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Code of Practice for the Housing of Caged Birds

This code has been prepared from a consideration of the welfare of cage birds held in captivity. Its purpose is to define the minimum standards of accommodation, management and care that are appropriate to the various species of cage birds.

Introduction

Cage birds are defined as all indigenous and exotic birds that may legally be kept in a state of captivity and are housed in cages approved by this code. All regulations and legislation that relate to the possession of birds should be observed.

A cage is defined as a fully enclosed structure having walls, a floor and a roof.

Cage birds have certain basic requirements:

- accommodation designed to suit their physical characteristics and behaviour;
- space enough to fly, roost and elude other cage birds;
- protection from the weather with shelter and comfortable conditions of temperature, ventilation and lighting;
- protection from the menace of predators;
- feed and water to provide essential nutrients;
- protection from disease;
- regular surveillance to enable early detection of problems.

This Code of Practice does not apply to:

- the keeping of waterfowl, pigeons used for racing, poultry, pheasants or quail used for the commercial production of meat or eggs;
- cages used for exhibition, quarantine or hospitalisation. Cages used for exhibition should be bound by regulation size: controlled by the sanctioning body of the organisation conducting the exhibition. These cages should be designed to protect the welfare of the birds.

1. Feeding

Adequate food suitable for the needs of the particular species of bird should be available at all times. Food should be fresh and clean and stored in a manner that prevents deterioration or spoilage.

Containers used to supply feed should not be constructed or used in a manner that may cause injury to the birds. They should be situated in cages in a position where the food is least likely to be spoiled or contaminated by faeces.

A varied diet should be supplied, and given the limitations of seasonal availability, alternating regularly between fresh fruit, vegetables and seeding grasses.

Mixed grit and a source of calcium should be available.

2. Water

Clean, cool water should be available at all times. Water containers should not be located in direct sunlight nor should they be placed in positions where they are likely to become contaminated by faeces. Containers should be kept in a clean condition free from foreign matter.

Food and water containers should not be transferred to other cages without prior washing in a disinfectant solution.

3. Accommodation

All cages should be kept in a state of cleanliness that is conducive to good health of the birds. Accommodation should provide:

- protection from extremes of climate
- a draught-free shelter incorporating suitable wind breaks
- protection from predators
- a means of escape from or avoidance of other cage birds
- a variety of different diameter perches with sufficient space for all birds
- an adequate number of feed and water stations to meet the requirements of all birds
- a choice of nesting and roosting sites and/or provision of suitable nesting material for all birds in the cage.

Wet areas may present a health hazard and suitable floor drainage should be provided.

Cage construction should be such that it inhibits the entry of pests. If bait stations or traps are used inside cages, they should be designed in such a way that it is impossible for birds to reach the bait or traps.

Roosting sites and perches should be provided in a manner and position that is most appropriate for the species housed.

New galvanised wire may be toxic, especially to parrots. The risk of "New Wire Disease" or zinc poisoning, can be reduced by washing with a mild acidic solution such as vinegar followed by a rinse with water.

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 before nightfall.

4.2 Disease

Ill health or stress may be observed in birds in a variety of ways. Symptoms of ill health include:

- changes in appearance of droppings
- food or water consumption
- attitude or behaviour

- appearance or posture
- weight
- enlargements or swelling
- vomiting, injury or bleeding
- discharge from nostrils, eyes or beak.

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

Cage birds can be affected by internal parasites causing health problems which may result in death.

Treatment can be administered via food or water but dosing of individual birds is more efficient.

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

5. General

Identification rings may be used on the legs of cage birds. 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.

Cage birds should have the ability for free flight and nothing should prevent or hinder this ability. Cage birds should not be wing clipped except for the health of the individual bird and on the advice of a veterinarian experienced in working with birds.

Licensed Wildlife Displayers are specifically authorised to restrain raptors by tethering, providing the period of restraint is less than two hours and the raptors are under the supervision of an experienced handler during this period. Tethering of any other birds by any means of restraint is unacceptable.

Overgrown beaks and toenails should be trimmed carefully to avoid haemorrhage. Overgrown toenails are usually prevented by using rough, uneven-diameter perches and eliminating foot disease and obesity. Perches should not be coated with sandpaper as this may lead to abrasions of the foot pads.

The catching of birds may cause stress and should be kept to a minimum.

Incompatible species of birds should not be housed together.

Where mixed species are housed together, the minimum size of the cage should conform to the requirements for the largest birds housed in the cage. The floor area of this cage should be increased by the amount specified in column four ("Increase floor area for each additional bird") for each bird of the smaller species housed in the cage.

5.1 Carry cages

General

- Any container used to convey a live bird for any purpose by any means of transportation, should conform to the following measurements.

(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.

- 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 no higher than 50mm above the bird's head when standing in a normal posture. The exception to this is for small finches (cage 1) where the height will be 150mm. Height should be such that the birds standing on the floor cannot obstruct ventilation holes.
- No bird should be transported in a container together with a bird of a different species.
- Birds that fight should be shipped in separate containers.
- The floor of the carry cage should be such that birds can obtain a secure footing.
- 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).
- One side of solid timber or metal carry cases should have bird wire or welded fabric of a size that prevents the head of a bird from protruding, on a minimum of one half of the area of that side.
- Containers should be darkened, taking care not to obstruct ventilation.
- Birds in containers should not be left unattended or exposed to high temperatures, wind or rain.
- To reduce undue stress, birds should not be confined in a carrying container for more than a minimum amount of time
- 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.
- Every vendor of birds should provide containers appropriate to the kinds of birds he offers for sale.

(a) Short period carry cages

- A strong, clean cardboard box may be suitable for some kinds of birds. Larger parrots and cockatoos may chew through cardboard or softwood and for those species a substantial hardwood box or metal cage is necessary.
- Containers should be of new material. Containers such as milk cartons, jars, plastic ice cream boxes, paper and plastic bags, etc. must not be used.
- 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.
- 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, the following five cage sizes are recommended and examples of the size of birds suitable for each cage are provided. Cages for birds in excess of 550 mm in length will be determined by the above formula and will contain only one bird.
- Short period carry cage dimensions (Table 1)

Table 1. Short period carry cage dimensions

Cage	Size of bird (approximate length)	Height (mm)	Length (mm)		Minimum width (mm)
			minimum	maximum	
1	100mm (10cm) Cage 1 (up to four birds only) For example, for zebra, Cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, five canaries	150	150	200	135

Cage	Size of bird (approximate length)	Height (mm)	Length (mm)		Minimum width (mm)
			minimum	maximum	
2	200mm (20cm) Cage 2 (up to four birds only) For example, for neophemas, budgerigars, Yorkshire canaries, red crested cardinal finches, small lorikeets (musk, purple crowned)	150	240	400	135
3	300mm (30cm) Cage 3 (up to two birds only) For example, for rosellas, cockatiels, large lorikeets (rainbow), bronze-wing pigeons	200	360	600	180
4	400mm (40cm) Cage 4 (up to two birds only) For example, for king, princess, indian ringneck and superb parrots, galahs, long billed corellas	200	480	800	240
5	500mm (50cm) Cage 5 (one bird only) For example, for sulphur crested cockatoos	300	600	1000	300

Note: Not more than four birds can be carried in cages one and two. Not more than two birds can be carried in cages three and four. Only one bird can be carried in cage five. Where more than two birds are carried, the cage should conform with the maximum length specification. Height must be as designated.

(b) 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 sufficiently 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 carry cases are stacked for transport, 5cm square spacer blocks are to be placed between consecutive tiers of cages (both vertically and horizontally) to ensure adequate air movement between cages.
- For cages six and seven adequate ventilation should be provided by drilling 1cm diameter holes at 10cm centres 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.
- Wild, trapped birds must be held for two weeks after capture before being transported interstate.
- Each carry cage being consigned interstate (apart from those carried in a private motor car by the consignee or consignor) must carry a label measuring at least 10cm x 15cm upon which is legibly printed the following details:
 - the consignee's name and address;
 - the consignor's name and address;
 - 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.

(c) Bulk consignment

Persons wishing to transport large numbers of birds (for example, wildlife trappers or dealers) may dispatch birds in cages one to five described above in the prescribed number, or may use cages six or seven described below (Table 2).

Table 2. Cage dimensions for bulk consignment

Cage	Size of bird	Height	Length (mm)	Minimum width
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Cage	(approximate length) Size of bird	(mm) Height	minimum Length (mm)	maximum	(Minimum width
	(approximate length)	(mm)	minimum	maximum	(mm)
6	100mm (10cm) Max no of birds - 40 For example, for zebra, Cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, five canaries	150	600	1000	300
	200mm (20cm) Max no of birds - 20 For example, for neophemas, budgerigars, Yorkshire canaries, red crested cardinal finches, lorikeets (except rainbow and red collared)				
7	300mm (30cm) Max no of birds - 10 For example, for rosellas, cockatiels, rainbow lorikeets, bronze-wing pigeons	200	600	1000	300
	400mm (40cm) Max no birds - 5 For example, for king, princess, Indian ringneck and superb parrots, galahs, long billed corellas				

Note: Minimum floor area must equal or exceed 3,000 sq cm but may not exceed 4,500 sq cm. Under this Code of Practice is possible to construct tiered cages, providing the dimensions of each tier conform with the specifications listed above for cages six and seven, and a 5cm ventilation gap is provided between tiers both vertically and horizontally. Birds approximately 500mm - for example, sulphur crested cockatoos, must be carried in cage five. Not more than four birds may be carried in cages one and two, and not more than two birds can be carried in cages three and four. Only one bird can be carried in cage five. No more than the prescribed maximum number of birds may be carried in cages six and seven.

5.2 Permanent housing

(a) Cage Design

In the design of any bird cage, the ratio between the lengths of the two longest straight lines which can be described on the floor of the cage and at right angles to each other shall not exceed 4 : 1 unless the shorter of those two lines is at least 900mm long. The length of this line should be at least twice the span of the wings of the largest bird to be kept in the cage.

(b) Cage construction

Any cage should be constructed of strong impervious materials which can be thoroughly washed and sterilised.

If floors are covered with absorbent litter (sand, etc.), the material should be totally removed at least twice a year and all floors, including natural soil, should at all times be kept in a clean and sanitary condition.

Cages should be maintained in clean condition at all times. In small cages a removable tray may be an advantage.

Cages shall not be stacked together in such a way that good ventilation is impaired.

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

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.

Sufficient food and watering points should be provided and kept supplied with clean, fresh food and water so that every bird has free access to them.

Young birds that are not self sufficient are 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.

(c) Permanent indoor housing

- Permanent 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 shall consist of a metal grille, netting or mesh to provide adequate ventilation.
- Floors should be of an impervious material. Suspended wire cages should be hung over a floor that can be kept in a clean and sanitary condition.
- Indoor cage dimensions (Table 3)

Table 3. Indoor cage dimensions

Size of bird (approximate length)	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Number of birds	Minimum height (cm)	Increase floor area for each additional bird (sq cm)
100mm (10cm) For example, for zebra, Cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, fife canaries	1000	1	34	500
200mm (20cm) For example, for neophemas, budgerigars, Yorkshire canaries, red crested cardinal finches, lorikeets (except rainbow and red collared)	1600	1	34	800
300mm (30cm) For example, for rosellas, cockatiels, rainbow lorikeets, bronze-wing pigeons	5000	1	90	2500
400mm (40cm) For example, for king, princess, Indian ringneck and superb parrots, galahs, long billed corellas	10000	1	90	5000
500mm (50cm) For example, for sulphur crested cockatoos	15000	1	150	7500

Cages with a floor area exceeding 20,000 sq cm must be a minimum height of 150cm 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.

(d) Permanent outdoor housing

- Any aviary or cage which is exposed to the weather should be constructed in such a way that every bird contained in the aviary/cage is able at all times to perch or roost in a place which is sheltered from the wind, rain and direct rays of the sun; whether by solid construction or cladding of the roof and walls of the aviary/cage, or by roosts covered by dense vegetation within the aviary/cage.

- If protection is to be provided substantially by the solid construction or cladding of roof and walls, at least one-third of their total area should be covered; including a continuous area of three walls forming a shelter to provide the best protection against prevailing winds.
- At least three-quarters of the area of one wall should be constructed from open weave mesh.
- The minimum dimension in any direction of any outdoor aviary/cage should not be less than 600mm.
- The minimum height to the top of any aviary/cage should not be less than 1.5m above ground level to allow birds to escape harassment by predators.
- Outdoor aviary/cage dimensions (Table 4).

Table 4. Outdoor cage dimensions

Size of bird (approximate length)	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Number of birds	Minimum height (cm)	Increase floor area for each additional bird (sq cm)
100mm (10cm) For example, for zebra, Cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, fife canaries	3700	1	60	1800
200mm (20cm) For example, for neophemas, budgerigars, Yorkshire canaries, red crested cardinal finches, lorikeets (except rainbow and red collared)	7200	1	60	3600
300mm (30cm) For example, for rosellas, cockatiels, rainbow lorikeets, bronze-wing pigeons	10000	1	90	5000
400mm (40cm) For example, for king, princess, Indian ringneck and superb parrots, galahs, long billed corellas	15000	1	90	7500
500mm (50cm) For example, for sulphur crested cockatoos	25000	1	150	12500

Aviaries/cages with floor area exceeding 20,000 sq cm must be of a minimum height of 150cm 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.

Exemption (Budgerigar Breeders). A minimum floor area of 600sq cm should be provided for each bird where budgerigars of one sex are housed together during the non-breeding season. The total floor area of this aviary/cage should not be less than 20,000 sq cm.

(e) Display cages - commercial/retail establishments

This section applies to the housing of birds in commercial and retail outlets, such as pet shops.

- 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.
- Cages should be constructed such that the ratio between the lengths of the two longest straight lines which can be described on the floor of the cage and at right angles to each other should not exceed 4:1, unless the shorter of these two lines is at least 900 mm long. The length of this line should be at least twice the span of the wings of the largest bird to be kept in the 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.
- Wooden perches should be provided of a diameter and length to enable every bird in the cage to perch comfortably. Perches should not unduly 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 bird.
- Sufficient food and watering points should be provided and kept supplied with clean, fresh food and water suitable for the bird in the cage so that every bird has free access to them.
- Birds of different species or incompatible birds of the same species should not be placed together in a display cage unless the cage conforms with the requirements for permanent indoor/outdoor cages.
- 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 on the husbandry of caged birds should be followed.
- No person shall sell, offer for sale or trade any juvenile bird that is not fully feathered and self sufficient.
- Any holder of a Protected Wildlife Dealer's Licence or any commercial dealer in pets, shall, at the time of sale of a bird provide the purchaser with a printed sheet which outlines the basic care necessary for that kind of bird in relation to regulation sizes of permanent cages, food, water, cleanliness and special habits or characteristics.
- If after 30 days a bird 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. The birds shall remain in this cage for at least 14 days before being returned to a display cage

Display cages should conform to the specifications below (Table 5), or to the specifications set down for permanent indoor/outdoor housing (Table 6)

Table 5. Indoor display cage dimensions.

Size of bird (approximate length)	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Number of birds	Minimum height (cm)	Increase floor area for each additional bird (sq cm)
100mm (10cm) For example, for zebra, Cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, fife canaries	900	6	30	150
200mm (20cm) For example, for neophemas, budgerigars, Yorkshire canaries, red crested cardinal finches, lorikeets (except rainbow and red collared)	1600	10	40	160
300mm (30cm) For example, for rosellas, cockatiels, rainbow lorikeets, bronze-wing pigeons	6000	10	100	600
400mm (40cm) For example, for king, princess, Indian ringneck and superb parrots, galahs, long billed corellas	6000	4	100	1000
500mm (50cm) For example, for sulphur crested cockatoos	6000	3	100	2000

Table 6. Outside display cages

Size of bird (approximate length)	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Number of birds	Minimum height (cm)	Increase floor area for each additional bird (sq cm)
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Size of bird (approximate length)	Minimum floor area (sq cm)	Number of birds	Minimum height (cm)	Increase floor area for each additional bird (sq cm)
100mm (10cm) For example, for zebra, Cuban, double bar, orange breasted waxbill finches, fife canaries	15000	100	180	150
200mm (20cm) For example, for neophemas, budgerigars, Yorkshire canaries, red crested cardinal finches, lorikeets (except rainbow and red collared)	15000	75	180	200
300mm (30cm) For example, for rosellas, cockatiels, rainbow lorikeets, bronze-wing pigeons	60000	100	180	600
400mm (40cm) For example, for king, princess, Indian ringneck and superb parrots, galahs, long billed corellas	60000	40	180	1000
500mm (50cm) For example, for sulphur crested cockatoos	60000	30	160	2000

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