

**CODE OF PRACTICE
FOR THE WELFARE OF CAPTIVE BIRDS IN THE A.C.T.**

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1. Introduction

This Code of Practice for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has been prepared from a consideration of the welfare of birds held in captivity. Its purpose is to provide general guidelines on the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care that are appropriate to the various species of captive birds.

Captive birds are defined as all indigenous and exotic birds that may legally be kept in a state of confinement. All legislation and regulations that relate to the possession of birds should be observed, including the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* and the *Public Health (General Sanitation) Regulations*.

This Code of Practice does not apply to:

- the keeping of birds used for any form of agricultural commercial production, including meat or eggs;
- cages used for authorised exhibitions, quarantine or hospitalisation. Cages used for exhibition should comply with regulation sizes required by the sanctioning body of the organisation conducting the exhibition; and
- a medical or surgical procedure carried out in accordance with accepted animal husbandry practice in connection with:
- farming and grazing activities;
- the management of a zoo; or
- the management of wildlife.

Captive birds have certain basic requirements:

- protection from the extremes of climate,
- safety from predators,
- means of escape from, or avoidance of stress from other birds, animals and humans,
- protection of food and water containers from contamination or from rain or direct sunlight,
- sufficient space, perches, nesting areas and/or feed and water stations to meet the needs of all birds in the cage, aviary or other enclosure,
- provision of nesting sites and materials appropriate for the species for breeding purposes where intended, and
- a draught-free shelter incorporating suitable wind breaks.

2. Licences

Under the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* licences to keep, sell, import into and export out of the ACT are required for all animals (dead or alive, whole or parts of) except those scheduled as exempt species under the Act, or, in the case of importing, included in the definition of imported animal product.

The trapping of native birds is illegal in the ACT except where a licence has been issued. It is also an offence to kill native birds without a licence under the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*.

Information concerning licences is available from the ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

The keeping of domestic birds, such as fowls, ducks, turkeys, guinea fowl and pigeons, within the Canberra City Area is controlled by the *ACT Public Health (General Sanitation) Regulations*.

Information concerning the requirements under these regulations can be obtained from the ACT Health Authority, Health Surveillance Service.

Release of birds from captivity is prohibited under section 11 of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, with the exception of the release of birds in a manner authorised under another law. Under the *Nature Conservation Act 1980*, a person may be licensed to release native birds.

3. General Requirements

3.1 Food

Adequate food suitable for the needs of the particular species of bird should be readily available. Small species of birds and young birds of some species should have access to food at all times.

Most birds benefit from a regular supply of fruit, greens or seeding grasses. These should be fresh, preferably supplied daily and old or stale food should be removed. Grit and other supplements should be readily available, especially to breeding birds.

Food should not be mouldy or contaminated. It should be stored in a manner which prevents deterioration, or prepared daily depending on the nature of its ingredients.

Food should be placed where it is least likely to be spoiled or contaminated. Open containers should not be located below perches.

Except where it is a species requirement, direct feeding on the ground should be avoided and suitable containers used to reduce the risk of disease.

Food containers should be checked frequently to ensure that food of suitable quality and quantity is available to the birds. Containers should not be constructed or used in a manner which is dangerous to the birds.

Care should be taken to avoid providing food that is contaminated with insecticides or other substances of toxic potential or food that is toxic.

3.2 Water

Clean cool water should be available at all times.

Water containers should not be located in direct sunlight nor placed in positions where likely to become contaminated. Open containers should not be located below perches.

Bathing water should be available for many species.

Containers should be cleaned at least weekly. They should be designed by size, shape, depth, or slope of sides, so as to avoid drowning or causing distress to birds.

Birds, except for water birds, should not be housed in continually wet areas as this may present health hazards, for example coccidiosis and internal parasites, and should be avoided as far as possible.

3.3 Accommodation

Each species should be accommodated according to its needs.

Cages and aviaries should be sited and constructed to minimise risks from flood or fire. There should be provision of suitable exits to allow for emergency evacuation.

Insulation or heating may be required for some species. Where birds are likely to be distressed by heat, cooling mechanisms should be provided.

Birds in small cages should not be left exposed to the sun and/or draughts without shelter.

Cages, aviaries and enclosures should be designed and constructed so as to minimise the threat posed to birds by predators. Many species of birds, animals and reptiles are predators of or cause distress to aviary birds by day or by night. These include cats, dogs, foxes, birds of prey including owls, butcher-birds and currawongs, snakes and even children. Water birds and poultry which have access to free range areas or swimming/wading areas require protection from many predators.

Vermin such as rats, mice, cockroaches, feed moths or beetles, ants or slugs should be rigidly controlled to prevent their entry to cages, aviaries, enclosures or food storage areas. If vermin is observed, prompt action should be taken to eradicate it.

Bird enclosures or cages should be fitted with openings or doorways designed to avoid the risk of injury or escape.

Roosting sites, perches or hiding areas should be provided in the manner and positions most appropriate for the species, e.g. many aviary species require high perches in protected areas for roosting, and some ground dwelling species remain distressed if unable to use hide areas. Perches should be of varied diameter and shape. They should be regularly cleaned or preferably replaced.

Wooden perches, including natural branches, should be provided of a diameter and length to enable every bird in the cage to perch comfortably at the same time. Perches should not unduly impede lines of flight nor be placed directly above other perches or food and drink containers.

Metal perches are not suitable. Perches should not be coated with sand paper as this may lead to abrasion of the foot pads.

The interior of the cage should be free from any sharp points or edges and any dangerous obstruction.

Hanging decorations, toys and vegetation inside the cage should not be allowed to clutter the cage or impede lines of flight.

Unless compatible, different species should not be confined together.

Care should be taken with new equipment. New galvanised wire may be toxic, especially for parrots. The risk of 'New Wire Disease' can be reduced by allowing the wire to be weathered for 4-8 weeks or by washing with a mild acidic solution, e.g., vinegar, and then rinsed.

Accommodation areas should be cleaned regularly. Food and water containers should be kept clean.

4. Health

4.1 Quarantine

Newly acquired birds should be quarantined for a suitable period for treatment and observation before being released into permanent housing. After quarantine a bird should only be released into new surroundings early in the day to allow time to adjust to the new environment by nightfall. The exception to this is when poultry are being introduced to other unfamiliar poultry. This should always be done during the night-time to reduce the risk of injury due to fighting.

4.2 Inspection

Birds should be inspected regularly to ensure that adequate feed and water are available, to check on their state of health, and to identify and promptly remedy any problems that may develop. New, sick or young birds should be inspected more frequently.

4.3 Disease

Ill health or stress may be observed in birds in a variety of ways. Careful observation may be needed as sick birds are able to suppress some signs when stimulated. Symptoms of ill health include:

- Changes in appearance of droppings,
- Changes in food or water consumption,
- Changes in attitude or behaviour e.g. inability to fly or see,
- Changes in appearance or posture,
- Changes in weight,
- Enlargements or swellings,

- Vomiting, injury or bleeding, and
- Discharge from nostrils, eyes or beak.

Other signs that should be noted include:

- Excess loss of feathers,
- Lameness or sores on feet,
- Overgrown beak or nails, and
- Stains or scabs around eyes or nostrils.

Sick or injured birds should be isolated for observation and treatment. This will prevent further injury and restrict the spread of infections. Veterinary advice should be sought if rapid recovery is not evident.

4.4 Parasite Control

Caged birds can be affected by internal and external parasites causing health problems that may result in death.

Internal parasite control is necessary with most aviary birds and poultry. Treatment can be administered via food or water but dosing individual birds is more efficient. Individual dosing should be performed by competent operators.

External parasites should be eradicated by application of an appropriate insecticide to birds, cages and nest boxes, and may include dusting, spraying, oral medication, or contact insecticides on perches.

Chemicals should be selected and used carefully, for example pest strips are ineffective except in enclosed areas. *Malathion* is toxic to some species such as Bourke's Parrot.

4.5 Euthanasia

Where treatment to restore health or to repair injury is not possible or not successful, euthanasia should be performed by a competent person and in an appropriate and humane manner. Veterinary advice should be sought.

5. Trading

A person trading birds to another should endeavour to ensure that the recipient understands the feeding and general husbandry requirements of the species being traded.

Any licensed bird seller shall, at the time of sale of a bird, provide the purchaser with information which outlines the basic care necessary for that kind of bird.

Sick, injured or aged birds should not be traded without the full knowledge of the purchaser.

6. Handling Procedures

6.1 Catching

The catching of aviary birds is usually a stressful experience to birds with some species particularly susceptible. Birds should be caught by the least stressful method available and subjected to minimal handling.

6.2 Restraint

Special care and knowledge is necessary in holding or restraining birds, and the most appropriate method should be used for each species. Tethering of birds by any means of restraint is unacceptable.

6.3 Rings

The application of rings for identification purposes requires care for selection of the appropriate ring and its application. These rings should be of a size that fits closely, yet moves freely on the leg of an adult bird. Over-large rings may be caught in obstacles such as vegetation or wire, and rings that are too tight may restrict blood flow to the leg. Special care is needed should a ring require removal, e.g. a leg injury. Aluminium rings are not suited for application on large parrots. Rings should not be placed on some species, especially the adult birds, because of the risk of possible self-mutilation.

6.4 Wings

Caged birds should have the ability for free flight and nothing should prevent or hinder this ability such as the cutting of feathers or the pinioning of wings. (Pinioning is the removal of the last joint of the wing.)

Wing feather clipping could be necessary in life-threatening situations but should not be done to a bird without the advice of an experienced person. When taming a young pet bird, wing taping with the advice of an experienced person is a more acceptable alternative.

6.5 Toe Nail Trimming

Excessively long toe nails should be trimmed without drawing blood, but toes should not be cut with the intent of permanently preventing nail growth. Overgrown nails, particularly in small cages, may be indicative of inadequate conditions. (See Section 3.3)

6.6 Beak Trimming

Overgrown beaks should be carefully trimmed by an experienced person.

6.7 Dubbing

Dubbing, the removal of the crest from poultry and game birds, is prohibited under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*.

7. Transport

7.1 General

Transport inevitably causes stress and therefore should be kept to the minimum necessary.

Transport cages should not be too large but should be spacious enough for the birds to move around. For some species the roof of transport boxes should be padded to prevent head injuries. Other species may require transportation in bags e.g. pheasants. Containers should be darkened. All wire metal cages should be covered with dark cloth during transport, taking care not to obstruct ventilation.

Feed should always be available during transport, especially for small or young birds, and water should be provided at intervals, especially in hot periods. An exception to this advice is that chickens being transported in the first 24 hours of life, do not require food or water in normal circumstances.

Birds do not tolerate extremes of temperature and should not be left in parked vehicles in the sun or hot weather.

7.2 Long Period Carry Cages

Any container used to convey a live bird for any purpose by means of transportation, should conform to the following measurements. An exemption to this may be with the transportation of very young birds for the purpose of hand rearing, or chicks. In these cases the birds require a close environment with shared body heat and no food or water.

Note: A bird is measured from the tip of its beak to the tip of its entire tail when held in the hand.

Length: no less than 20% (one fifth) longer than the longest bird to be carried in it, and
no more than twice the length of the longest bird to be carried in it.

Width: 50% of the minimum length providing that if more than one bird is to be transported, the container should be wide enough for all birds to stand shoulder to shoulder.

Height: should be high enough for the birds to stand normally and the top of the container no higher than 50 mm above the bird's head when standing in a normal position. The exception to this is finches [see **Appendix 1** (cage 1)] where the height should be 150 mm. Height should be such that the birds standing on the floor cannot obstruct ventilation holes.

Birds in containers should not be left unattended or exposed to extremes of temperature or weather.

To reduce undue stress, birds should not be confined in a carrying container for more than the minimum amount of time needed for transport. Food and water should be provided if transport is longer than two hours. Water should not be placed in a container during transport unless it is in a non-spill container.

Birds that fight should be shipped in separate containers.

The floor of the carry cage should be such that the birds can obtain a secure footing. The floor should be sealed and covered with a non-toxic absorbent material to stop the escape of faecal matter.

Adequate ventilation should be provided by drilling or clipping holes 0.8 - 1 cm diameter in a line along both sides and both ends of the container at intervals not exceeding 4 cm. The holes should be near the top edge but care must be taken that they are not blocked when a cover or lid is in place.

Ventilation holes must be clipped out or drilled out. (Holes which are made by perforating with a spike easily become blocked.) There should be no hole large enough for the birds to stick their head through.

Every vendor of birds should provide carry cages appropriate to the kinds of birds offered for sale.

7.3 Short Period Carry Cages

Containers should be sufficiently robust for the species they contain and should be securely closed during transport to ensure no injury or escape is possible.

A strong, clean, ventilated cardboard box may be suitable for some kinds of birds. Larger parrots and cockatoos may chew through cardboard or softwood and for these species a substantial hardwood box or metal cage is necessary.

Containers should preferably be of non-toxic material. Containers such as milk cartons, jars, plastic ice-cream containers, paper and plastic bags etc. must not be used as adequate ventilation cannot be provided.

Exemptions: Show cages of a size specified for individual species by the governing body of the organisation conducting an exhibition may be used for transport to and from an exhibition.

To simplify the measurement requirements, five cage sizes are recommended with examples of the size of birds suitable for each cage. Cages for birds in excess of 550 mm in length will contain only one bird. Examples are provided at **Appendix 1**.

7.4 Interstate Carry Cages

All cages should be of wood or metal and should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between consignments of birds, and should be sturdy to prevent the escape or injury of birds contained therein. Floors should be solid.

Carry cages should be stowed in a manner and position to provide adequate ventilation to all cages during transport.

Where cages are stacked for transport, adequate ventilation should be provided by either the design of the carry cage or by placing spacer blocks between cages to ensure adequate air movement.

For bulk consignment cages, as described in **Appendix 2**, adequate ventilation should be provided by drilling 1 cm diameter holes at 10 cm

intervals in two staggered rows along the back and each side of the carry cage. The holes are to be in the upper one-third of each side.

Birds should not be delivered to the dispatch point more than two hours prior to the scheduled departure time.

Each carry cage being consigned interstate (apart from those carried in a private motor vehicle by the consignee or consignor) must carry a label measuring at least 10 cm x 15 cm upon which is legibly printed the following details:

- the consignee's name, address and telephone number;
- the consignor's name, address and telephone number;
- the number of birds and the time and date the birds were placed in the container.

The words "Live Birds" should be displayed on similar sized labels on at least two sides of the container.

7.5 Bulk Consignment

Persons wishing to transport large numbers of birds may dispatch or receive birds in cages as described in **Appendix 1** in the prescribed number, or may use cages as described in **Appendix 2**.

8. Permanent Housing

8.1 Cage Design and Construction

In cage design and construction, the needs of the species of bird to be kept must be considered.

Young birds that are not self sufficient should be excluded from the determination of the number of birds that may be housed in cages/aviaries. Once the progeny are self sufficient, the numbers should be reduced to comply with the maximum numbers permitted within the cage or aviary.

8.2 Indoor Housing

Indoor cages are defined as cages that are normally kept inside a building. They include cages that house a single bird, cages where more than one bird is permanently housed and cages where birds are housed for short periods of the year, such as breeding cages.

At least half of the largest side of the cage should consist of a metal grille, netting or mesh to provide adequate ventilation.

Floors should be of an impervious material especially if cages are to be stacked in tiers. This will prevent litter passing through to lower cages. Floor covering material such as grit may be added. Suspended wire cages should be hung over a floor that can be kept in a clean and sanitary condition.

Cage dimensions for indoor housing are given at **Appendix 3**.

8.3 Aviary Housing

In the ACT, special attention to the housing of birds is necessary due to extremes in the temperature, particularly in the cold months. The aviary should face north-east where possible to trap the warmth of the sun and avoid the cold south-westerly winds. This aspect will also give protection from the western sun.

A section, about a third of the length of the aviary, should be fully covered and enclosed on three sides. This is necessary for shelter, roosting and nesting.

The remainder of the aviary can be covered with shade cloth or other similar material to minimise contamination by vermin and attacks by predatory birds and cats. For ground dwelling birds roosts can be covered by dense vegetation within the aviary.

Vermin should be rigidly controlled to prevent its entry to cages, aviaries or food storage areas or to achieve prompt eradication.

To prevent predators from digging under the walls of the aviary the mesh should be secured by being buried to a depth of 300 mms, or by being set in concrete.

Cage dimensions for aviaries are given at **Appendix 4**.

8.4 Commercial and Retail Establishments

This section applies to the housing of birds in commercial and retail outlets, such as pet shops, markets, bird sales by fancier groups and the operations of bird traders.

Birds should be transported to the commercial or retail premises in carry cages complying with this Code.

As soon as practicable upon arrival at premises, the birds should be transferred to display cages which comply with the specifications set down in the attached schedule, or transferred to cages that conform to the permanent indoor/outdoor housing requirements.

If after 6 weeks a species larger than *Psephotus* is still in the possession of the retailer/trader, the bird should be released into a cage complying with the specifications for permanent indoor/outdoor housing. *Agapornis* e.g. African Lovebird, *Neophema* e.g. Bourke's Parrot, *Psephotus* e.g. cockatiel, and similar sized birds may be in display cages for up to 8 weeks. Birds smaller than the preceding group, such as finches, canaries and budgerigars, are exempt from this movement requirement. Adult poultry should be housed in display cages for a maximum of 4 days. Birds placed in the larger housing for a break from display cages shall remain there for at least 2 weeks before being returned to a display cage.

Birds should be transferred to display cages in such a way as to minimise stress to those birds.

All display cages should be of strong, impervious material that can be thoroughly washed and sterilised. At least 75% of the front of the cage should be constructed from open weave mesh. Floors should be solid. The cage should be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition at all times. Poultry will require absorbent material on the floors of cages.

Wooden perches should be provided of a diameter and length to enable every bird in the cage to perch comfortably. Perches should not impede lines of flight nor be placed directly above other perches or food and drink containers.

Cages should be positioned so as to be free from draughts, direct sunlight through windows and other factors that may stress or cause discomfort to the birds.

Sufficient food and watering points should be provided so that every bird has free access to them. Clean, fresh water and fresh food suitable for the bird(s) in the cage should be supplied.

Birds which may fight should not be placed together in a display cage. If there is any evidence of fighting or harassment the birds should be immediately separated into different cages.

Health and quarantine provisions as specified in Section 4 of this Code should be followed.

No person shall sell, offer for sale or trade any juvenile bird that is not fully feathered and self sufficient.

Display cages should conform to the specifications listed in **Appendix 5** or in the specifications for permanent indoor/outdoor housing at **Appendix 3** or **4**.

9. Acknowledgements

This document draws heavily on the National Consultative Committee on Animal Welfare (NCCAW), *Code of Practice for the Housing of Caged Birds* and the NSW Associated Birdkeepers and Traders Inc. *Code of Ethics for the Keeping and Trading of Birds*. Further assistance in preparation of this Code is gratefully acknowledged from various industry related societies and particularly:

- The Avicultural Society of Canberra
- The Canberra Branch of the Budgerigar Society of NSW
- Canberra and Queanbeyan Poultry Association, and
- Canberra Bird Fanciers.

Appendix 1 - Short Period Carry Cage Dimensions

Cage	Size of Bird (Approx length)	Height (mm)	Length Min (mm)	Length Max (mm)	Width Min (mm)
1a	100 mm (1 bird only) e.g. canaries, zebra, cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, african peachface and mask birds	150	80		80
1b	100 mm (up to 4 birds) e.g. canaries, zebra, cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, african peachface and mask birds	150	150	200	135
2	200 mm (4 birds only) e.g. neophemas, budgerigars, diamond doves, lorikeets, cockatiels	150	240	400	135
3	300 mm (2 birds only) e.g. eastern rosellas, princess, indian ringneck, and superb parrots	200	360	600	180
4	400 mm (2 birds only) e.g. king parrot, crimson rosella, galahs, long bill corellas	200	480	800	240
5	500 mm (1 bird only) e.g. sulphur crested cockatoos	300	600	1000	300

Appendix 2 - Bulk Consignment Cage Dimensions

Cage	Size of Bird (Approx length) (mm)	Height		Length		Width (mm)
		Min	Max	Min	Max	
6	100 mm (Max no of birds - 40) e.g. canaries, zebra, cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, african peachface and mask birds	150		600	1000	300
	200 mm (Max no of birds - 20) e.g. neophemas, budgerigars, diamond doves, lorikeets, cockatiels					
7	300 mm (Max no of birds - 10) e.g. eastern rosellas, princess, indian ringneck, and superb parrots	200		600	1000	300
	400 mm (Max no of birds - 5) e.g. king parrots, crimson rosella, galahs, long bill corellas					
8	500 mm (Max no of birds - 1) e.g. sulphur crested cockatoos	300		600	1000	300

Appendix 3 Indoor Cage Dimensions

Size of bird (Approx length) bird	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Maximum Number of birds	Min height (cm)	Increased floor area for each additional (sq cm)
100 mm e.g. canaries, zebra, cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, african peachface and mask birds	850	2	34	*
200 mm e.g. neophemas, budgerigars, diamond doves	1450	2	34	*
200 mm e.g. lorikeets, cockatiels	1450	1	34	*
300 mm e.g. eastern rosellas, princess, indian ringneck, and superb parrots	3700	1	76	2500
400 mm e.g. crimson rosellas, king parrot, galahs, long bill corellas	10000	1	90	5000
500 mm e.g. sulphur crested cockatoos	15000	1	150	7500

Cages with a floor area exceeding 20000 sq cm must have a minimum height of 150 cm and allow access for physical entry. The minimum length and width of any cage should be at least twice the length of the largest bird in the cage.

* additional bird requires increase of volume by 50%

Appendix 4 Aviary (Outside Cage) Dimensions

Size of bird (Approx length)	Minimum floor dimensions (cm x cm)	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Min height (cm)
100 mm (10 cm) e.g. canaries, zebra, cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, african peachface and mask birds	75 x 150	11250	180
200 mm (20 cm) e.g. neophemas, budgerigars, diamond doves, cockatiels	75 x 150	11250	180
300 mm (30 cm) e.g. eastern rosellas, rainbow lorikeets, princess, indian ringneck, and superb parrots	75 x 150	11250	180
400 mm (40 cm) e.g. king parrot, crimson rosella, galahs, long bill corellas	75 x 150	11250	180
500 mm (50 cm) e.g. sulphur crested cockatoos	150 x 150	22500	180

The size, number and variety of birds as well as the number of feed stations, roosts and other accessories will all impact on the number of birds that are able to be kept in any aviary.

The number of birds that are able to be kept within the aviaries will depend upon the species that are being kept. For example Sulphur Crested Cockatoos and other large birds would need a minimum floor area of 22,500 sq cm per bird. Advice should be sought from bird societies and pet shops on stocking maximums.

Appendix 5 Display Cage Dimensions (other than Poultry and Game Birds)

Size of bird (Approx length) each	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Number of birds	Min height (cm)	Increased floor area for additional bird (sq cm)
100 mm (10 cm) e.g. canaries, zebra, cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, african peachface and mask birds	900	8	30	100
200 mm (20 cm) e.g. neophemas, budgerigars, diamond doves, lorikeets, cockatiels	1600	12	40	135
300 mm (30 cm) e.g. eastern rosellas, princess, indian ringneck, and superb parrots	2400	6	90	400
400 mm (40 cm) e.g. king parrot, crimson rosella, galahs, long bill corellas	22500	20	100	1000
500 mm (50 cm) e.g. sulphur crested cockatoos	10000	2	100	2000

Appendix 6 Poultry and Game Birds Display Cage Dimensions

Type of bird	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Increased floor area for each additional bird (sq cm)
Bantam	375	375
Large fowl	700	500
Other poultry e.g., water fowl	1350	1000
Large poultry e.g., turkey, geese	2000	1500

All measurements quoted for poultry are for one bird only.

The height of the cage or container needs to be a minimum of 5 cm greater than the full height of the bird (including comb) when standing at full height.