

Bird Care

A straightforward guide to your legal responsibilities

INTRODUCTION

A legal duty to promote welfare

You must not cause a bird unnecessary suffering

- All reasonable steps should be taken to meet the welfare needs of any bird in your care, whatever the circumstances
- It is your responsibility to find out what those needs are and how to meet them
- If you are the parent or guardian of a child (under 16 years) you are responsible for any animal the child looks after
- If you fail to meet the welfare needs of a bird in your care, you may commit an offence and may be prosecuted under a law called The Animal Welfare Act
- Find out more about this Law and others relating to birds at www.defra.gov.uk.

A bird's welfare needs

The Animal Welfare Act says that a bird's needs include:

- the need for a suitable environment
- the need for a suitable diet
- the need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- any need to be with, or apart from, other animals
- the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

The five sections of this leaflet explain more about each of these in turn.

Important decisions – your responsibility

- Some birds typically live for many years especially parrots, geese and the larger birds of prey. Owning a bird is a serious, long term commitment and responsibility.
- This leaflet summarizes the most important things you must consider in order to keep a bird happy and healthy. It does not tell you what to do.
- There is no one “perfect” way to care for a bird. Every bird and every situation is different. Each different taxonomic group (type of birds, i.e. poultry, waterfowl, parrots, pigeons, raptors (birds of prey), etc require very different care and housing. You should explore the sources of further information given on the back of this leaflet to help you decide the best way to care for your birds.
- If you are ever unsure about your bird's needs, you should seek advice from an animal welfare professional, such as a specialist vet or a society with specialist knowledge of the species.

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SECTION 1: A bird's need for a suitable environment

KEY FACTS

- A bird's "environment" includes the place where it lives and anywhere it spends time.
- Birds are intelligent animals and need an interesting life to be happy.
- If birds are bored they will suffer and may develop unwanted behaviours.
- Living in an unsuitable environment can cause birds to suffer and may lead to illness.

THE LAW

If you look after a bird, you must take all reasonable steps to ensure it has a suitable and environment.

ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

- Make sure your bird is safe and secure at all times, including when you are not with it.
- Provide your bird with a suitable environment at all times.
- Ensure the size and temperature of any living space is suited to the species of birds that you keep, and that it/they are able to avoid getting too hot or too cold.
- Ensure that birds have enough to do each day, so that it/they do not become distressed or bored (also see Sections 3 and 4).
- Give your birds suitable retreat areas where they can feel secure when they feel nervous or threatened.
- When transporting birds in your care, make sure they are comfortable and safe.
- Where birds share an environment, make sure there are sufficient extra resources (e.g. perches, feeding stations and water supply) to avoid competition and fights and different species that to live together are compatible.

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SECTION 2:

A bird's need for a suitable diet

KEY FACTS

- All birds need an appropriately balanced diet to stay fit and healthy.
- Birds have very different and specific nutritional needs according to species which need to be understood by owners.

THE LAW

If you look after a bird you must take all reasonable steps to ensure it has a suitable diet

ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

- Provide your birds with access to clean drinking water at all times.
- Ensure your birds are provided with a healthy diet suitable for its species
- Use suitable food and water containers and keep them clean.

SECTION 3:

A bird's need to exhibit normal behaviour

KEY FACTS

- "Normal" behaviour means appropriate behaviour for that species.
- Training a tamed bird using rewards will help it learn to behave appropriately and make it easier to control. Good training can greatly enhance a pet bird's quality of life.
- Frightening experiences and punishment may lead to behaviour problems and suffering.
- Like us, birds need regular exercise to stay healthy and happy.

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THE LAW

If you look after a bird you must take all reasonable steps to ensure that it is able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

- Choose a species of bird that is suited to your experience of keeping birds, the accommodation you have available and your lifestyle.
- Give your bird appropriate room to exercise appropriately to keep it fit, active and stimulated.
- Be observant. If your bird's behaviour changes it could be distressed, bored, ill or injured.

SECTION 4:

A bird's need to be with, or apart from, other birds

KEY FACTS

- Some birds are sociable and need companionship.
- If birds are to become household pet birds and are treated well, they learn to see people as friends and companions.
- Some species of birds can suffer if left alone for long periods of time.

THE LAW

If you keep or look after birds you must take all reasonable steps to ensure their need to be kept with, or apart from, other animals.

ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

- Ensure that your birds have enough opportunity to interact positively with appropriate companions so that they do not become lonely or bored.
- When entrusting your birds' care to a third person it is your responsibility to ensure that they are experienced in your birds' needs.

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SECTION 5:

A bird's need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

KEY FACTS

- Birds can and do feel pain, although sometimes it is difficult to identify, monitoring of your bird is vital.
- Birds are vulnerable to a range of infectious diseases and other illnesses.
- Different species show pain and suffering in different ways.
- A change in the way a bird behaves can be an early sign that it is ill or in pain.
- Reward-based training methods are the most suitable, successful and positive methods of training, and therefore recommended"

THE LAW

If you look after a bird you must take all reasonable steps to ensure that it is protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

- Always obtain your birds from a reputable source. Seek expert advice if in doubt.
- Look for signs of injury or illness every day.
- If you suspect that your bird is in pain, ill or injured act promptly.
- Ensure that birds in your care do not escape.
- Be alert to risks and take sensible precautions to keep your birds safe.