

Code of Welfare and Husbandry for Falconry



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Falconers should be encouraged not only to ‘meet’ the expectations of good welfare, but to exceed them wherever possible. In the UK welfare is covered in law by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. The ‘Five Freedoms’, superseded recently with the ‘Five Provisions’, are often cited as assessment criteria to ensure opportunities for animals to ‘thrive’, not simply ‘survive’.

An understanding of the law and requirements will help the falconer think about the welfare of their birds and ensure the highest standards are met. It is the responsibility of the falconer to ensure they keep up to date with amendments to the various laws (and regional differences) and not rely on this document.

This document demonstrates where good welfare must be met, but it is not an exhaustive list, nor is it prescriptive in what ‘must’ be done by the falconer. There is no ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to welfare. This is designed as a practical means for the falconer to not only assess the welfare of his bird but help tailor it to the individual.

Legislation – Animal Welfare Act 2006

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 describes the following ‘needs’ to be met by good practice:

- Suitable environment
- Suitable diet
- Exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- Protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease
- Need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals



Five Provisions and Welfare Aims

Welfare is something an animal experiences. The Five Provisions of welfare set out ways to maximise positive and minimise negative experiences to encourage animals to thrive:

- **Good nutrition**
Access to fresh water/diet to maintain full health and vigour
- **Good environment**
Appropriate environment including shelter/comfortable resting area
- **Good health**
Prevention through rapid diagnosis and treatment
- **Appropriate behaviour**
Providing sufficient space and proper facilities
- **Positive mental experience**
Ensuring conditions/treatment that avoid mental suffering and promote positive behaviour

Self-Assessment and Indicators of Good Welfare

It is the responsibility of the falconer to ensure welfare is of the highest possible order for the birds under their care. The diversity of species flown for falconry means there cannot be one prescribed set of instructions that ensures good welfare for ALL species under ALL management regimes. The following list should be used as a checklist to monitor birds' welfare continually and to make changes where necessary:

1. **Access to clean water for drinking and bathing**

All birds should be given constant access to clean and fresh water. Water may be removed temporarily prior to free flight of the bird to ensure that the bird is dry; however, water should only be removed for the minimal period that would allow drying in the contemporary weather conditions should the bird bathe. Bathing is a natural behaviour and helps ensure good feather condition; baths should be of suitable design that allows the bird easy access and be of sufficient size for the bird to undertake proper bathing behaviour.

2. Suitable diet and appropriate feeding

A diet should be fed that matches the nutritional needs of the bird and encourages “full health and vigour”. A mixed, ‘whole carcass’ diet reduces the risk of nutritional deficiencies that may result from feeding one specific food item. Food should be sourced from, and stored in, hygienic conditions that prevent risk of disease and spoilage. Food should never be withheld for prolonged periods (see section 6) and fed at an amount that matches the nutritional and metabolic requirements of the bird. Free-lofted birds should be fed in a manner that allows intake to be monitored and uneaten food to be removed easily.

3. Health

It is important to know the signs of good health so that any change can be investigated immediately. Particular attention should be paid to inspecting feet and legs, cere, beak, skin, wing tips and joints, eyes and nares/mouth as well as faecal output; any signs of abnormality indicate a need to investigate the cause and changes be implemented. Feather condition is also an indicator of welfare; damaged feathers indicate poor handling or husbandry techniques and should be investigated to prevent further damage. If a bird is either sick or injured, prompt veterinary attention should be sought immediately. It is advisable to register your birds with a local avian veterinary surgeon before such an emergency arises.

4. Husbandry to allow natural behaviour / maintain health and mental wellbeing: -

Tethering: - Birds should only be tethered whilst in the process of training, being flown on a regular basis or under-going veterinary care. Birds should be flown on a regular basis to ensure good health, both physically and mentally. Perches should be of suitable design to allow sufficient movement to allow normal behaviour to occur whilst not excessive so that trauma may occur from bating. Materials should be used that prevent failure and subsequent loss of the bird with tethering equipment, ideally housing within a secure enclosure preventing a birds loss in such circumstances whilst protecting from injury by other predators/humans. Perches should be of suitable design, position and manufacture to ensure safety and health at all times.

Housing: - Accommodation whilst tethered or free-lofted should at all times protect the hawk from adverse weather and provide protection from injury from other animals/people. Accommodation should allow for clear observation whilst allowing the bird to remove itself from stressful/adverse situations. It should allow access to sunlight for both metabolic requirements (Vitamin D) and behavioural needs (sunbathing) whilst maintaining comfort from excessive heat and cold. It should be constructed from materials able to withstand adverse weather conditions and be easily cleaned and hygiene maintained. Aviary design should allow normal behaviour. Size should allow sufficient flight behaviour and maintain good feather and body condition.

5. Safe and comfortable furniture

Furniture on the bird should be of suitable design and manufacture to ensure comfort and prevent risk of injury or loss. Furniture should be clean, regularly inspected to check for signs of wear/damage and the bird also examined regularly to ensure no harm or trauma. Any sign of discomfort or damage should be investigated and changed immediately. Hoods are appropriate to reduce stress and prevent damage to a bird; evidence suggests a calming effect whilst hooded and being manually restrained. Hoods should be used for periods of time sufficient to ensure that any stressful incident (that cannot be avoided or prevented) is by-passed and the risk of the bird causing damage to itself/others has passed, e.g. during transport.

6. Training to reduce stress

The environment should be managed to reduce stressors as much as practically possible. Food should never be withheld for prolonged periods that could be detrimental to the birds' overall health and wellbeing. Birds should be encouraged to eat as soon as reasonably feasible upon initial training. Methods utilising positive reinforcement should always be used.

7. Adequately trained to ensure return upon free flight and appropriate precautions

Free flight should occur only in places where the landowner has given permission. Steps should be taken to avoid the general public to minimise any risk of incident. We recommend that all people undertaking free flight with any bird of prey should acquire third-party liability insurance. The environment should be assessed for safety risks and precautions taken to avoid these as far as possible. All precautions should be taken to ensure return from free flight, including correct prior training and telemetry. Telemetry assists with a swift recovery of a lost bird and should be considered an essential tool to assist with good welfare.

8. Transport

Birds undergoing transport must be safe and secure at all times. Ventilated travel boxes (or hooded on a cage) are suitable for housing birds during travel and for short-term (overnight) use whilst away from the home address - so long as this does not exceed an aggregate of 72 hours, are regularly monitored and given frequent opportunities to exhibit normal behaviour including flight and bathing.

9. Law

It is the responsibility of anyone who has a bird under their care to be aware of and to comply with all aspects of law appropriate to falconry, for example, access to land, ownership, registration, CITES requirements, the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Act, animal health legislation (disease control and importation and exportation) Avian Influenza directives and requirements for the Animal Activities License (where relevant).

Legislation is often updated and amended. The latest legislation can be found at:
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk>

