



Welfare of animals kept on allotments

briefing on the key issues from the Public Affairs team

Background

The following information has been produced to assist local authority allotment officers, allotment societies and allotment holders to have a better understanding of the animal welfare issues they should consider with regard to their work in regulating allotment use. These guidelines may also be useful to householders wishing to keep livestock in their gardens (notwithstanding planning, noise, nuisance and other environmental considerations).

Where animals are being kept on allotments, the RSPCA advises that the following guidelines be followed to help to ensure that animal welfare is safeguarded. Animals must not be kept on allotments, or anywhere else, unless their welfare needs can be provided for (as set out in the Animal Welfare Act 2006).

Allotments and the Animal Welfare Act 2006.

In view of the specific needs and the sometimes complex legislative requirements covering the keeping of pigs, camelids (llamas and alpacas), cattle, equines and sheep, the RSPCA believes that it would be extremely difficult to care properly for these species within the confines of an average allotment, and hence, these animals should not be kept at such premises.

Under section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, a person responsible for any vertebrate animal must take all reasonable steps to ensure they meet all of its welfare needs to the extent required by good practice. This applies to both farm and pet animals and includes but is not limited to:

- **Need for a suitable diet**

Continuous ready access to an adequate supply of clean, fresh drinking water. Provision of feed of a type and form appropriate to the age, condition and species of animal, and which is fed in sufficient quantities, and sufficiently frequently, to maintain them in good health and to satisfy their nutritional needs. Such foodstuffs should be properly protected from rodents and other wild animals. If farm animals are kept on an allotment, storage and removal of manure must be arranged to prevent contamination of watercourses or other nuisance.

- **Need for a suitable environment**

Continuous access to shelter, free from sharp edges, protrusions etc which could cause injury, and including a clean, dry, well-bedded lying or roosting (for poultry) area large enough to allow all animals using the shelter to lie down (or roost) together at the same time.

- **Need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns**

Additional space and a suitable environment for exercise, feeding, dunging and the expression of natural behaviours (which vary between species - see annexes).

- **Need to be housed with, or apart from other animals**

Animals should be kept with suitable companions of the same species, or apart from other animals, where appropriate.

- **Need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease**

Competent care and management from those with the knowledge and skill to ensure the animals' wellbeing as well as regular, frequent inspection (at least daily, and more frequently for vulnerable animals such as those that are ill, old or very young) of each animal by a competent person. Suitable steps should be taken to protect the animals on allotments from other animals.

Appropriate preventative and/or curative veterinary treatment available at all times. Vaccinations, should be carried out by a veterinary surgeon, who should also advise on worming. Foot trimming of goats should be carried out either by the vet, or some other competent person.

Take action now

There are a number of steps that local authorities and allotment societies can take to deal with the keeping of animals on allotments:

1. **The local authority should, in conjunction with local allotment societies, draw up an *animals on allotments* policy which states which species of animals may be kept and how many as well as the standards of care which are expected.**

For example, allotment holders should comply with specified standards of care such as those laid out in Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) codes of practice. The policy should also outline the procedures to follow if an allotment holder wishes to keep animals. The policy should also state on which sites animals may be kept and which sites are not suitable.

2. **Such a policy should include plans to deal with emergencies e.g. fire, flood or the need for emergency slaughter/killing.**

The floods in the winter of 2013 demonstrated how important it is to have such a plan as the RSPCA was involved in several rescues of livestock from allotment sites. Thought should be given as to an emergency containment area for the animals.

3. **Allotment holders who wish to keep livestock should be able to demonstrate minimum standards of experience/training before being allowed to keep farm animals.**

There are a number of agricultural colleges that offer training for stock-keepers. The Society would strongly recommend that people who intend to keep livestock arrange to attend some courses, or gain practical experience with a knowledgeable person who understands livestock behaviour. Such a person should be keeping animals in a way that enables them to perform normal behaviours, maintains them in good health and minimises disease problems. Anyone who keeps animals must have regular contact with their veterinary surgeon who can advise them of any necessary actions needed to protect the health of the animals.

4. **Local authorities may wish to make it a condition of the tenancy agreement that owners have suitable insurance in case their animal strays and causes damage or injury as well as having a right of access (as well as a right to give the police and other relevant bodies access).**

5. All equines must have a valid horse passport which requires compulsory microchipping.
6. Any allotment holder keeping animals should supply full contact details with a 24-hour phone number in case of emergencies.

Animal owners should supply details of a second contact should they be unavailable. Animal owners should also be encouraged to pass on these details to neighbouring allotment holders who can alert them in case of an emergency. An emergency contact number should be displayed prominently at the entrance to the site for use by the emergency services or RSPCA.

7. Suitable arrangements must be made for care of the animals whilst the owner is on holiday or away.
8. Either a designated person from the allotment society or a local authority officer, with suitable farm animal knowledge and experience, should carry out pre-arranged and spot checks on the animals kept on the allotment site.
9. Consideration should be given to additional security measures on sites where animals are kept. Animals should be prevented from escaping.

This is particularly important on sites which may be vulnerable to vandalism or theft. It is a violation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act to release or allow a non-native species to escape into the wild. This may be particularly applicable to small non-native fowl or game species (e.g bobwhite quail or rock partridge) that may be kept.

10. If a local authority feels that it is not able to ensure these basic standards, for whatever reason, it should expressly prohibit the keeping of any animals on its allotment sites.
11. Local authorities may also wish to consider other measures to protect animal welfare on its sites.

Other useful information

There are a number of specific issues local authorities and allotment societies should be aware of and these include:

- **Dogs in hot cars**

Free *dogs die in hot cars* posters, fliers and adhesive warning notices are available for display in allotment car parks reminding allotment holders not to leave their dogs in cars in hot weather whilst visiting the allotment site.

- **Lethal litter**

Allotment holders should also be reminded of the hazards caused to wildlife and other animals such as domestic cats by dangerous waste, litter, nylon rope, netting and chemicals. An RSPCA lethal litter poster and leaflet is available.

- **Rearing animals for meat**

Allotment holders thinking about rearing farm animals for meat, must be aware of the strict laws covering killing and meat hygiene. We strongly recommend that allotment holders don't try to kill animals themselves as they could cause severe suffering, which would be a serious offence under the law.

Further information is available from;

- Humane Slaughter Association
- Defra
- Food Standards Agency

- **Ragwort**

Owners of animals, especially horses and cattle should be aware of the danger of ragwort poisoning. This can be either from the live plant, or from the dead plant either pulled and left to wither or in hay. The landowner should also be aware of legislation requiring its control. There is a statutory Code of Practice on preventing the spread of ragwort. For further details: Defra advisory leaflets and information on the Weeds Act 1959, the Ragwort Control Act 2003 and the Code of Practice - available from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69264/pb9840-cop-ragwort.pdf

Allotment holders and local authority staff should be encouraged to contact the RSPCA for either proactive advice on animal welfare issues or to report any concerns about animal welfare, such as neglect, abandonment or cruelty. Allotment sites may also be used for illegal activity such as wild bird trapping or snaring.

Free information cards are available giving the RSPCA's national cruelty and advice line: 0300 1234 999.

For further information please contact Lenny Rolles at politicalaffairs@rspca.org.uk

Annex 1: specific needs for different species

GOATS

Legislation

In the UK there are strict laws governing the identification, registration, transportation and movement of goats. Further information can be found on the Defra website:

<https://www.gov.uk/sheep-and-goats-identification-registration-and-movement>

Water

It is essential to ensure goats have continuous access to clean, fresh drinking water at all times. Drinkers/bowls should be cleaned regularly. In cold weather, care should be taken to prevent the water source from icing-up. Should this occur, the ice should be broken manually; chemicals that prevent the build-up of ice or break it up once formed should **never** be used.

Food

Goats are selective eaters, and will not consume fodder that has become soiled in any way (e.g. hay that has fallen on the ground). They are browsing animals, and should be given a hayrack with a lid of a suitable height to eat from. Hay nets, commonly used for horses, should never be used, as goats can become dangerously entangled in them. General dietary needs vary depending on the time of year, age and stage of production cycle (e.g. growing animals, pregnant, lactating), and the amount of grazing available, but the diet must always contain adequate amounts of seasonal greenstuffs and hay, with or without additional concentrates as necessary. Long fibrous food is needed in order for the goat's rumen to work efficiently. It is important to be aware of which plants are poisonous to goats, such as yew, honeysuckle, laurel, and rhododendron.

Social behaviour

Goats are social herd animals that require the company of other goats. They do not cope well with being kept singly and provision should therefore be made to allow at least two goats, who get on well, to live together.

Entire (uncastrated) males

Uncastrated males are often not suitable for keeping on allotments or as pets. They develop a strong odour, frequently spray urine, may make a great deal of noise during the mating season (Autumn and winter), may display undesirable sexual behaviours and can be boisterous. Males that have been castrated before they become sexually mature (wethers) can be easier to manage, particularly castrated males of the smaller breeds such as pygmy goats. However, castrated males of the larger breeds are still powerful animals that can be difficult to handle.

Shelter

Goats must always have ready access to shelter at all times, whatever the season. They cannot tolerate wet conditions (as they have no lanolin in their hair) and will always try to seek out a dry shelter in bad weather. This could either be the main goat house or effective temporary shelter. The shelter should be warm, dry and provide a bedded lying area and be large enough to allow all the goats to shelter at the same time.

Housing

The goat house should be warm, dry, draught-free and well-ventilated. It should be of a sufficient size, suitable construction, contain suitable facilities and allow all the goats to rest and feed comfortably. As a

guide at least 2 to 2.5 square metres of space per goat should be provided in the house.

Outdoor area

In addition to shelter/housing, the animals should be provided with a well-maintained exercise and/or grazing area. If grazing is being relied on as a major source of feed during the summer months, each goat must be provided with at least a quarter of an acre. If the diet is to be well supplemented with plenty of hay and greenstuffs, less space is required, though around 8.5 square metres should be provided for each animal when goats are kept in small groups.

Tethering and fencing

Goats must not be tethered. Tethered animals are in danger of becoming entangled or even being strangled, are vulnerable to attacks by passing animals such as dogs, and may develop sores/injuries under the collar or head collar. Areas where goats are kept must, therefore, be properly fenced instead. Fencing needs to be strong, safe and durable, it should be high and secure enough to prevent the goats from escaping and should be well maintained and provide protection against wild animals.

Milking

Lactating goats must be milked twice a day, every day, by someone competent to do so.

Health

In general, a healthy goat has a good appetite, a strong, glossy coat, clear bright eyes and will move freely and easily and be interested and alert. Any signs of disease or injury should be treated immediately with the advice of a veterinary surgeon. Health problems to look out for include:

- **Diarrhoea**
Diarrhoea (scouring) is a common ailment in goats and can result from a variety of causes such as sudden changes in diet, internal parasites, the ingestion of poisonous plants or substances, and more serious microbial infections.
- **Lameness**
Goats can be prone to foot problems, and routine examination and maintenance of hooves is essential. When necessary, the feet should be trimmed by a trained, competent person using the correct equipment. Any lameness, particularly involving infection, should be treated immediately.
- **Mastitis**
An infection of the udder that may be indicated by factors such as heat in the udder, changes in udder texture or blood/deposits in the milk. The condition must be treated immediately.
- **Parasites**
It is important to discuss a worming regime with your veterinarian. Lice and mite (mange) infestations are a common problem in goats. 'Flystrike' can also occur, particularly during the summer months, when blowflies lay their eggs on the goats, which subsequently hatch out as maggots.

CHICKENS

Anyone keeping 50 or more birds is required by Defra to register with the Great Britain Poultry Register, in order to help the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency get in touch in the event of any disease outbreaks. The RSPCA highly recommends that anyone with any number of birds, even two or three, registers in order to receive any disease alerts and guidance.

Water

Chickens must have access to clean and fresh water at all times. In cold weather, care should be taken to prevent drinking water from icing-up. Should this occur, the ice should be broken manually; chemicals that prevent the build-up of ice or break it up once formed should **never** be used.

Drinkers should be cleaned regularly and water should not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition. Drinkers that prevent young chicks climbing in and drowning should be used. As the birds become older and require more water, alternative drinkers can be introduced and those drinkers used previously should be removed gradually over a number of days. If new chickens are introduced to the allotment, they must be provided with facilities to which they are already accustomed, as chickens do not like to drink from unfamiliar drinkers.

Food

Chickens will spend much of their day scratching and foraging for small seeds, roots and insects. However, they will need additional food, which is suitable for their age and breed, to provide a balanced diet. If feed is provided outside, it should be sheltered to keep it clean and dry. Feed dispensers should be cleaned regularly and precautions taken to prevent infestation and contamination of the feed. Avoid attracting rodents and wild birds by, for example, cleaning up any spilt feed. Chickens must also always have access to insoluble grit (e.g. hard flint grit) to aid digestion. If the birds are kept on a grassed area, the grass should not be allowed to become too long, as, if eaten, long strands can become impacted in the crop, making it difficult for the birds to digest food.

Laying hens

As female birds (hens) mature they will begin to lay eggs and a layers' mash or pellet feed should be provided to ensure a balanced diet. Calcium supplements, such as oyster shell, can also be included in the diet. Hens will naturally prefer to find a quiet, secluded place to lay their eggs. Therefore, hens should be provided with individual, enclosed nest boxes. The boxes should be draught-free and lined with plenty of clean, dry and comfortable nesting material, such as straw or wood shavings.

Housing

Chickens should be provided with warm, dry and well-ventilated housing. Adequate ventilation is very important, and while it is important to keep the birds warm, there must also be good air circulation inside the housing. The floor should be covered with a suitable substrate, such as wood shavings or straw, which must be kept dry and friable and therefore topped-up or replaced when necessary. Chickens like to dustbathe and preen their feathers, therefore a suitable material, such as wood shavings, should also be supplied for this activity. Feed and water facilities should be provided within the house.

Owners must ensure that there is plenty of space for the birds to move around easily and perform their natural behaviours within the house, this will depend on the size and number of chickens and the layout of facilities. It is important not to overstock birds as doing so may increase aggression and the potential for conflict.

Chickens will naturally seek a raised position to roost at dusk, which is an anti-predator behaviour, and should therefore be provided with perching facilities. Perches should be wooden and approximately 3-5cm in width with rounded edges, to enable the birds to grip them properly. They should provide enough perching space for all the chickens to roost at the same time. However, there must be enough space either side of the perch for hens to get up and down from them without injuring themselves. As a guide, chickens may require about 15cm of perching space each, but this will depend on the size of the birds. The height of the perches will have to be adjusted according to the age, size and breed of birds being kept.

In smaller houses, a greater proportion of birds tend to go out onto the range area during the day, and only use the housing at night. The entrance to the housing should be wide enough to allow chickens to pass through without difficulty and high enough so that they do not have to crouch down. The accommodation should be cleaned out frequently and disinfected to ensure that there are no harmful parasites that could compromise the birds' health.

Pasture

The outdoor area will require careful management and should be given periods of rest, to allow the ground and grass to recover. It is important that the area is sufficiently large enough to be divided (unless there are alternative grass areas nearby to use) in order to allow the chickens to roam on good pasture every day while other parts are allowed to recover. Again, the birds should have plenty of space to move around easily and perform their natural behaviours, this will depend on the size and number of chickens and the layout of facilities.

Overhead cover should be provided on the range area such as small trees, shrubs and purpose built shelters, to provide the chickens with protection from the sun, bad weather and other animals. It will also help to encourage birds to utilise the full outside area. They should also have access to dry soil where they can dustbathe and forage. Where outside conditions and/or the vegetation is poor or limited, consideration should be given to providing alternative areas for enrichment. The provision of straw will keep birds occupied and encourage them to carry out food searching behaviours. Raised perches on the range area should be considered, as they provide a way for individuals to escape from one another, and birds often use them as a place to preen during the day.

Fencing

Fences should be well maintained and provide appropriate protection against other animals. The design should ensure that the birds cannot escape or become trapped or injured.

Company

We recommend that people keep at least three hens (female chickens) which get on well together. Cockerels (male chickens) should not be kept together, unless they have grown up together and get on well.

Introducing new stock to an existing flock

Mixing of chickens that are unfamiliar with each other should be done carefully. Avoid mixing breeds with substantially different body weights or individuals from the same breed of markedly different sizes as this may result in increased conflict and bullying of smaller birds.

Health

Signs of poor health may include a hunched posture, erect feathers and a reluctance to move. Birds may also be found hiding, for example in corners or amongst housing equipment, and may tuck their head

under their wing. Healthy birds appear alert and interested in their environment, and look ‘bright eyed’ and well hydrated.

Chickens can be susceptible to lice and red mites. Lice, which are 2-3mm in size, can be found all over the body with their eggs being deposited around the shaft of the feather. Red mites are smaller and are more likely to be found on the fixtures within the shed. However, where a more serious infestation exists, they may be seen on birds at the base of the feathers, particularly under the wing.

Worming

Poultry need regular worming, particularly if they are kept on the same ground for a prolonged period (more than a month).

Feather pecking

Feather pecking is where hens peck and pull at the feathers of other hens, sometimes leading to more serious injuries and even cannibalism. It can affect hens in any system, including commercial farming systems and hens kept as pets. Healthy hens, with plenty of space, dust-bathing facilities and opportunity to scratch and forage are less at risk but outbreaks can suddenly occur.

More information can be found in the ‘Laying hen feather cover advice guide’ which can be downloaded from the RSPCA website here:

<http://www.rspca.org.uk/ImageLocator/LocateAsset?asset=document&assetId=1232730923154&mode=prid>

DUCKS AND GEESE

Anyone keeping 50 or more birds is required by Defra to register with the Great Britain Poultry Register, in order to help the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency get in touch in the event of any disease outbreaks. The RSPCA highly recommends that anyone with any number of birds, even two or three, registers in order to receive any disease alerts and guidance.

Most of the provisions and management practices for chickens apply to ducks and geese too. Therefore, please read the relevant sections for chickens in conjunction with the more specific advice for ducks and geese below.

Water

It is important that ducks and geese have a separate supply of clean, fresh drinking water available at all times. Often this is forgotten about when the birds have access to water for other reasons, such as preening and bathing, but this water can become dirty very quickly.

Open water facilities

Both ducks and geese are waterfowl and, in the wild, spend a certain amount of their time in and around water. Both ducks and geese will spend time during the day performing water-related activities, such as preening.

Shallow water facilities, such as troughs, should be provided for the first couple of weeks of the ducks life, as young ducks could drown in deep water until they have developed sufficient waterproofing on their feathers. After this time, facilities that provide the ducks with full body access to deeper water should be provided. Ducks like to be able to stand in water to perform certain behaviours, so a shallower area (about 10cm deep) whereby the birds can stand and fully immerse their heads in water, is important. A deeper

area (about 20 - 30cm deep) enables the birds to perform other water related behaviours, such as swimming.

Water facilities need to be cleaned at least twice every day before refilling with clean water. The area immediately around the water facility needs to be managed well to prevent the area becoming excessively wet. Water facilities should therefore be placed over an area with good drainage that is effective at removing excess water from around the facility. If this is not possible, water facilities should be moved regularly to a new, dry location. Keeping the area around the water facility in good condition is particularly important as ducks like to spend time near, as well as in, water, and will spend time using the water from around the outside of the facility.

Food

Ducks will spend much of their time feeding in and around water, whereas geese will spend far more time grazing and need to be provided with plenty of grass for this reason. However, both ducks and geese should be provided with feed that is suitable for the breed and age of the birds being kept. Feed dispensers should be clean and cleaned out regularly.

Housing

Although ducks and geese like water, they will seek protection and shelter from adverse weather, such as driving rain, direct sunshine and strong winds. Suitable housing should therefore be provided. The RSPCA recommends allowing at least one square metre of floor area in the house for every two/three ducks. Geese should be provided with at least one square metre of floor area per bird. Owners must ensure that there is plenty of room for the birds to move around easily, exercise, stretch their wings and carry out normal behaviours. Ample straw to cover the floor should be provided and replenished as necessary to maintain a clean and dry bedded area.

Nest boxes

Female ducks and geese may seek an isolated position to lay their eggs and prefer somewhere safe and secluded, such as individual nest boxes. Nest boxes should be draught-free and lined with clean, dry, comfortable nesting material (e.g. straw or wood shavings).

Pasture

It is very important that the outdoor area is well managed, especially around the water facilities where the ground can become very wet and dirty. This can be reduced by moving the water facilities on a regular basis to allow the surrounding area to recover, or by placing the water facilities over a well-drained area, such as a bed of shingle, which helps drain away any excess water.

RABBITS

Water

Rabbits normally drink approximately 10ml water per 100g bodyweight per day. However, depending upon the type of diet they are fed, and in warmer weather, they will need to drink more water. Lactating does (females) will drink around 90ml per 100g bodyweight per day and must be given plenty of water during this time.

In order to keep the water clean and to avoid spillage, bottle drinkers are very suitable, although these must be checked regularly to ensure that there is no blockage, which would prevent the rabbits obtaining sufficient water. However some rabbits may prefer to drink water from a bowl, which should be sturdy

enough to prevent it being tipped over. We recommend that rabbits are provided with water in a way that they have been used to. Bowls/bottles should be checked regularly to ensure that the rabbits have continuous access to fresh, clean water.

Food

A high fibre diet should be given to rabbits, in the form of hay or similar forage material. Any sudden change in diet should be avoided to prevent digestive problems. For breeding does, a high-energy diet should be given. Rabbits will graze for a large proportion of the day and there should be an adequate supply of food in the form of leafy greens and specially prepared pellets, to provide all the necessary nutrients, but the majority of the diet should be hay-based. Rabbits' teeth continue to grow throughout their lives and they should be given hard gnawing material to help prevent the teeth from over-growing. Owners should avoid overfeeding concentrate food.

Housing and shelter

Most rabbits are kept in traditional hutches, however, they are very active animals so should be provided with as large a living space as possible. It is important that the height of their enclosure allows them to stand up on their hind feet without their ears touching the top of the enclosure. If movement is restricted, rabbits can develop skeletal problems, and in severe cases of restriction they can develop osteoporosis.

Rabbits should have permanent access to a large, safe exercise area to give them the opportunity to perform a wide range of behaviours (e.g. running, hopping, jumping, playing, digging). The exercise area must provide adequate protection against predators, such as foxes and cats as well as protection from the elements. The exercise area should contain hiding places, tunnels and safe toys for them to chew and explore (there should be enough for every rabbit to perform the same behaviour simultaneously). Hay should be continuously available to rabbits.

In addition, there must be a dry, comfortable and draught-free place for the rabbits to retreat, with a plentiful supply of clean bedding. If the substrate is coarse or rough, this can cause sore hocks. Some rabbits are predisposed to this; however, unclean housing or rough surfaces within the hutch, can increase the risk of this occurring. Rabbits like to hide away so they should have continual access to safe hiding places. There should also be a separate sleeping compartment (ideally darkened) where they can retreat for security and sleep undisturbed. Throughout the sleeping area there should be adequate bedding which must be changed frequently to keep it clean and dry.

Rabbits are social animals and should not be kept in solitary confinement. However, if two males are kept together, they may fight and it may be necessary to separate these. Females can usually be kept in groups without any problems. The best combination is a neutered male with a neutered female. When introducing new rabbits for the first time, introductions need to be carefully managed and can take several weeks. Unsuccessful or rushed introductions can lead to fighting and to severe injuries.

Fencing

Where there is access to an outside run, care must be taken to ensure that the rabbits will not dig their way out and predators are able to dig in. The fencing should be strong and constructed properly to protect against other animals.

Neutering

Rabbits will breed at every opportunity, so it is advisable that male rabbits are neutered unless they are specifically wanted for planned breeding. Neutering may reduce fighting and prevents some serious

medical problems. In females, neutering is a major health benefit as approximately 80% of unneutered females over the age of 3 years develop uterine tumours.

Health

It is strongly advised that all rabbits are vaccinated against Myxomatosis and VHD (Viral Haemorrhagic Disease). Both these diseases are widespread in the wild rabbit population so wild rabbits should be prevented from coming into contact with pet rabbits.

Rabbits should be checked for cleanliness every day (more frequently in warm weather), and any build up of faeces on the fur removed promptly. If it is necessary to wash rabbits, they should be thoroughly dried. Soiled and/or wet areas are prone to fly strike, and subsequent infestation with maggots. Rabbits' teeth and nails should be checked frequently to ensure they are not becoming overgrown or have been damaged.

If a rabbits' normal behaviour changes it can indicate they are not well or are in pain. If there are any concerns about a rabbit's health they should be taken to a vet immediately.

EQUINES

The RSPCA encourages all horse owners to follow the Defra Code of Practice for the welfare of equines that are freely grazed or tethered. In all cases the equine should be suitably passported and microchipped. For further information on the legal requirements concerning identification of equines please see the Defra website <https://www.gov.uk/horse-passport>

Tethering - the RSPCA's view

The RSPCA believes that tethering is not a suitable method of long-term management of an animal as it restricts that animal's freedom to exercise itself, to find food or water, or to escape from either predators or the extremes of hot or cold weather. The animal is also at risk of becoming entangled in the tether causing injury and distress or in extreme cases, death. The Society is also concerned that tethering is seen as a cheap solution to the care of equines leading to irresponsible equine ownership. Equines are often tethered in inappropriate locations such as wasteland or by highways where they are at risk of harm and injury and may also be a danger to other livestock and passers-by.

Where tethering exists the RSPCA encourages landowners and equine owners to follow a voluntary code of practice:

- **Very young, old, sick, pregnant or nursing equines should not be tethered.**
- **The site should be suitable.**

e.g. level, good grass cover, free of hazards, not crossed by public rights of way etc.

- **Suitable tethering equipment should be used.**

e.g. well-fitting leather head collar, or broad leather neck strap fitted with a 360 swivel device where the chain or rope is attached. The rope or chain should be strong enough to prevent breakage but light enough to prevent pressure sores for the tethering equipment. The ground stake should not protrude above ground level and should be fitted with a 360 swivel.

- **Equines should be tethered far enough apart so that their tethers do not become entangled with tethers of other animals.**

- Suitable arrangements must be made for adequate food and water and access to shelter.
- Tethered animals should be regularly checked at regular intervals.

e.g. every six hours.

- Equines should be allowed a daily period of exercise off the tether.
- All equines should be suitably identified.

As mentioned we believe all equines should be allowed to graze freely and the following bullet points provide issues to consider:

- Sites should be suitably enclosed - fencing and gates should be regularly checked.
- Rubbish and droppings should be cleared from pasture at least weekly.
- Owners should have a basic understanding of pasture management and be able to identify dangerous weeds.
- A regular feeding routine should be followed.

e.g. equines should be fed at the same time each and every day.

- Sufficient grazing space should be allowed.

(allow two acres per horse, more in winter).

- A shelter or stable of suitable construction should be provided.
- Regular access to a clean water supply should be provided.
- Stabled horses should have several hours exercise every day.

PIGEON LOFTS AND RACING PIGEONS

All pigeon fanciers, in order to race their pigeons against others, need to be a member of a pigeon racing club. These standards have been produced in conjunction with the Royal Pigeon Racing Association, but there are other associations, or homing unions which also govern the sport. In case of serious problems with a loft, or abandoned pigeons, these organisations, as well as the RSPCA, may be able to help.

The loft

Any pigeon loft should be well maintained, and free of any obvious damage, or structural irregularities which could cause damage to the birds. It would probably be at a minimum 12-14 ft long, about 7ft high and 7ft deep, and would need to include access to perches and nest boxes. The roof should be watertight and the whole interior free from damp. Ideally it should be raised from the ground to prevent access by vermin. Apart from the traps to allow entry of returning pigeons the loft should be made inaccessible to wild birds. The loft should face as near south as possible, allowing the birds to bask in the sun, but otherwise should be of draught- free construction. A landing board outside the loft should be provided

Internally it should be divided into two compartments for the birds, although with the means to open the whole area up as one when necessary. They may be additionally food or equipment storage areas. In the spring nesting bowls will be placed in the nest boxes (provided), but during the remainder of the year perches can be in use. All equipment should be well-constructed and maintained and capable of being thoroughly cleaned when necessary. Water fountains and feed troughs will need to be supplied for each compartment, as will a pigeon bath and small pots for grit and other nutritional supplements. Equipment for cleaning should be readily available.

A well-run loft will not show signs of accumulated dirt; droppings, old feathers or general dirt. There will always be available a good supply of clean fresh water, suitable bedding material, and a regular food supply. Grit should be provided. Pigeons should be allowed free exercise for some periods most days, although the details of this will vary amongst different fanciers and their locations.

A typical 14 x 7ft loft normally gives enough space to house around 60 birds, 30 old birds and 30 young birds. They should all have a nesting box and perch available so overcrowding is not a problem.

Feeding and management

There are many different ways of feeding pigeons, all of which may be acceptable. However, it seems to be agreed that regularity is important and that the birds should be fed at the same times each day. It is common practice for the birds to become hungry before the next feed time, and this is acceptable, provided that the feed is supplied on a regular basis. Feed should be dust free and be a mixture of hard corn, peas and beans although this may be varied at certain times during the racing season to build the pigeons up. It should be stored in vermin-proof containers and should not appear stale. Grit should always be readily accessible and it is advisable also to supply a mixture of mineral salts.

Similarly exercise times and cleaning times should be the same each day, so that the birds have an established routine. Many fanciers allow their birds free exercise for several hours most days, but this will vary with the weather, training and breeding programmes and local conditions.

The breeding season starts in January or early February and continues until May or June. The birds are paired up and will be confined to the nest boxes for short periods. The fancier will manage the breeding programme by removing unwanted eggs and replacing them with either pot eggs or old, non-fertile eggs. Records should be kept of all breeding, and indiscriminate breeding should be avoided. Young birds are normally fitted with a leg ring at seven days old. It is normal practice to race the birds whilst they are also rearing their young.

Siting of the loft

Lofts are usually sited with a south facing aspect, and should be raised on brick piers to prevent rot and also reduce the access for vermin. If lofts are sited on the owner's land then the normal planning laws will apply. If they are sited on rented land, the landlord must be in agreement with the use of the land for a pigeon loft and the normal planning regulations should be followed. This would be particularly applicable if the loft was to be sited on local authority land, particularly allotments. Landlords may apply additional conditions which should be complied with.

Loft owners should take precautions to ensure that the movement of other people or their animals which have access to the land cannot gain entry to the loft, or interfere with it in such a way as the pigeons are disturbed. They should also be aware that if the pigeons are allowed free flight, they may cause annoyance to neighbours and this should be prevented as far as possible.

The RSPCA would like to thank the Royal Pigeon Racing Association, Cheltenham for their kind assistance in producing this information.

WILDLIFE ON ALLOTMENT SITES

Allotments and gardens can be attractive to animals such as hedgehogs but may also pose risks. Leaflets about helping hedgehogs, frogs and toads, snakes and birds, as well as risks to wildlife, for example netting, etc are available - see publications list.

The RSPCA welcomes the creation or maintenance of habitats for the local wildlife such as ponds, meadowland or, for example, by leaving piles of logs, areas of long grass and compost heaps. However, the Society would not normally encourage allotment keepers to introduce wildlife to the area because of the risk of releasing animals into a habitat that is unsuitable or an area that already supports a resident population of the animals being introduced.

Hedgehogs

The hedgehog is one animal that is sometimes encouraged to stay in allotments for pest control purposes. However, if there are no signs of hedgehogs already living on an allotment site, there are various reasons why this may be so. It is possible that the location of the allotment site is next to busy roads, has insufficient food resources, does not provide areas of suitable habitat or is isolated from areas already supporting hedgehogs.

There are many ways to make an area more attractive to hedgehogs, but bear in mind that they are unlikely to restrict their movements to one allotment. A hedgehog would normally forage for food and travel between 0.5 and 1.5 kilometres per night in open habitat using an area of approximately 2-5 hectares. To attract hedgehogs, and other wildlife, to allotments, follow the guidelines below:

- **Leave rough areas of bramble, log and leaf piles, compost heaps or long grass to provide suitable nesting and hibernation sites.**
- **Provide a range of different habitats on the site, including cultivated earth and lawns.**

Take care when cutting grass to avoid injuring any resident hedgehogs when using a mower or strimmer. Check all bonfires for the presence of hedgehogs before burning any garden cuttings or leaves.

- **Ensure all ponds in the area are 'animal friendly'.**

If there are any ponds in the allotment or neighbouring gardens, it is important that they have gentle sloping sides to minimise the risk of hedgehogs, and other animals, drowning after falling into the water and not being able to return to dry land.

- **Cover open drains and holes.**

Drains and similar open holes can frequently trap unwary hedgehogs and they can starve if not rescued.

- **Do not use fruit netting at ground level.**

Avoid using any netting at ground level as it is a hazard to hedgehogs and other animals as they can become trapped underneath, or entangled in the netting. If you do use netting this should be checked regularly for trapped wildlife.

- **If slug control is employed, carefully consider the method used.**

Methods that kill both slugs and snails, such as slug pellets, can have a negative impact on hedgehogs and other wildlife as they remove an important source of food. There is also the potential risk of poisoning animals that eat the slug pellets or the poisoned slugs, This is also very true of pesticides and wood treatments.

Alternative methods of slug and snail control can be considered if it is thought to be necessary. Plants can be surrounded by materials that slugs and snails find uncomfortable to climb over, such as cinders, ground up egg shells or sand. Alternatively, a biological control agent containing microscopic nematodes can be used to specifically target slugs without harming other wildlife. This product can be ordered from a number of companies and the local garden centre should be able to provide details of the relevant suppliers.

Another method often used for protecting plants from slugs is the use of a beer trap. Proprietary 'slug pubs' can be used. Alternatively, a margarine tub can be buried in the ground filled with beer. The tub can be partly buried near to the plants until the rim of the tub is slightly above ground level. It is important that the rim of the tub is not level with the ground to prevent other ground-dwelling wildlife, such as beetles and frogs, falling into the trap.

- **Ensure hedgehogs can easily leave and return to the area when seeking food or shelter and if the allotment has a shed that hedgehogs are not locked in when you leave.**
- **Dispose of all rubbish safely to prevent discarded litter being a hazard to hedgehogs and other animals in the area.**

Annex 2: Useful contacts

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
Tel: 0207 238 6951
www.gov.uk/defra

British Goat Society

www.allgoats.com

British Free Range Egg Producers Association

PO Box 3425,
Ashton Keynes,
Swindon, SN6 6WR
Tel: 01722 410775
www.bfrepa.co.uk

British Rabbit Council

Purefoy House
7 Kirkgate
Newark
Nottinghamshire
NG24 1AD
Tel: 01636-676042
www.thebrc.org

Royal Pigeon Racing Association

The Reddings
Nr Cheltenham
Gloucestershire
GL51 6RN.
Tel: 01452 713529
www.rpra.org

RSPCA

Wilberforce Way
Southwater
Nr Horsham
West Sussex
RH13 9RS
Tel: 0300 1234 999
www.rspca.org.uk