



Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals on Private Game Reserves Licensed to Hunt Game Birds

Bureau of Animal Welfare, Attwood

Preface

The **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986**, administered by the Department of Primary Industries, has the purpose of protecting animals, encouraging the considerate treatment of animals and to improve the level of community awareness about the prevention of cruelty to animals. It establishes fundamental obligations relating to the care of animals in general terms. Details of obligations are found in codes of practice that are made under the provisions of the Act. These set out minimum standards and recommendations relating to important aspects of the care of animals. They are developed following a process of consultation with stakeholders and the community.

They reflect the views and values held by Victorians with respect to the care of animals. It is recommended that all those who care for animals become familiar with the relevant codes.

Codes are issued after review by the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. This committee comprises persons who have knowledge and expertise in particular areas such as animal welfare, veterinary science, animal uses in research, agriculture, the commercial use of animals and the standards and conduct of ethical use of animals.

The **Wildlife Act 1975**, administered by the Department of Sustainability and Environment, licences the rearing of introduced species of game birds for release for hunting purposes. The purpose of this code is to provide a measure of consideration for the welfare of the birds during their rearing and release, and for the dogs used in the hunting activity. A condition of licence will be compliance with the recommendations contained in the code.

This Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals on Game Reserves licensed to hunt game birds was issued by a notice published in the Government Gazette on 9 June 2005 under Section 7 of the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986**.

A: Objectives

1. This Code aims to prevent cruelty and encourage the considerate treatment of introduced game birds that are reared for release to be hunted on a Private Game Reserve that is licensed to do so.
2. Hunting without care and consideration for ecosystems may interrupt the natural balance between animals and their environment. To enhance the environment and its wildlife, this code supports the participation of hunters in conservation and environmental programs, and to be members of approved (hunting) organisations.
3. This code supports membership by hunters of approved organisations which encourage responsible hunting and wildlife management, monitor the standards of hunting by their members and liaise with regulatory agencies responsible for animal welfare.
4. Birds to be hunted should at all times be free and unrestricted. Man-made devices should not deliberately be used to restrict birds that are being hunted, to an area.

B: Introduction

5. This code defines the type of animals that may be used to assist gamekeepers and hunters, and the acceptable method in which these animals may be used.
6. This Code does not approve of hunting where one animal is permitted to inflict injury that would cause another animal to suffer, if it remained alive.
7. Hunting includes the use of any legal firearm capable of humanely killing the bird to be hunted.

8. It is the responsibility of gamekeepers and hunters to be aware of and observe all regulations and legislation that relates to hunting and the use of firearms.

C: Definitions

9. **'Approved organisation'** is a hunting organisation approved under the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals in Hunting by the Bureau of Animal Welfare, which promotes ethical hunting, and compliance of members with this Code by:
- developing hunter education and proficiency testing programs and encouraging members to participate in these programs;
 - using practice ranges so that members may use simulated targets to develop proficiency. New members (or novices) should practice before using firearms or bows in hunting;
 - appointing sufficient numbers of experienced members as field officers so that the hunting activities of members can be adequately assessed; and
 - providing an annual report of the hunting activities of members (and the registration of hounds, if applicable) to the Bureau of Animal Welfare.
10. **'Bureau of Animal Welfare'** means the Director, Bureau of Animal Welfare, Department of Primary Industries, 475 Mickleham Road, Attwood 3049
11. **'Field officer'** means a person appointed by the approved organisation who:
- regularly attends hunts;
 - reports breaches of the Code to the approved organisation;
 - provides details for the annual report to the Bureau of Animal Welfare.
12. **'Firearm'** has the same meaning as under the **Firearms Act 1996**.
13. **'Game bird'** for the purpose of this code means any live introduced species of bird defined as game in schedule 6 Part A of the Wildlife Regulations 2002 or subsequent legislation. Where birds other than birds protected by the **Wildlife Act 1975** are reared and released for hunting the hunters must comply with the **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986**, the provisions of this code and the provisions of any relevant code of practice for rearing of the particular species.
14. **'Gamekeeper'** is the person licensed under the Wildlife Regulations or acting as the agent for the licensed person.

15. **'Gundogs'** are dogs as defined under the **Wildlife Act 1975** and the associated regulations as 'gundogs' and conforming to the breed standards of the Australian National Kennel Council.

16. **'Hunting'** is the pursuit, trailing, stalking, searching for or driving out of an animal where the deliberate intention is to kill the animals being hunted.

17. **'Legislation relating to hunting'** includes:

- **Conservation Forests and Lands Act 1987** and associated regulations.
- **Firearms Act 1996** and associated regulations.
- **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986** and associated regulations.
- **Wildlife Act 1975** and associated regulations.

D: Husbandry

18. The aim of game bird rearing is to provide fit, healthy animals, well adapted for release into the Private Game Reserve. Birds must not be released until fully feathered, and capable of achieving full flight capability.

Minimum Standard

19. The owner of a private game reserve must have a current Commercial Wildlife (Wildlife Producer) Licence Type 1 issued under the **Wildlife Act 1975** before releasing game birds for hunting.

20. Those responsible for the incubation and rearing of game birds must be caring, considerate, conscientious, knowledgeable and skilled. They must be well prepared and take professional advice from veterinarians and qualified game consultants wherever necessary.

21. **Beak trimming** must only be performed by an experienced and competent operator or under the direct supervision of an experienced and competent operator.

Recommended best practice

22. Young birds in brooders should be inspected at least twice every 24 hours. Thorough attention should be paid at least daily for bird health, parasites, injury, problem behaviours, feed and water availability, ventilation, lighting, safety of confinement measures and protection from predators.
23. Management should use appropriate selection of birds and the provision of conditions that reduce the tendency for cannibalism to occur.
24. To prevent cannibalism up to one-third of the upper beak may be removed within 72 hours of hatching.

E: Nutrition**Minimum standard**

25. Birds must have readily accessible fresh water and an appropriate diet to maintain growth, health and vigour.
26. They must have an environment appropriate to their species and age including areas of shelter and comfortable resting and have visual contact with other members of their own species.
27. Every precaution must be taken to avoid pain, injury or distress. Prevention of disease, injury and vice, and their rapid treatment should they occur.
28. Birds, apart from newly hatched birds, must not be placed in circumstances where they are deprived of water for more than 24 hours.

Recommended best practice

29. Adequate feed should be supplied in the feeding systems of sheds and ranges taking into account the level of nutrients available in these areas.
30. All feeding and watering systems should be checked daily for efficient operation and to ensure all birds have access to feed and water.
31. Water sources should be evaluated for salinity and microbiological contamination periodically to assess suitability for birds.
32. Up to 5 – 7 days of age, food and shallow water should be provided continuously to newly hatched chicks such that that can walk over or through it. Water containers should be flat and filled such that birds will not drown. Use of pebbles in shallow water dishes can assist birds in difficulty.

Guidelines

33. Commercial turkey rations may be used. Birds must receive a diet containing adequate nutrients to meet their requirements for good health and vitality. Confined birds must be fed daily.
34. Newly hatched birds require water within 60 hours under normal conditions; less time in hot weather. They may take more than 24 hours before requiring water.
35. Suggested minimum feed quality parameters-
From 0-6 weeks starter rations (Crude Protein 28%)
From 7-12 weeks (Crude Protein 22%)
From 12 weeks on (Crude Protein 18 –20 %).

F: Shelter and Facilities

36. Adequate welfare involves consideration of flock size, the housing system, the feeding and watering system, the breed and strain of bird, temperature, ventilation, lighting and other husbandry factors. The observance of any particular stocking density on its own cannot ensure the welfare of birds.

Recommended best practice**37. Space Allowances:**

Recommendations for commercial rearing of these species are in appendices 1,2 & 3.

38. Range Yards:

38.1 Birds should be moved into range yards as soon as chicks no longer require extra heating. Usually at 6 weeks of age but can be at 12 weeks of age depending on seasonal conditions, weather and feather development.

38.2 Large yards are best and there should be sufficient space for the birds to fly. Yards should have protection for the birds such as brush and perches but these must be placed in such a way as to allow for flight without injuring birds.

38.3 The yards should have a soft roof e.g. grapevine netting, so as to avoid damage to any birds in flight.

38.4 Sandy loams are the best soil type. Heavy soils could hold water and contribute to disease problems. Yards should be well drained.

38.5 The lower walls should be boarded to a height of 50 –60 cm to protect birds from wind when necessary. Rodents must be routinely baited and predators fenced out by a wire fence of 50mm mesh buried 450mm deep or with a 600mm apron on the ground. Electric fencing may be used to supplement a standard wire fence.

38.6 Several types of cover crops can be sown as ground cover and the pens should be rotated to get maximum crop production with minimum traffic damage. Spring annuals such as wheat barley and oats, and summer annuals such as sunflower and sorghum can be used.

38.7 Shaded areas and protection from the elements should be provided if ground cover is inadequate.

Recommended flight pen sizes and maximum bird density			
Species	Width (m)	Length (m)	Max. bird density (sq m/bird)
Pheasant	10	30	1.35
Partridge	5	10	0.93
Quail	5	10	0.37

G: Health and Welfare

Minimum Standard

39. Those responsible for the husbandry and custody of the birds must have experience and knowledge of the species involved. They must be aware of signs of ill health or distress in birds and have in place arrangements to obtain expert advice to assist with the development of appropriate treatment or corrections in management

Recommended best practice

40. Dead, injured, trapped or ill birds should be detected and removed promptly. Prompt disposal, treatment or humane destruction should be arranged.

H: Transportation

Minimum Standard

41. Where cages are stacked for transport space must be provided between consecutive tiers both horizontally and vertically to ensure adequate air movement between cages.

Recommended best practice

42. 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.
43. Additional care and procedures should be taken when birds are transported on very hot days particularly on days of high humidity. Avoid transportation on the hottest part of the day and particularly during periods of high humidity.
44. Birds should not be transported to the release point more than two hours prior to liberation.
45. Recommended transport cage dimensions

Species	Height (mm)	Length (mm)	Width (mm)
Quail (per 4 birds)	150	240	135
Partridge (25 birds)	300	700	500
Pheasant (10 birds)	300	700	500

I: Release Management

Minimum Standard

46. A minimum hunting area of 100 ha must be provided.
47. The number of birds released must not be more than the environment and re-capture pens can sustain.
48. Birds must be released into cover in this area out of view of the hunters.
49. Birds must be fully developed physically, be capable of full flight, have full feather cover and must be mature.

Recommended best practice

50. Release sites should be selected that provide adequate brush cover for protection from predators and the elements. Bare unprotected areas should be not be used. Birds must be free roaming.
51. The direction and location of the release should not be disclosed to hunters.

J: Holding and Recapture

Minimum Standard

52. All reasonable attempts must be made to recapture birds after hunting is completed.
53. Proper provision must be made to recover all released birds that have not been shot during the course of the hunt in the holding and recapture pens.

Recommended best practice

54. Holding and re-capture pens and habitat should always be appropriate and sufficient for the needs of the bird species, and sited away from public roads and areas. Pens should be designed and positioned in such a way as to encourage animals to seek refuge, food and water, and should be sufficient in number for the area being hunted. As for the range yards, the soil type, ground cover protection and predator controls are critical. These pens should have feeders and drinkers, which are regularly checked and refreshed. There should be at least one secure entrance that will permit birds to enter the pen but not exit.

K: Conduct of Hunting:

Minimum Standard

55. Shotguns used must not have a gauge greater than 12 gauge.
56. A handler may work no more than one gun dog at any one time.
57. Only gundogs may be used on Private Game Reserves.

Recommended best practice

58. The hunt should be cancelled if adverse or severe weather conditions cause birds to be unable fly normally.
59. Firearms should be used that will kill humanely. Guidelines published by ammunition manufacturers should be considered when selecting ammunition suitable for the various bird species to be hunted. Rules for the safe use of firearms should be observed.
60. A game bird should only be shot at on a Private Game Reserve when:
 - It is safe to do so
 - The bird can be clearly identified
 - The bird is within effective range of the firearm and its ammunition
 - A humane kill is probable
61. To produce a quick and painless death a hunter should shoot to have the bird in the centre of the pattern at the point of impact.
62. Proper provision should be made to recover all shot birds. Every bird that is shot should be immediately recovered and examined to ensure that it is dead. If a bird is wounded and escapes, all reasonable attempts should be made to locate it so it can be dispatched quickly and humanely. A trained dog may be used to locate and recover a wounded bird as quickly as practicable.
63. Gundogs should be trained to obey commands, not to chase, and to hunt and retrieve only under the direction of the handler.
64. Dogs that are disobedient or do not hunt in the prescribed manner or commit chasing or catching of birds that are not wounded, and those that kill birds at retrieval, should be removed from the hunt.
65. When not participating in the hunt, dogs should be constrained by use of a lead, tether or crate.
66. Dogs used to assist hunters should be healthy and in good physical condition. They should not be used where there is an unacceptable risk of heat exhaustion or serious accident. If dogs are injured, they should receive prompt first aid, and professional treatment if required.
67. All diligent care should be taken by owners and handlers for the safety of dogs involved in a hunt. Hunts must be supervised by experienced staff of the private game reserve.

Appendix 1**Quail****Housing**

In wire-floor systems, a 7 mm square mesh is necessary to provide secure footing and prevent leg injuries, particularly during the first 10 days of life. This may be assisted at this early age by using corrugated cardboard or coarse paper over the floor surface.

In the cage systems, a 7 mm square mesh is necessary to prevent chicks escaping through side walls.

Space Allowances

Maximum recommended stocking densities for quail according to housing type under good management conditions

Age

0-2 weeks:	180 birds/m ² deep litter
	200 birds/m ² wire floored brooder
2-6 weeks:	120 birds/m ² deep litter
	130 birds/m ² wire floored grower cage
Breeders	70 birds/m ² deep litter
	80 birds/m ² wire floored cage

Appendix 2**Partridge****Space Allowances**

Cages with floors should provide a minimum of 0.3 m² per bird

Grassed aviaries should provide 2.5m² per bird and should enable rotational use of aviaries to provide ground cover for the birds to hide.

Partridges will adapt to cages. A cage suitable for a mated pair measures 300 mm wide by 600mm deep and 380mm high. The 12.5mm square welded wire floor should slope 12.5 degrees from back to front to allow eggs to be collected. This is a slope of about 1 in 7. Cages may be positioned back to back with a water trough servicing a pair of pens. Feeders should run full length along the front.

Appendix 3**Pheasants****Space allowances**

Wire grids may be fitted to drinkers to prevent drowning. Birds are shifted to rearing pens at seven weeks of age and then their beaks may be trimmed. They can be stocked at 35 birds per metre square. After one to two weeks of settling down they may be moved to yards, which reduces picking and promotes feathering.

Indoor

Feeding and watering facilities should be distributed to provide equal and ready access to all birds.

After 8 weeks of age stocking density should not exceed 2.6 bird/m². Cannibalism is likely to occur at higher densities.

Feed and Water Space Allowances

Sufficient feed and facilities should be available so all birds receive adequate nutrition for even growth and lack of obvious competition. In providing adequate feed and water space requirements for birds, it is recognised there range of feeder and waterer types in use. Manufacturers' recommendations should be referred to and not exceeded in this respect. In some cases more space per bird should be allowed.

Guidelines for acceptable feed and water space in housing systems are provided below.

Breeders

Feeder Space

Max 80 birds/pan feeder

Waterer Space

Max 110 birds/bell drinker

Rearing and Breeders

Feeder Space

Max 100 birds/pan feeder

Waterer Space

Max 120 birds/bell drinker

Disclaimer

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The Government Gazette version should be relied on for any legal defence.

This Information Note was previously published in June 2005

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