

D. STANDARDS OF CARE FOR CHICKENS

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Adapted from Standards of Care for Farmed Animals , The Association Of Sanctuaries (TAOS). Edited by Chicken Run Rescue. 6/2008, revised for MACC 4/7/09

A. Care & Facilities

1. General

a) Number of Birds – Capacity should be limited by shelter space, available space for exercise, number of animal caretakers and the financial capabilities. All of these issues should be taken into consideration before acquiring new animals.

b) Handling & Restraint - Attempting to catch an unwilling animal in a large open area can be difficult or impossible. Training animals to go into a confined area by feeding grain or giving treats in this area daily— will make it much easier and less stressful on the animals to catch and restrain them when treatment or handling is necessary.

Chickens should never be held upside down or tethered by their legs. They can be easily carried or restrained by cradling the animal and pinning the wings down with your hands, or a towel can be wrapped around the body. Care should be used to avoid pressure on the chest area of birds when restraining and handling as they use their pectoral muscles for breathing.

c) Transportation - Chickens can be transported in enclosed kennels and airline carriers with either straw or towels for bedding. Care should be taken not to overcrowd animals when transporting and to minimize travel during the hottest portions of the day. Travel should be minimized or postponed during extreme hot or cold weather. Water and feed/hay should be provided for trips longer than a few hours.

2. Enclosures

a) Construction & Materials – All shelters should take into account the weather conditions of the specific geographic area. Local building codes should be followed to prevent damage from snow, wind, etc. Fencing for chickens should be adequate to discourage and prevent predators. Access to electricity is required in free standing structures.

“Housing and infrastructure. The primary purpose of poultry housing is to protect flocks against adverse weather and predators (coyote, fox, stray dogs, raccoons and raptors). Weather is of critical concern in the Upper Midwest, where summers can be extremely hot and winters bitterly cold. Housing must provide shade from sun and cover from rain. It must be able to withstand high winds and snow loads if it is to be used for year-round operation. These basic housing considerations apply to all poultry.”

-“Poultry Your Way: A Guide to Management Alternatives for the Upper Midwest”, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, 2005

b) Size & number of animals per enclosure – A minimum of 4 square feet per bird

should be provided for interior enclosures and 10 square feet per bird for outside pens. Animals should have access to shelters where there is enough space to fit all of the animals who will be using the shelter, without overcrowding. Temperament and social structures of animals should be taken into account, and separate fenced areas or stalls should be available for animals who are lower in the pecking order. There should be plenty of outdoor space to run and perform normal behaviors without causing crowding or aggression between animals.

c) Substrate – Straw, grass hay, leaves or shavings can be used as substrate in shelter. Hay or straw used for bedding should be fresh and free of mold. Care should be taken when using shavings for birds, as they may eat them, causing crop impactions. All domestic fowl should have access to fenced outdoor areas with grass for foraging or hay where grass is not available.

d) Furnishings – Chickens should have access to perches and nestboxes. There should be enough perches and nestboxes or nesting areas that animals do not have to fight over them. Bales of hay or straw should be available as perches.

e) Access to shelter, shade, bathing, privacy - All chickens should have access to shelter and shade. Chickens should have areas for dustbathing. All birds should have private areas available in which to lay their eggs.

f) Animal safety & security – There should be 6 ft. privacy fencing with locking gates to discourage uninvited human visitors for the animals' safety. Security cameras are also highly recommended deterrents. Chickens are susceptible to a number of predators – these animals should have predator proof enclosures where they are shut in at night. Very young or debilitated animals should be kept in predator proof enclosures.

See NON-LETHAL PREDATOR CONTROL

3. Sanitation

a) Maintenance & cleaning of enclosures and substrates - Manure and wet bedding should be removed from coop and animal feeding and lounging areas daily. Thorough, complete cleaning and removal of all bedding and disinfecting of coop and furnishings should be done on a regular basis as needed.

b) Control of invasive, non-resident species including bacteria, fungi, insects, rodents, etc. - Keeping shelter areas clean and dry will help prevent many invasive species. Shelter and furnishings should be disinfected on a regular basis. Rodent levels will be minimized by keeping all feed in rodent proof containers and removing spilled or uneaten food promptly.

4. Climate

a) Heating/cooling – Shelters should be kept at a comfortable temperature for the animals. “Minimum Temperature 55°(f) , maximum temperature 70°(F)”

-Poultry Housing Recommendations: Poultry Your Way:
A Guide to Management Alternatives for the Upper Midwest”,

During hot weather fans should be made available to maintain a temperature under 80 degrees, especially for chickens who are especially susceptible to heat stress.

During cold weather, chickens (all descended from Tropical Jungle Fowl) are susceptible to frostbite. Oil or water filled safety heaters (i.e. brands Pelonis, DeLonghi, Honeywell) should be made available to maintain a minimum temperature above 32 degrees. Oil heaters (or water) are completely closed and sealed systems that run on electricity. The oil is heated from within and the heat is radiant so there are no exposed heating elements that create dangerous problems even if they tip over. Heat lamps, which should only be used with extreme caution, should be firmly attached and should be kept at least 3 feet from animals and far from any flammable item, especially dry straw or bedding. Extra bedding should be available to keep animals warm and comfortable in cold climates. Coop should be set up to protect animals from drafts.

b) Ventilation – Shelters should have adequate ventilation and should be built with ridge vents, adequate windows, and/or doors that open fully to let fresh air into the shelter. Windows/doors should be opened and fans used to facilitate ventilation during warm weather.

c) Natural/artificial light – Natural light from windows and/or skylights should be provided in all shelters if possible. If not available, adequate full spectrum incandescent light should be installed and should be controlled to follow normal seasonal light cycles.

5. Food

a) Nutritional & fluid requirements - Chickens and other fowl should be provided with fresh food and water daily. Chickens and other fowl can have chicken feed available at all times.

b) Quality & variety - Hay , grain and feed should preferably be less than one year old and free of mold or other contaminants. Grain should be fresh and free of insects, mold, or other contaminants. Formulated crumble or pellets provides balanced nutrition to supplement limited foraging in an urban setting. A variety of fresh fruits and vegetables should be offered in addition to their commercial grain on a regular basis.

c) Communal feeding/drinking & monitoring of individual intake - Groups of animals should be observed daily when feeding for possible aggressive behavior. Individuals who are subordinate and subject to intimidation may need to be separated for feeding.

d) Food safety & hygiene – Feed should be stored in rodent proof containers in a cool dry area inaccessible to animals. Stored feedbags should be rotated to ensure that feed is always fresh. Food that is uneaten or spilled should be removed from animal enclosures daily.

B. Enrichment

1. Social

a) Pairs – Animals who arrive as bonded pairs, or who develop this relationship should be

kept together at all times, if possible.

b) Social grouping - Domestic fowl have social structures which should be accommodated whenever possible. Animals should be allowed to form healthy social groups. This should be encouraged and respected when housing decisions are being made.

c) Communal activities – Groups of fowl should be observed for possible aggressive or intimidating behavior to individuals in the group and housing/feeding/ enclosures should be adjusted accordingly. Communal activities such as feeding should be closely observed to ensure that all animals in the group have access to adequate food and water.

2. Environmental

a) Habitat/enclosure provisions, complexity & variety – Habitat for domestic fowl should include grass areas with adequate shelter from weather conditions. The outdoor area should have areas of sun and shade. Plenty of space to prevent crowding and encourage natural behaviors should be available in the indoor and outdoor areas.

b) Food, feeding & foraging – Chickens should have areas in which to forage and scratch for insects.

c) Natural/artificial elements – Enclosures should include trees whenever possible. Branches, stumps or platforms for roosting can be offered to chickens.

3. Therapeutic

a) Treatment plan for recovery from illness or injury – Animals who are being treated for illness or injury should be separated from the group when needed to facilitate treatment or when the illness is contagious or debilitating.

b) treatment plan for abnormal behaviors - Individual animals with abnormal behaviors including aggression, antisocial traits, phobias, anxiety, self-injury or issues may need to be separated or reintroduced into another group which may better suit their needs. Attention and encouragement should be given to these animals to provide opportunities to improve behavior.

C. Veterinary Medical Care-

see CHICKEN CARE, PHYSICAL EXAM FOR CHICKENS

1. General

a) Veterinary specialty & availability – A relationship should be established with a local avian veterinarian or one who is familiar with birds to treat problems that are specifically associated with domestic fowl. Some research and trial may be necessary to locate a compassionate veterinarian who is educated and sympathetic to the unique requirements of humanely treating domestic fowl, including using anesthesia for surgical procedures. Ideally the veterinarian will be located in close proximity to enable a quick response in case of emergency.

see VET CLINICS FOR CHICKEN CARE MINNEAPOLIS / ST. PAUL / WESTERN WISCONSIN VICINITY

b) Critical/emergency first aid- Critical/emergency first aid supplies should be kept

stocked and in date including roll gauze, gauze pads, tape, vetwrap, blood stop powder, antibiotic ointment, antibacterial scrub and solution, and bandage scissors.

d) Necropsy - It is very helpful to have a complete necropsy performed whenever possible on animals who have died or who have been euthanized. Useful information can often be obtained when a state lab or veterinarian does the necropsy, even if the cause of death is presumed

2. Quarantine & Isolation

a) New Arrivals – New arrivals should be separated from resident animals in a designated isolation area. This area should be treated as quarantine. A complete physical exam should be done on the animal and treatment for any health issues should begin as soon as possible after arrival. New arrivals should remain in quarantine for a period of at least 7 days, to help ensure the animal is free from contagious disease.

b) Testing - Prior to release from quarantine, animals should be tested for internal and external parasites. Animals should also be tested for diseases that may be a concern for the individual species or for the geographical area of the sanctuary.

c) Treatment - All animals should be treated for internal and external parasites and any detectable illness or disease before release from quarantine.

d) Introduction – Once an animal's quarantine time period is up, and all tests for disease and parasites are negative, the new animal can be introduced to the resident group. Care should be taken during this period with chickens, who have social structures which may encourage aggression to new arrivals. Gradual introduction in these situations should be undertaken, allowing the resident animals to see the new animal through a fence or other barrier, then introducing the animal for short periods of time gradually over several days or weeks lengthening the exposure until the animals are all getting along.

See INTRODUCING ROOSTERS AND NEW FLOCK MEMBERS.

3. Biosecurity & Zoonoses

a) Types of infectious/zoonotic diseases of Chickens and other birds – Psittacosis (Ornithosis in humans), Salmonellosis, Campylobacter

b) Vectors & transmission – Psittacosis is transmitted by inhaling dust from infected feathers or manure. Salmonella and Campylobacter is through direct contact with contaminated food or water.

c) Prevention – animals suspected of having zoonotic infectious diseases should be isolated in a quarantine area, and gloves and masks should be used when working with them. Disinfectant footbaths or disposable footwear/clothing should be worn when cleaning/treating and handling the animal. Feces should be disposed of promptly. Contact with animals should be kept to a minimum and no visitors should be allowed in the area. Housing animals in spacious, clean and relatively dust free environments will keep them healthy and will minimize human exposure to infectious disease.

4. Health & Wellness

a) Diet & exercise - All domestic fowl should be given diets that are properly formulated and adequate for the individual animal. All animals should have outdoor access and sufficient indoor shelter space that allows them to exercise and perform normal behaviors freely.

b) Preventative medicine & prophylaxis including exams, grooming, testing, vaccination, treatment – All animals should be examined on a regular basis and checked for any signs of illness, including weight loss, diarrhea, hidden injuries, anorexia, unusual feather loss, or depressed attitude, and treated for any problems that may be observed. A veterinarian should be consulted for any illness or injury that is not easily treatable. Fecals should be taken from all animals on a regular basis and examined by a lab or qualified individual for parasites. Domestic fowl should be wormed prophylactically on a regular basis, depending on the climate and quality of pasture. Grazing animals should be rotated in pastures to reduce parasite levels. Fecals from these animals should be periodically examined to determine the efficacy of the treatment program so that adjustments can be made when necessary. Birds do not require vaccinations.

D. Safety & Security

1. General

a) Facility - Exterior area should have a perimeter fence which prevents or discourages unannounced visitors and promotes the safety and security of the animals.

b) Enclosures – All fencing and shelters should be checked regularly for disrepair and maintained adequately to prevent escapes or injury to the animals. Problems such as leaking roofs or design problems of shelters which cause flooding into sleeping areas should be repaired promptly to prevent discomfort and disease.

2. Emergency & Disaster Preparedness

a) Evacuation, transportation, shelter & temporary construction – A policy and plan should be in place for evacuation in case of natural disaster or other emergency situation. This policy should be familiar to all personnel and include details of methods of transporting animals from the sanctuary, contacts who can assist with transportation, and alternative housing for emergency situations.

b) Equipment & Supplies – Sufficient carriers should be available for domestic fowl. Nets should be readily accessible for capturing flighty chickens or other birds, if necessary.

3. Animal Escape

a) Equipment - Capture equipment such as nets of various sizes and crates for chickens, turkeys and waterfowl should be readily available to aid in capturing escaped animals. Domestic fowl do not normally pose a threat to the community, but their lives may be in jeopardy if they escape out onto streets with cars, dogs, etc. For this reason it is important to maintain pasture fences in a good state of repair and to capture escaped animals as soon as possible.

b) Handling – Escaped animals should be handled carefully as they may be extremely

excited or frightened. Care should be taken to avoid injuries. It is best to get the animals in a carrier as soon as possible after capturing them and to minimize handling until the animal is calmer and has been returned to his/her normal environment.

4. Injury

a) Procedure - Animals who have been injured should be isolated and examined immediately to determine the severity of the injury. Superficial injuries should be treated with supplies which should be at hand. A veterinarian should be notified and summoned immediately for injuries that are serious or life threatening. Veterinary phone numbers should be posted in a prominent place which is accessible to staff. Crates and bedding should be readily accessible to transport smaller animals such as chickens and other birds to a vet hospital if necessary.

b) Supplies – First aid type supplies should be readily available and accessible for treating injuries. Some of the items that should be included are roll gauze, gauze pads, tape, vetwrap, blood stop powder, antibiotic ointment, antibacterial scrub and solution, and bandage scissors.

c) Restraint, handling & transport - Animals who are seriously injured and need to be transported to a vet should be handled carefully and minimally to avoid causing a more serious injury. They should be transported in a carrier or vehicle with sufficient bedding and/or padding to protect the injury. Fractures should be stabilized with a splint or sufficient bandage prior to transport.

Further reading on chicken care:

Johannes Paul, Keeping Pet Chickens,

Barbara Kilarski, Keep Chickens! Tending Small Flocks in Cities, Suburbs, and Other Small Spaces -

Gail Damerow, Building Chicken Coops: Storey Country Wisdom Bulletin A-224,
Juliette de Bairacli Levy, The Complete Herbal Handbook for Farm and Stable, London-Boston: Faber and Faber, 1952; Paperback 1984.

Rick & Gail Luttmann, Chickens in your Backyard, Emmaus, PA 18049: Rodale Press, 1976. Paperback (ph: 610/967-5171).

G. McBride et al., "The Social Organization and Behavior of the Feral Domestic Fowl," Animal Behavior Monographs, Part Three, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1969, pp. 127-181. Library.

Page Smith & Charles Daniel, The Chicken Book, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1975. Library.

David Sullenberger, "Poultry Housing Considerations for Low Input Small Scale Producers," TimeWarrior Farm Chronicle Special Reports. Order from Time Warrior Farm, P.O. Box 1480, Anthony, NM 88021 (ph: 505/882-4376).

Lesley Rogers, The Development of Brain and Behavior in the Chicken (New York: CABI Publishing, 1996).

http://www.farmanimalshelters.org/care_chicken.htm

<http://www.upc-online.org/chickens/>

<http://www.brittonclouse.com/chickenrunrescue>

