

Reports and Comments

Updated Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens in England

Following a period of consultation in 2017, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has recently published an updated Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens in England. The Code came into force in March 2018.

Much of the content in the 2018 Code is similar to that found in previous guidance documents: the 2002 Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens, and the 2011 Interim Guidance for Keepers of Conventionally Reared Meat Chickens in Relation to the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations, as amended by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (amendment) Regulations 2010. The 2018 Code combines information from both of these documents and is more user-friendly in style. It has also been updated where necessary, taking into account new legislation and advances in scientific and veterinary knowledge.

The Code covers all husbandry systems across all sectors of the meat chicken production industry (including parent and grandparent breeding birds) and it is intended that the Code “help all those who care for meat chickens and meat breeding chickens to practise good standards of stockmanship to safeguard chicken welfare”. Both the Five Freedoms and the Three Essentials of Stockmanship are provided at the beginning of the document and it is suggested that they “form the guiding principles for the assessment of welfare within any system”.

The main body of the document is divided into three sections:

- 1) Recommendations applying to all husbandry systems;
- 2) Additional recommendations for free-range systems; and
- 3) Additional recommendations for meat breeding and grandparent chickens.

Throughout the document, relevant legislation (such as paragraphs from the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Welfare of Farmed Animals [England] Regulations 2007, and the Mutilations [Permitted Procedures] [England] Regulations 2007) are provided alongside the related section.

Compared to the previous guidance, some sections have been extended, eg the section on leg health discusses bird health and welfare more extensively and also includes a paragraph requiring that particular attention is given to lame birds when assessing birds before transportation: “Prior to crating and loading, an assessment of birds’ fitness to travel must be undertaken. Careful consideration should be given by the keeper as to whether any lame birds are legally fit to travel for the proposed journey. If they are not, they should be humanely killed on farm”.

There are some new sections, including one on environmental enrichment, which states that: “Environmental enrichment can improve bird health and welfare by reducing disturbances, aggression, injurious pecking, fear responses and stress and improving leg health by increasing the level of physical activity”.

A number of Annexes provide further, useful information (eg applicable legislation) and worked examples (eg cumulative daily mortality rate).

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Meat Chickens and Meat Breeding Chickens (2018). A4, 47 pages. Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs. Further information is available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-recommendations-for-the-welfare-of-livestock-meat-chickens-and-breeding-chickens>.

*E Carter,
UFAW*

Updated Codes of Welfare published for dogs, cats and equids in England

There are approximately 8.5 million dogs, 8 million cats and 1 million horses in the United Kingdom. According to the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (Section 9), any person responsible for an animal is required to take all reasonable steps to meet the needs of that animal. Under the Act, the needs of an animal are based on the ‘Five Freedoms’ and are considered to be:

- 1) Its need for a suitable environment;
- 2) its need for a suitable diet;
- 3) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
- 4) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and
- 5) its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

To help inform dog, cat and equine owners and keepers about their responsibility to meet the welfare needs of an animal in their care, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has recently revised and updated the Codes of Practice for these three species (in association with the Canine and Feline Sector Council [dogs and cats], and the Equine Sector Council for Health and Welfare and the British Horse Industry Confederation [horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids]). The codes came into force on 6 April 2018.

All three Codes give information as to why each of the five ‘needs’ is important, and what people should do to meet each of these needs for an animal in their care. However, all the Codes clearly state that each animal and situation is different and it is the responsibility of the owner or keeper to find out the individual needs of their particular cat, dog or horse, and how best to meet them.

Since the previous Codes were published in 2009 there have been some advances in our understanding of animal behaviour, socialisation, and training, and the amended Codes have been updated accordingly. The Codes also take into account changes in legislation, such as the requirement for all dogs to be microchipped (Microchipping of Dogs [England] Regulations 2015).

The updated Codes are generally user-friendly with a clear layout, more pictures and simple charts. Useful extra information is provided in the Annexes of each Code, which direct the reader to other, more comprehensive, guidance and advice.

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats (2017). A4, 12 pages. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Canine and Feline Sector Group. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-cats>.

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs (2017). A4, 12 pages. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Canine and Feline Sector Group. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-dogs>.

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids (2017). A4, 37 pages. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Equine Sector Council for Health and Welfare and the British Horse Industry Confederation. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-horses-ponies-donkeys-and-their-hybrids>.

E Carter,
UFAW

Updated zoo standards for care of elephants in England

In 2008, a Report found that there were a number of welfare concerns for zoo-housed elephants in the United Kingdom (UK) (Harris *et al* 2008). Many elephants had foot or joint problems (over half the national herd was either mildly or severely lame), 75% of the herd was classed as ‘overweight’ or ‘very overweight’, and many elephants exhibited abnormal behaviour (stereotypies). Subsequent to this Report, the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) formed the Elephant Welfare Group and were tasked by the UK Government with improving the welfare of captive elephants over the next ten years.

To ensure that the welfare of elephants could be monitored in an objective way, a further project was supported by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and undertaken by the University of Nottingham (Defra 2015). The main objective of the project was to create a reliable and evidence-based behavioural welfare assessment tool for elephants. Researchers also reviewed current elephant provisions in the Secretary of State’s Standards of Modern Zoo Practice.

Under UK law, zoos (defined as an establishment which houses wild animals and allows the public access to view the animals seven or more days in a twelve-month period [not including pet shops or circuses]) must be managed in accordance with the Secretary of State’s Standards of Modern Zoo Practice, which are issued under Section 9 of the Zoo Licensing Act 1981. Zoo Inspectors are also expected to refer to the standards when carrying out zoo inspections.

The Standards encompass 12 areas of care and management, including: provision of a suitable environment for animals (based on the Five Freedoms); transportation and movement of live animals; conservation and education measures; public safety in the zoo; stock records; staff and training; public facilities; and display of zoo licence. There are also 12 Appendices that give greater detail on areas, such as veterinary facilities (Appendix 5), training of animals (Appendix 7), and specialist exhibits (Appendix 8).

Appendix 8.8 of the standards covers elephants and, taking into account recommendations from the recent report by the University of Nottingham (Defra 2015), Defra has recently updated the Standards to include much greater detail on elephant care. The new sections within Appendix 8.8 emphasise the complex needs of elephants and introduce a requirement for zoos housing them to develop both a Long Term Management Plan (LTMP) for their elephant collection as a whole (spanning at least 30 years), and an Individual Welfare Plan (IWP) for each elephant. These plans must include certain features, such as: herd compatibility, long-term enclosure development planning, elephant training and an exit strategy should the collection choose to no longer hold elephants.

The importance of social grouping is given greater weight in the updated standards and section 8.8.8 on social grouping states that: “Appropriate social grouping is key to successful elephant management and must be pre-eminent in all aspects of care”.

Other changes to Appendix 8.8 include an increase in the recommended indoor enclosure size (from 200 m² to at least 300 m² for indoor cow/herd facilities for four [or fewer] animals); an increase in outdoor enclosure size (from 2,000 m² to at least 3,000 m²) and a recommendation that at least one metre of sand is provided in indoor areas to help prevent foot and joint problems, as well as allowing other natural behaviours, such as digging).

There is also greater detail given within sections on: behavioural management; healthcare; and elephant training. For example, it is stipulated that “Each institution must have an elephant training programme (documented in the LMP) and individual tailored goals for each animal (documented in the IWP).” Particular emphasis is placed on appropriate use of the ankus (a tool with a hook on the end that is used to cue elephants when training) and all staff using an ankus are required to undergo continued professional development.