus on one wing with a precision implement. There is little blood and the ducklings do not seem to be set back by the procedure, showing normal behaviour immediately. Or the flight feathers can be cut as above but leaving two primary feathers untouched so they look unclipped at rest, or the pens netted over so that any form of pinioning is not needed. Pinioned exhibition Call and bantam ducks are not usually downgraded by judges but are not eligible for higher awards.

11. Dubbing and de-beaking
a) Dubbing is the removal in chickens of the upper part of the comb plus wattles and originated in the days of cockfighting, continuing where cockerels were kept together in order to prevent injury. The new Animal Welfare Act (2007) permits Old English Game and Modern Game birds to be dubbed if done before 72 hours old or by a veterinary surgeon at a later age for medical reasons
b) The beak of chickens and turkeys grows continuously. If the beak does not meet exactly it may need occasional shaping. On the other hand, de-beaking (the top beak is cut back to the sensitive quick) is a commercial procedure to reduce cannibalism. This is not recommended for chickens as it is painful and sets the birds back. If feather pecking is a problem, reduce the number of birds in a pen, ensure a lower environmental temperature and provide fresh vegetables or nettles hung off the floor
c) DEFRA welfare guidelines to be followed whenever these are updated

12. Shows
a) The latest biosecurity and licence guidelines from DEFRA must be followed and a show licence applied for in good time
b) Pens must be clean and have been disinfected using wherever possible a DEFRA approved disinfectant (as stated in http://disinfectants.defra.gov.uk and used at General Orders dilution rates). Be in good condition and be of appropriate size for the breed with solid divisions between adjacent pens. Ideal sizes are: game bantams (OEG) and some small true bantams in 15” (38cm) pens: larger true bantams, modern game and small SF bantam breeds in 18” (45cm) pens: larger SF bantam breeds in 24” (60cm) pens: large HF in 24” (60cm) pens and some in 27” (69cm) pens. Large SF breeds should be in 27” (69cm) pens. Call or bantam ducks in 18” (45cm) pens, medium/light ducks in 24” (60cm) pens, large heavy ducks and runner ducks in 27” (69cm) pens, geese and turkeys in 36” (91cm) pens preferably front opening for turkeys.
c) Large male longtails should have double 24” (60cm) pens, large females single 24” (60cm), bantam males single 24” (60cm) or double 18”(45cm), bantam females single 18” (45cm) pens.
d) Pens should be steam cleaned and disinfected after use and stored in vermin-proof areas.

e) Divisions of corrugated cardboard should be placed between rows of pens which are back-to-back which is then disposed of at the end of the show. The design of penning layout should give protection and privacy and have no sharp protrusions or gaps likely to trap or injure birds.

f) Pen doors to be of sufficient size to avoid damaging the bird on entry or exit. Latches/locks shall prevent birds escaping.

g) Shavings should be provided in each pen to a suitable depth that will last the duration of the bird’s stay in that pen and keep the bird clean and dry at all times. Replenishment may be necessary after day one of a two day show.

h) Birds must be fed regularly and fresh, clean water should be available at all times whatever the length of the show, normally after judging. If drinkers are not provided by the Show (this must be stated in the Schedule), exhibitors (that is owners or exhibitors taking another person’s birds to a show) must provide their own. Take a small container for each pen and a bottle of water.

i) Drinker cups must be properly secured to the pen to avoid spillage and consequently wetting the shavings or the birds.

j) All shows under PCGB rules must appoint a PCGB Representative who is independent from the show committee. The show committee should also appoint a Welfare Officer who may serve on that committee, who should have a copy of the welfare at shows guidelines to hand. The Welfare Officer should wear a badge and be named in the Schedule. Exhibitors are responsible for seeing that all birds in their care are fed, watered and in clean shavings throughout the duration of the show and the Welfare Officer has authority to ensure this is carried out. It is suggested that breeds should be labelled where possible in order to educate the public.

k) The Welfare Officer should make sure that any birds showing signs of being unwell, appearing overly distressed or having lice, mite or scaly leg mite are removed from the show pens and the exhibitor and attending veterinary surgeon informed. Secluded, sheltered isolation pens/cages should be available at all shows. Judges must ensure that birds with external parasites are boxed, removed from the show hall and the birds then cared for appropriately.

l) Where the ambient temperature and/or humidity increases the Welfare Officer should monitor all birds for signs of distress (eg. excessive panting or prostration) and these should be treated or removed to a better ventilated area. At summer shows or events, appropriate measures should be taken to ventilate tents, marquees or buildings. Birds should be sheltered from the weather (eg. wind and rain) and should not be exposed to prolonged draughts or excessive noise. At winter shows very low temperatures should be monitored by the welfare officer. When necessary appropriate action be taken in consultation with the owner.

m) At shows, birds are only to be removed from pens or handled by the exhibitor of the bird, judges, stewards, the Welfare Officer or the veterinary surgeon.

n) Judges should be encouraged to use disinfectant or antibacterial hand wash between exhibits where it is provided.

o) All birds travelling to a show should be in a suitably strong box, basket or cage appropriate to their size and nature. See Section 8 for the transportation of poultry.

p) Birds in boxes should not be transported into shows on two wheel carts or sack barrows that excessively tilt the boxes on their sides making it hard for the birds to stand up or tip them on their sides. Three or four wheeled carts or trolleys are preferable.

q) At any time before, during or after a show or sale, exhibitors should not carry birds only by their legs to or from their transport or boxes.

r) Show Secretaries must take all steps possible to maintain security for the birds. Exhibitors may provide tamper-proof cage closures (e.g. cable ties or padlocks) to be fitted only after judging.

s) Dogs should not be allowed in the immediate vicinity and notices posted to this effect, especially at summer agricultural shows.
t) Clothes and vehicles to be disinfected before and after attending a show.

13. Sales
a) Pens must be disinfected between different occupants.
b) Unhealthy birds should not be entered/accepted.
c) Birds should be restricted in numbers to each pen according to the breed and the size of the pen. Number of birds per pen should be clearly stated on the Sale Schedule.
d) All sale birds should be clean and their legs and feet should be washed before coming to the sale. They should also be free from all external parasites, i.e. lice, mites and scaly leg mite.
e) All birds sold should be provided with appropriate sized boxes for the number of birds and clearly marked with breed, number of birds and the name of the owner.
f) Clothes and vehicles to be disinfected before and after attending a sale.
g) Isolate bought stock for 2-3 weeks.

14. Culling
a) Small numbers of birds on home premises: neck dislocation without prior stunning must induce immediate unconsciousness without causing pain or suffering.
b) It is the responsibility of the keeper to ensure that poultry are killed humanely.
c) If not killed for home consumption, carcases must be disposed of legally.

Biosecurity for all free-range poultry
- Keep feed under cover to minimise wild bird attraction.
- Keep water fresh and free of droppings.
- Keep waterfowl and chickens separate.
- Control vermin.
- Isolate new stock for 2-3 weeks.
- Isolate birds after taking to an exhibition for 7 days.
- Change clothes and wash boots before and after visiting other breeders.
- Change clothes and wash boots before and after attending a sale.
- Keep fresh disinfectant at the entrance to poultry areas for dipping footwear.
- Disinfect crates before and after use, especially if lent to others. However, it is preferable not to be sharing equipment.
- Disinfect vehicles which have been on poultry premises but avoid taking vehicles onto other premises.
- Wash hands before and after handling poultry.
- Comply with any import/export regulations/guidelines.

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