

**Code of
Practice—Aviculture**
*Nature Conservation
Act 1992*

Prepared by: Department of Environment and Science

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Human Rights compatibility

The Department of Environment and Science is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights. Under the [Human Rights Act 2019](#), the department has an obligation to act and make decisions in a way that is compatible with human rights and, when making a decision, to give proper consideration to human rights. When acting or making a decision under this code of practice, officers must comply with that obligation (refer to [Comply with Human Rights Act](#)).

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1. About this code

This code identifies minimum acceptable standards for the keeping and use of protected native birds in Queensland. It also outlines some of the conditions for the conduct of persons involved in the keeping and use of protected native birds in Queensland. Requirements concerning captive husbandry and transport can be found in the Table of Contents are outlined.

This code is intended as a resource for recreational keepers but may be useful to many types of people, including hobbyists, individuals concerned with animal welfare and researchers.

This code should be read in conjunction with the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (the Act), the *Nature Conservation (Animals) Regulation 2020* (the Animals Regulation), the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001* and any other relevant legislation.

A person must not take, keep or use a protected animal unless the person is an authorised person or the taking is authorised under the Act. Licence holders should make sure they are familiar with the relevant sections in the Act and the Regulations.

Matters such as cruelty, duty of care to animals and the humane killing of animals are covered in the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*. These are issues of importance to persons keeping animals in captivity.

People who keep protected native birds also need to consider other laws, including those made by local government that may deal with the keeping and use of animals. Local government may still limit the number of animals you may keep. If you are uncertain about the laws that apply in your local area you should contact your local council.

This code is based on the knowledge and technology available at the time of publication. To maintain high standards of animal welfare and avoid personal injury, it is essential that a commonsense approach prevail at all times when dealing with birds.

The basic behavioural, anatomical and physiological needs of various birds are considered in this code.

The importance of knowledge of the particular species involved cannot be overemphasised. A sound knowledge of particular species enables the early detection of signs of distress and disease, so that the cause can be identified, and prompt, appropriate remedial action taken.

The basic requirements for the wellbeing of native animals are:

- a. appropriate and sufficient food and water to sustain health and vitality
- b. sufficient area with appropriate environmental features to maintain their wellbeing and in which they can exhibit normal behaviour
- c. protection from predation
- d. protection from injury and disease, including providing veterinary treatment
- e. protection from extremes of climate, particularly when young or injured
- f. protection from pain, distress and suffering.

2. Birds of Queensland

General information:

This code is designed to provide basic information on the requirements of captive native birds but does not provide specific information for each of the species that can be kept in captivity.

Although the use of scientific names has been kept to a minimum in the code, it is sometimes necessary and often convenient to refer to an animal by its scientific name. Many species of Australian birds have one or more recognised common names and it is only by referring to the scientific name that it can be accurately identified.

3. Aims of aviculture

The aims of aviculture are the:

- a. breeding and keeping of birds in a captive environment
- b. acquisition of knowledge of the biological aspects of bird species through the study of birds in captivity
- c. maintenance of genetic integrity through sound captive breeding management
- d. conservation of various species and particularly those whose numbers are decreasing, both in the wild and in aviary situations.

4. Purpose of code

The purpose of this Code is to assist in:

- a. providing the minimum standards for the safe housing and maintenance of native birds in captivity, which ensure that the likelihood of escape, injury or illness to the birds is minimised
- b. the promotion of the understanding of the health and nutritional requirements of all birds
- c. compliance with any legislative requirements of the State or the Commonwealth.

5. Captive husbandry

General information

This code does not provide keepers with information about the husbandry and breeding of all Australian birds.

Keepers, and any person who wishes to become involved in aviculture, are encouraged to contact their local aviculture society to learn more about the practice of aviculture, including obtaining specialist advice about the breeding of birds.

Diet

General information:

A varied diet should be supplied that, given the limitations of seasonal availability, alternates regularly between fresh fruit, vegetables and seeding grasses appropriate to the bird species being fed. Suitable pelleted food can also be used.

Where a specific species requires a special diet, the bird should be provided with an appropriate diet when seasonally available or for breeding purposes. Some examples are:

- lorikeets and other nectar feeders require a specialised diet that can be purchased commercially
- larger species of cockatoo should be provided with insect larvae or grubs
- some finches require live insects when breeding
- fruit pigeons will benefit from being provided with native fruits.

Food and supplies should be stored in a manner that prevents deterioration or spoilage.

Grit and calcium blocks/cuttlefish should be provided regularly to those species that may require it.

Minimum standard:

Adequate food suitable for the particular species of bird must be available at times when normal feeding activity would be undertaken in the wild. The advice of an experienced aviculturist or veterinarian must be sought if uncertain of a bird's requirements.

Food containers must be constructed in such a manner as to avoid injury to the birds, and placed in a position to avoid contamination.

Water

Minimum standard:

Clean water must be available at all times with the containers where possible placed away from direct sunlight.

Food and/or water containers must be kept clean and must not be placed under perches or in areas where they could become contaminated with faeces (droppings).

Quarantine

General information:

Ensure the best avian health and quarantine practices are implemented. It is recommended that any person wishing to acquire birds for the first time should learn as much as possible about the species before acquiring them. Relevant information can be sought from local bird clubs or experienced birdkeepers.

Newly acquired birds should be quarantined for a period of 21 days before release into aviaries or cages. It is important to seek advice from an experienced bird keeper or veterinarian if a bird appears to be sick.

Birds should be released into aviaries or cages in the early part of the day to allow time for the bird to adjust to its new environment.

Health

General information:

Ill health or stress may affect birds in a variety of ways. Indications that may require urgent attention include:

- changes in appearance of droppings

- marked changes in food or water consumption
- changes in behaviour
- absence of preening
- changes in appearance or posture
- raised, ruffled feathers
- changes in weight
- enlargement of organs or swellings
- vomiting, injury or bleeding
- dull and lacklustre eyes
- discharge from nostrils, eyes or beak.

Birdkeepers are urged to know the differences between healthy and unwell behaviour of the species being kept.

The advice of a veterinary surgeon should be obtained if an illness persists or if several birds become ill in a short time.

Minimum standard:

Sick or injured birds must be isolated to facilitate observation and treatment and prevent further damage or spread of infection.

Caged birds affected by internal and external parasites causing health problems must be treated appropriately. Seek advice from an experienced bird keeper or veterinarian for treatment.

6. Housing

General information:

The individual requirements of the species need to be met by providing shelter sites, perches, feeding areas and access to water within the cage.

Common to all good cage design is the recognition that access to all parts of the cage is necessary for cleaning. Good visibility also contributes to good husbandry as it allows the health of occupants to be regularly assessed and any problems recognised early.

Appropriate cage ‘furniture’ is vital to the wellbeing of birds and providing suitable furniture requires the keeper to have a good knowledge of the species’ particular requirements.

Minimum standards:

Cages must be escape-proof and exclude predators. The requirements for indoor and outdoor cages vary. However, generally cages or enclosures must provide the following things:

- protection from the weather (all cages must 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 sunlight)
- protection from predators (whether native or exotic)
- opportunity for all birds to minimise stress caused by other birds, animals and people
- sufficient space, perches, nesting areas and nesting material
- feed and water stations
- perches of varied size and shape made from natural products

- a non-toxic environment (aviaries must be constructed of non-toxic materials, or be treated in such a way that the materials are rendered non-toxic)
- aviary/cage interiors that are free from obstacles that pose a high risk of injury and free from sharp edges and points.

Types of housing recognised as suitable for birds are:

1. Permanent:
 - i. outdoor aviaries/cages
 - ii. indoor aviaries/cages
 - iii. breeding cabinets
 - iv. suspended aviaries.
2. Temporary:
 - i. transportation cages
 - ii. show cages
 - iii. display cages.

Recommended minimum dimensions for inside and outdoor housing are set out in Schedules 1 and 2.

Show cages

General information:

Show cages are required to meet the relevant accommodation standard as set down by the Show Standards pertaining to each particular species of bird.

All clubs or organisations should have a publicised 'Conditions of Sale' which further sets out the conditions under which the welfare of all animals offered for sale or on display will be maintained. A model 'Conditions of Sale' should be available from your local bird club or organisation.

Proximity of the public during a show is at the discretion of the stewards. Adequate and regular supervision of the birds is essential.

Minimum standards:

As with all cages, appropriate sustenance either in containers or on the floor must be provided. Water must be placed in containers at appropriate positions and changed when necessary to minimise soiling.

Stressed, injured or sick birds must be removed immediately from the show bench and appropriate action taken to alleviate their problem.

Display cages

General information:

Display cages refer to commercial establishments keeping or using birds.

Minimum standards:

Display cages must be constructed of strong material that can be washed and sanitised. These cages must be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition.

Incompatible birds must not be housed together. Birds found to be fighting with or harassing other birds

in the same cage must be separated immediately.

Display cages must be placed in a position that is free from draughts and heat. Sufficient perches must be provided to allow every bird in the cage to perch comfortably. Catching and transferring birds must be done in the least stressful manner possible.

Appropriate food and water must be provided at all times.

7. Transportation

Containers

General information:

Transportation of birds can cause stress to the animal. Careful planning to minimise the impact on the animal should be considered before consigning animals for transport and commencing the journey.

The main principle of safe transport for animals is to minimise the period the animal spends in transit or in its transit container.

Minimum Standards:

Incompatible species must not be transported in the same container. Even paired birds if currently compatible may need to be separated.

All containers used for transport must not only be labeled with the consignor and consignee's details but be labeled to provide care and handling advice while in transit. Common labels include 'KEEP OUT OF DIRECT SUNLIGHT', 'THIS WAY UP', 'AVOID TEMPERATURE EXTREMES' and 'LIVE BIRDS'.

Containers must:

- a. be enclosed or covered to restrict visual stimulus
- b. provide access for visual inspection of the birds within and appropriate ventilation to suit the species being transported
- c. be of a suitable construction to suit the species being carried and be able to withstand general handling
- d. provide sufficient space to allow the birds to move, although not so large as to allow a bird to injure itself
- e. provide appropriate food and water (or food with a high water content such as apple or celery) if the birds are to be transported for more than 4 hours
- f. not be packed together in such a manner as to obstruct good air circulation between them
- g. be constructed of a material to allow birds a secure footing. The floor should be sealed and covered with a non-toxic absorbent material to stop the escape of urine or faeces
- h. not be left exposed to extremes of weather.

Any carry cage being consigned unattended must carry a written statement which is legibly printed and contains the following information:

the following details for the person who sent the animal and the person to whom the animal is sent:

- a. name and address
- b. if the person holds a wildlife authority — the number of the authority.
- c. the animal's common name or, if the animal does not have a common name, the animal's

scientific name

- d. if there is more than 1 animal in the container — how many animals are in the container
- e. if the animal is dangerous — that the animal is dangerous.

8. Keeping of waterfowl

General information:

There are two main categories of waterfowl kept in captivity:

- a. the grazing waterfowl that do not spend a great length of time in the water
- b. the diving and dabbling waterfowl that require access to fresh water.

Minimum standards:

Waterfowl kept in captivity must be kept in an area that is adequately landscaped and of sufficient size to avoid soiling, pollution and ill health. These areas should be cleaned regularly.

Bathing water must be provided via a pond arrangement (or equivalent) or in a container that allows the species to bathe appropriately. Where a container is used it must be separate from those used for drinking. Fresh drinking water must be provided daily.

9. Records

General information:

The Animals Regulation sets out the requirements for records that must be kept by the holders of standard, advanced and specialised licences. The form in which the records must be kept is either a record book or an electronic record system approved by the chief executive.

In addition to the requirements listed below, it is recommended that keepers retain the following records:

- recording notes and observations on behaviour and health are vital parts of captive husbandry, enabling a chronological record of any patterns or problems that occur
- the place of origin of the individual, when the specimen was acquired, species name, sex, age if known, any distinguishing features and general condition. Further notes on feeding, fasting, social interaction, breeding and any other aspects of behaviour can be made.

Minimum standards:

There is certain information that must be recorded electronically or in a record book, including:

- the common and scientific name of species purchased or sold
- date and method of acquisition or disposal
- name, address and wildlife authority number (if applicable) of seller/buyer
- tag or implant number (if applicable)
- movement advice or permit number (if applicable) and
- a running tally of numbers in and out.

Keepers must also record any birth (once the bird has fledged and becomes independent), death or transaction involving birds kept under the licence. This information must be recorded electronically or entered into a record book.

10. General

General information:

Purchasers of birds should be provided with guidelines on the basic care necessary for the particular species of bird by the vendor. The vendor should provide information on a suitable diet and basic care necessary for that particular species of bird and the purchaser should seek out information to enable the purchaser to provide the bird/s with a correctly balanced diet to maintain health and wellbeing.

The application of rings for identification purposes requires care. For adult birds select an appropriately sized split ring that will fit closely but moves freely on the leg. For young or juvenile birds closed rings are recommended. Microchips are a useful means of identification and should be considered. Aviculturists are encouraged to contact an experienced birdkeeper or veterinarian for advice regarding which method of identification most suits their needs.

Minimum standards:

A person must not buy or sell a juvenile bird that is not feeding itself to a point of self sufficiency.

Tethering of birds by any means must not be done in any way other than by a body harness. Restraint by body harness must be closely monitored.

Trimming of overgrown beaks, excessively long claws or wings must only be carried out by an experienced birdkeeper or veterinarian.

Adult birds must not be rung with closed rings.

11. Euthanasia

General information:

There may be times when the most appropriate treatment for an animal is euthanasia. Situations where an animal may require euthanasia include:

- where the animal is suffering to such an extent that it is unreasonable to keep it alive;
- where the animal is injured or diseased to a point where it can not reasonably be expected to recover; and
- where no appropriate treatment for the animal is available.

Euthanasia should be performed by a veterinarian or by a person skilled and experienced in the euthanasia of birds.

Minimum standards:

Whatever the reason for euthanasia, it must be done in such a way to ensure that the animal experiences as little pain as possible. Euthanasia must never be undertaken by an inexperienced person without supervision.

The first and most preferable method is by lethal injection. This can only be performed by veterinarians

or a person trained and authorised for the use of barbiturates.

Other acceptable methods include, decapitation, cervical dislocation (birds under 3 kg), and carbon dioxide gassing.

Car exhaust gases must not be used to euthanase birds.

12. Definitions

For the purposes of this Code of Practice, the following terms have the meanings as indicated:

"the Act" means the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and includes the *Nature Conservation (Animals) Regulation 2020* and any Conservation Plans relating to Aviculture;

"aviculture" means the breeding and keeping of protected native birds in captivity for personal satisfaction or hobby purposes.

"bird" means a bird that is lawfully bred, kept or used in accordance with the requirements of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*;

"indigenous" has the same meaning as "indigenous to Australia" as contained in the Act;

"minimum standards" means the minimum legal requirements that must be complied with to ensure the likelihood of escape, injury or ill-health is minimised.

"the Commonwealth" means the Commonwealth of Australia including its External Territories; "the State" means the State of Queensland.

Disclaimer

While this document has been prepared with care, it contains general information and does not profess to offer legal, professional or commercial advice. The Queensland Government accepts no liability for any external decisions or actions taken on the basis of this document. Persons external to the Department of Environment and Science should satisfy themselves independently and by consulting their own professional advisors before embarking on any proposed course of action.

The Code of Practice for Aviculture details cage construction, and licence holders should be conversant with this Code. In the design of any bird cage, the ratio between the lengths of the two longest straight lines that 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 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.

Aviaries/cages with floor area exceeding 2,000,000sq mm (20,000sq cm or 2sq m) must be of a minimum height of at least 1800mm 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.

Schedule 1

Minimum indoor or suspended cage dimensions

| Size of bird (approx. length in mm) | Minimum floor area (sq mm) | Number of birds | Minimum height (mm) | Increased floor area for each additional bird (sq mm) |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------|---------------------|---|
| 100 | 100,000 (1000sq cm) .1 sq m | 2 | 340 | 100,000 (1000sq cm) |
| 200 | 160,000 (1600sq cm) .16 sq m | 2 | 340 | 100,000 (1000sq cm) |
| 300 | 500,000 (5000sq cm) .5sq m | 2 | 900 | 250,000 (2500sq cm) |
| 400 | 1,000,000 (10,000 sq cm or 1sq m) | 2 | 900 | 600,000 (6000sq cm) |
| 500 | 2,250,000 (22,500sq cm or 2.25sq m) | 2 | 1,500 | 850,000 (8500sq cm) |
| 900 | 4,000,000 (40,000sq cm or 4sq m) | 2 | 1,500 | 1,400,000 (14,000sq cm or 1.4sq m) |

Schedule 2

Minimum outdoor aviary dimensions

| Size of bird (approx. length in mm) | Minimum floor area (sq mm) | Number of birds | Minimum height (mm) | Increased floor area for each additional bird (sq mm) |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---|
| 100 | 370,000 (3700sq cm) | 2 | 1,800 | 180,000 (1800sq cm) |
| 200 | 720,000 (7200sq cm) | 2 | 1,800 | 360,000 (3600sq cm) |
| 300 | 1,000,000 (10,000sq cm or 1sq m) | 2 | 1,800 | 500,000 (5000sq cm) |
| 400 | 1,500,000 (15,000sq cm or 1.5sq m) | 2 | 1,800 | 750,000 (7500sq cm) |
| 500 | 2,500,000 (25,000sq cm or 2.5sq m) | 2 | 1,800 | 1,250,000 (12,500sq cm or 1.25sq m) |
| 900 | 5,000,000 (50,000sq cm or 5sq m) | 2 | 1,800 | 2,500,000 (25,000sq cm or 2.5sq m) |