



**RSPCA welfare
standards for**

**domestic/common
ducks**

April 2009



Certification Mark

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Introduction

The '*RSPCA welfare standards for domestic/common ducks*' are used to provide the only RSPCA-approved scheme for the rearing, handling, transport and slaughter of ducks. They take account of legislation, government welfare codes, scientific research, veterinary advice and practical experience of the farming industry.

The standards are based upon the 'Five Freedoms' as defined by FAWC (hence the name 'Freedom Food' - see page iv). Although these 'freedoms' define ideal states, they provide a comprehensive framework for the assessment of animal welfare on farm, in transit and at the place of slaughter, as well as representing an important element of farm assurance requirements.

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- Freedom from discomfort
by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- Freedom from pain, injury or disease
by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- Freedom from fear and distress
by ensuring conditions and care which avoid mental suffering.

These freedoms will be better provided for if those who have care of livestock practise:

- caring and responsible planning and management
- skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious stockmanship
- appropriate environmental design
- considerate handling and transport
- humane slaughter.

Guide to the use of the RSPCA welfare standards

- (i) At the head of each section the broad objectives of the welfare standards are described.
- (ii) The numbered requirements are the standards, all of which must be complied with.
- (iii) Boxed sections (indicated by ⓘ) give additional advice or may highlight areas where the standards will be reviewed in the future.
- (iv) It is assumed that all relevant legislation regarding farm animal husbandry and welfare on-farm, during transport, and at the abattoir, will be fully implemented in addition to the RSPCA welfare standards.
- (v) **Farmers are required by law to have a thorough knowledge of the '*Defra Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Ducks*'.**

Freedom Food Ltd

Freedom Food is a wholly owned subsidiary of the RSPCA, formed to implement the RSPCA welfare standards. Upon satisfactory inspection farmers, hauliers, slaughterers, processors and retailers may subscribe to the scheme and use the Freedom Food trademark. All participants are regularly assessed by Freedom Food Ltd. A charge is levied to cover inspection, administration and marketing costs. Participants are also randomly monitored by members of the RSPCA Farm Animals Department, free of charge.

It is the intention of Freedom Food Ltd to establish sister, franchise organisations in other countries working to the RSPCA welfare standards and therefore, in time, establish a common and consistent message for consumers around the world.

Freedom Food Ltd is non-profit making. Any surplus income will be used to fund research into farm animal welfare.

Specific provisions for ducklings

Duckling sourcing

SPD 1.1 * Ducklings must:

- a) be hatched according to the current version of the '*RSPCA welfare standards for hatcheries*'
- b) be sourced from a Freedom Food-accredited hatchery
- c) not be of a Muscovy (Barbary) genotype.

* ** The domestic (or common) duck and the Muscovy (or Barbary) are two distinct species with different evolutionary origins and biological characteristics. As such, these separate species are likely to have different management requirements. These standards have been written specifically for domestic/common meat duck breeds.**

Specific provisions for ducklings

SPD 2.1 Buildings must be fully prepared and ready to receive ducklings in sufficient time to allow the environment to meet their thermal requirements.

SPD 2.2 * For the brooding of ducklings, the number of feeders and drinkers placed, stocking density, air quality and ventilation must be as the breeding companies' published management guidelines.

SPD 2.3 Where used, spot brooders must be suspended above the centre of the surround.

SPD 2.4 The height of the brooder must be adjustable to ensure that the temperature at the level of the litter is maintained at the optimum level.

SPD 2.5 During unloading and placement, ducklings must be handled carefully.

SPD 2.6 Care must be taken to avoid heat and cold stress in ducklings.

SPD 2.7 Brooder surrounds and feeding and watering equipment within the surround must be designed and constructed so that ducklings can move freely towards or away from the brooder.

SPD 2.8 Particular care must be taken in the placement and maintenance of brooder heaters to ensure against risk of fire and emission of noxious gases, for example carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide.

SPD 2.9 Care must be taken to ensure that feeders do not become hot, especially when metal feeders are used.

SPD 2.10 * Supplementary feed trays and drinkers must be provided to the ducklings, in addition to the permanent feeders and drinkers, for the first few days at the start of brooding.

 Supplementary drinkers should be phased out by the end of 7 days.

SPD 2.11 Feeders and drinkers must be kept clean and free from litter.

Specific provisions for ducklings

- SPD 2.12 The environment for brooding ducklings must be lit at a minimum of 25 lux for the first few days.
- SPD 2.13 Supplementary lighting must be hung next to the brooder for the first few days after placement to attract ducklings to the heat source and provide extra illumination of feeders and drinkers.
- SPD 2.14 Drinker facilities must be of a design that prevents young ducklings from getting very wet or drowning before they have had sufficient time to develop waterproofing on their feathers.
- SPD 2.15 Young ducklings must be given appropriate experience of management practices (particularly feeding and watering systems) and environmental conditions (e.g. natural light, sufficient water to fulfil biological requirements, litter) to enable them to adapt to the husbandry systems they will encounter later in life.
- SPD 2.16 On arrival at the farm, day-old ducklings must be thoroughly inspected for signs of injury or deformities.
- SPD 2.17 All ducklings showing obvious signs of injury or deformity (including wrynecks) must be removed and humanely culled.

Food and water

Livestock must have freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and promote a positive state of well-being. Feed and water must be distributed in such a way that livestock can eat and drink without undue competition.

Food

- FW 1.1 All units must have a written feeding programme to ensure that ducks are fed a wholesome diet which is:
- appropriate to their species and age
 - fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health
 - satisfies their nutritional needs.
- FW 1.2 * Ducks must have access to nutritious food *ad libitum* each day, except when required by the attending veterinary surgeon, and prior to slaughter (see T 2.18)
- FW 1.3 Producers must have a written record of the nutrient content of the feed, as declared by the feed compounder.
- FW 1.4 No feedstuffs containing mammalian or avian derived protein are permitted.
- FW 1.5 All foodstuffs must be safely and hygienically transported, stored and delivered to stock to prevent spoiling e.g. infestation, contamination and wetting.
- FW 1.6 Food must not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition.
- FW 1.7 There must be a minimum feed space allowance of 50cm per 100 birds.
- FW 1.8 Feed troughs must be designed to enable birds to scoop up the feed effectively.
- FW 1.9 The siting of feeders must be such that all birds have ready access to food without undue competition.

Water

- FW 2.1 Ducks must have access to drinking water at all times, except when required by the attending veterinary surgeon.
- FW 2.2 * All water supplied must be clean and fresh.
- FW 2.3 Provision must be made to ensure an emergency supply of water in case normal supplies fail.
- FW 2.4 Provision must be made for supplying water in freezing conditions.
- FW 2.5 * Water must not be allowed to become harmfully contaminated.
- FW 2.6 All open water facilities must be cleaned out daily.
- FW 2.7 All drinkers must be in good working order.
- FW 2.8 There must be a minimum open water facility space of 50cm per 100 birds.

Food and water

FW 2.9 The height of the open water facility must be no more than 25cm for ducklings from 4 weeks of age to enable the birds to enter the open water facility and sit in the water should they so desire.

FW 2.10 For birds younger than 4 weeks old that have developed waterproofing on their feathers, the open water facility height must be adjusted according to their size to enable the birds to enter the open water facility.

i Ducks are waterfowl and use water to preen and to re-condition their feathers. Ducks that are not able to dip their heads in water may become affected by eye and/or nostril problems.

FW 2.11 The water open water facilities must be at least 20cm wide.

FW 2.12 The depth of water must be a minimum of 10cm to enable the birds to make full use of the water provided.

FW 2.13 * Where ball cocks are used within the open water facility, measures must be taken to prevent birds becoming stuck under them.

* **i** The ball cock should be enclosed or covered. However, a brick could be placed under the ball cock, but should not impede the flow of water.

FW 2.14 Consideration must be given to the placement of water facilities in order to prevent consequent problems with litter.

* **i** Open water facilities should be placed on a surface that has good drainage, e.g. slats or a perforated grid/plastic mat, to prevent the ducks coming into contact with wet litter. This surface should extend outwards from the facility by at least 1 metre.

In addition, the open water facility should be designed to minimise water spillage. For example, an angled lip can be positioned along the sides of the facility and wide feet can be fitted to the base to ensure it sits firmly on the floor and does not easily move if knocked by the birds.

Measures should also be taken to ensure any water spilt from the open water facility is removed from the building to a designated water collection area. Such measures can include a slightly sloping floor and drainage holes, drains or drainage channels positioned under the facility and extending to the water collection point.

The RSPCA Farm Animals Department will be considering making such requirements mandatory in the future.

FW 2.15 * Any litter immediately surrounding the open water facilities must:

- a) be managed to ensure it remains in good condition
- b) not be allowed to become excessively wet.

* **i** FW 2.15b will be determined by firmly compressing the litter surrounding the water facility with the foot. If water appears then the litter will be regarded as being excessively wet.

FW 2.16 The siting of drinkers must be such that all birds have ready access to water without undue competition.

FW 2.17 Ducks must not have to travel more than 20m anywhere in the house to reach food and water.

Environment

The environment in which livestock are kept must take into account their welfare needs, be designed to protect them from physical and thermal discomfort, fear and distress, and allow them to perform their natural behaviour.

- E 1.1 Where management systems, designs or layout of facilities not covered in the RSPCA welfare standards are being employed or considered, these must be referred to, and discussed with, the RSPCA Farm Animals Department before they can be considered for certification by Freedom Food.
- E 1.2 * Bird welfare must not be compromised/be likely to be compromised by outside environmental factors, such as noise, atmospheric pollution, adverse weather conditions, predators and, in the case of free range systems, soil conditions.

Buildings

- E 2.1 * All ducks must be provided with accommodation.
- E 2.2 * Buildings must be designed and erected so as to be suitable for expected local weather conditions.
- E 2.3 For all accommodation, a notice containing a checklist of the key points relating to welfare (see E 2.4) must be prominently displayed at, or near, the entrance to each building.
- E 2.4 The checklist to satisfy E 2.3 must include:
- a) total floor area available to the birds
 - b) total number of birds placed
 - * c) maximum predicted stocking density at depletion
 - d) total number of drinkers and feeders/minimum feed and water space in the house
 - e) target air quality parameters
 - f) lighting levels and regimes
 - g) emergency procedures i.e. actions in the case of fire, flood, failure of automatic equipment, and when temperatures move outside acceptable limits.
- E 2.5 * There must be nothing in the ducks' environment that is likely to cause injury or distress to the birds that can be avoided.
- E 2.6 Except where preservatives with an insecticidal role are used, ducks must not come into contact with toxic fumes or surfaces, for example from paints, wood preservatives or disinfectants.

Environment

- E 2.7 All electrical installations at mains voltage must be:
- a) inaccessible to the ducks
 - b) well insulated
 - c) safeguarded from rodents
 - d) properly earthed
 - * e) tested at least annually by a qualified or competent person
 - * f) in good working order.

*  **By law electrical installations have to be tested every 3 years as part of the Periodic Inspection Report. However, at least once a year, the 'trip switch' can be tested to ensure it is in correct working order.**

- E 2.8 Housing and equipment must be designed so that all ducks can be clearly seen.
- E 2.9 * Where new accommodation is being built or new equipment installed that has not previously been assessed, managers must inform Freedom Food.
- E 2.10 * New housing or housing undergoing major structural change must be designed to allow easy removal and minimal carrying and handling of birds during catching.
- E 2.11 * Managers must:
- a) have access to a copy of the '*Code of practice for using plant protection products*' (Defra, 2006, PB 11090) [this code replaces the '*Code of Practice for the Safe Use of Pesticides on Farms and Holdings*']
 - b) be familiar with its content
 - c) implement the recommendations as appropriate.

Floor and litter

- E 3.1 Duck house flooring must allow effective cleansing and disinfection, preventing significant build up of parasites and other pathogens.

 **Where possible flooring should be concrete.**

- E 3.2 Buildings and equipment must be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected after each flock and/or before the placement of new birds.
- E 3.3 The floor of all houses must be completely covered in litter (except in the case of areas around water facilities).

Environment

- E 3.4 The litter must:
- a) be of a suitable material and particle size
 - b) be managed to maintain it in a dry condition
 - c) be of a sufficient depth for dilution of faeces
 - * d) be topped up to maintain dry conditions - this must be on a daily basis if necessary
 - e) be managed hygienically

*  **It is a legal requirement to keep the litter in a well-maintained state.**

- E 3.5 Litter which is wet, infested with mites, or otherwise harmfully contaminated must:
- a) not be introduced into duck housing
 - b) be replaced immediately if within the house.

*  **Depending on the severity of the issue, wet litter may be covered with fresh, dry litter if this is sufficient to prevent the birds becoming wet from water seeping up through the litter.**

E 3.6 Ducks must have access to the litter area at all times.

E 3.7 Where a suitable slatted floor area is provided under water facilities, this must occupy no more than 25% of the total floor area of the house.

- E 3.8 Stock-keepers must:
- a) understand the factors that affect litter condition
 - b) be aware of the welfare problems associated with poor litter management (e.g. foot burn).

- E 3.9 Where straw is used as bedding material, stock-keepers must:
- a) be aware of problems associated with respiratory problems, i.e. aspergillosis
 - b) only use good quality straw.

 **Where possible, straw for the purpose of bedding should be stored under cover.**

Lighting

- E 4.1 * In each period of 24 hours there must be:
- a) a minimum period of 8 hours continuous natural daylight
 - b) an average illumination of at least 20 lux across the house during the light period
 - c) a minimum period of 6 hours continuous darkness, (which must take place during the natural dark period), except for birds up to 5 days of age where the minimum period of continuous darkness must be at least 1 hour from day 1 and increased by at least 1 hour per day.

* **i** **Natural daylight is to be used to achieve the minimum light level of 20 lux. During the shorter winter months, artificial lighting may be used to supplement the natural daylight in order to maintain the minimum light level either side of the 8-hour period and to achieve the 8-hour photoperiod.**

Measures of illuminance are to be taken at bird head height.

It is acknowledged that it may not be possible to achieve 6 hours of continuous darkness when the natural period of darkness is shorter than 6 hours.

* **i** **The introduction of natural daylight into the house is likely to be beneficial to bird welfare by, for example, increasing activity and enriching the bird's environment. Natural daylight can provide a range of illuminance levels in different areas within the house, which changes throughout the day, and is spectrally different to artificial sources.**

* **i** **As a guide, based on practical experience, the light openings should correspond to at least 3% of the total floor area of the house. The RSPCA Farm Animals Department will be considering making this requirement mandatory in the future.**

- E 4.2 * Light openings must be of a sufficient size to ensure that streams of light entering the house causing patches of bright light are avoided.

* **i** **As a guide, each light opening should be no smaller than 0.56m².**

* **i** **Where there are patches of bright light, e.g. when windows are not evenly distributed around the house or when windows are not of a similar size, bird activity may be greater in the more illuminated areas, which could adversely affect litter quality.**

Environment

E 4.3 * Where there could be a risk of birds becoming heat stressed due to the penetration of direct sunlight into the house, it must be possible to readily control the amount of natural daylight entering the building to the extent that darkness can be achieved.

* **i** For example, installing shutters can control the amount of light entering through the light opening. The shutters can also be used to completely block any light entering the house at night where events outside the house could cause birds to panic. To have the greatest amount of control over the light entering the house it should be possible to open/close the shutters by varying degrees. Shutters, especially if insulated, can also help keep the building warm during cold weather, which is important during the brooding phase (see E 6.5).

* **i** The provision of daylight, particularly via windows, can increase environmental temperature within the house. Therefore it is important to consider the capacity of the ventilation system and the positioning of the ventilation inlets so that good ventilation and correct house temperature can be achieved.

E 4.4 * Where glass is used, this must be safety/toughened glass.

* **i** The use of transparent glass windows is encouraged, as this will allow birds to see out of the building, further enriching their environment. Transparent glass windows also provide good light, with minimal filtering and distortion, and do not discolour with time.

* **i** Window material that helps prevent condensation forming should be selected, e.g. double-glazed windows.

E 4.5 * Birds must be exposed to natural daylight as soon as possible, and no later than 7 days of age.

* **i** Experience has shown that exposing birds to events occurring outside the house at an early stage allows them time to develop recognition and familiarity and therefore reduce their fearfulness towards them.

E 4.6 * Natural daylight must penetrate all areas of the house.

* **i** It is important to install a sufficient number and size of light inlets to ensure the lighting requirements can be achieved at all times.

Installing light openings down both sides of a house can allow greater control over the light entering the building. For example, if the shutters on one side of the house have to be closed then daylight can still enter the building through the inlets on the opposite side. Similarly, more than the suggested amount of total window space for a building should be provided.

E 4.7 * Natural daylight must be provided at all times during the natural daylight period, through all the openings.

Environment

- E 4.8 * Birds must be exposed to dawn and dusk periods.
- E 4.9 The use of intermittent lighting patterns to meet the minimum number of hours of darkness is not permitted, with the exception of the first 36 hours after placement.
- E 4.10 * When used outside the natural daylight period, artificial light must be switched on and off in a stepped or gradual manner, over a period of at least 20 minutes.

* **i** **Turning artificial lights on/off gradually allows time for the ducks to prepare for daytime and darkness. Before the dark period, it is also likely to promote natural settling behaviour and stimulate birds to have a last meal, which may help increase feed conversion efficiency.**

- E 4.11 Where supplementary lighting is provided at night, this must not exceed 2 lux.

i **In order to avoid panic, it is accepted that ducks may not be kept in total darkness during the night.**

- E 4.12 Lighting patterns in all houses must be recorded.

i **Where possible, lighting patterns should be recorded automatically.**

Stocking density

- E 5.1 * Stocking density, which is to be calculated using the floor space available to the birds, must never:
- exceed 17kg/m²
 - be likely to exceed 17kg/m²

* **i** **For Freedom Food members, E 5.1 a) not only applies to the current flock but also the previous 3 Freedom Food accredited flocks, where applicable.**

E 5.1 b) will be based on predicted outcomes for the current flock.

- E 5.2 * Stocking density must take account of the ventilation capacity of the building in order to maintain:
- good air quality
 - an adequate temperature to avoid heat stress
 - * good litter quality.

i **Stocking density should be set at a level that is appropriate to the design of the building and its locality.**

Air quality and thermal environment

- E 6.1 Ventilation systems must be designed to maintain air quality.
- E 6.2 Provision must be made to ensure that aerial contaminants do not reach a level at which they are noticeably unpleasant to a human observer.
- E 6.3 Averaged over an 8 hour period:
- a) dust must not exceed 10mg/m³
 - b) carbon monoxide must not exceed 50ppm.

i Air quality parameters should be maintained under all foreseeable climatic conditions, below the following levels at bird head height:

Ammonia	15ppm
Carbon dioxide	5000ppm
Relative humidity	50 to 70%

Air quality parameters, i.e. ammonia, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide etc., should be measured and recorded on a daily basis. Where possible, these levels should be automatically recorded.

- E 6.4 Where automatic recording of air quality parameters is not possible, producers must monitor and record air quality on a daily basis.
- E 6.5 Ducks must have access to a thermally comfortable environment at all times so that heat/cold stress does not occur.

i The number, size and capacity of the fans are an important consideration when determining ventilation rate. A minimum ventilation rate of $1.6 \times 10^{-4} \text{m}^3/\text{s}$ per $\text{kg}^{0.75}$ liveweight is recommended. The maximum ventilation capacity should be sufficient to limit a maximum temperature lift to 3°C.

- E 6.6 Daily measurements of the maximum and minimum temperatures must be recorded (a) from the centre of the shed and at either end, (b) at bird height.
- E 6.7 * Stock-keepers must:
- a) have access to a copy of the Defra booklet '*Heat Stress in Poultry - Solving the Problem*' (PB 10543, 2005)
 - b) be familiar with its content
 - c) adopt its recommendations.

Environmental enrichment

- E 7.1 Ducks are particularly water-orientated and must be given the opportunity to preen and recondition their feathers effectively.
- E 7.2 Provisions must be made to keep indoor ducks active by enriching their environment. Stock-keepers must be able to demonstrate to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer, effective methods of environmental enrichment which stimulate activity in the birds, e.g. by providing straw bales, and additional water facilities for preening and bathing.



Current commercial duck rearing imposes restricted access to water for most water-related behaviours other than drinking. The RSPCA believes that, as ducks are waterfowl, they should be given access to open water sources that enable them to fulfil many of their complex water-related preening behaviours. Producers are therefore encouraged to seek designs of water facilities that can fulfil these needs and be managed hygienically to overcome the potential health-related issues that may be associated with providing water for this purpose.

The range

* The RSPCA believes that free-range conditions can offer benefits to bird welfare, provided the range area is well managed and the birds are offered suitable protection against inclement weather and predators. Where range is provided, the following standards are to be met in addition to all other relevant standards in other sections of this document.

R 1.1 * Birds must be introduced onto the range as soon as they are mature enough.

* ** For birds being sold as free-range it is a legal requirement for them to have had, during at least half their lifetime, continuous daytime access to the range. The minimum legal slaughter age for free-range Pekin ducks is 49 days.**

R 1.2 Consideration must be given to the weather conditions before young birds are introduced to the range and, if necessary, this must be delayed to avoid cold stress.

R 1.3 * Ducks kept in free-range systems must have continuous daytime access to the range.

R 1.4 The outdoor area in free-range systems must:

- a) be designed and managed in ways that ensure that the land around the house and shelter does not become poached
- b) consist of pasture mainly covered by living vegetation.

R 1.5 In paddocks, where pasture management practices such as rotation ensure a good grass sward is maintained throughout the grass period, there must be a minimum of 2.5m² of range per bird.

R 1.6 Where grass cover is poor, there must be a minimum of 4m² of range per bird.

* ** It is a legal requirement that free-range ducks have access to a range that is mainly covered by vegetation, and that each bird be provided with a minimum range area of 2m².**

R 1.7 Ducks must be provided with shelter as a form of protection against adverse weather conditions, such as prevailing wind, rain and strong sunlight.

* ** Free range ducks should have access to areas of shelter to not only offer cover from adverse weather conditions but also offer regions of variation and enrichment. Both natural and artificial shelter is recommended. Natural shelter should include the planting of trees and shrubs or semi-permanent vegetation that can be easily established and removed, such as artichoke and kale. Artificial shelter could include the erection of military netting and sun parasols, and the provision of straw bale 'huts' and trailers.**

Items should form 'corridors' leading out from the building to encourage birds onto the range.

R 1.8 In summer conditions, free-range ducks must have access to adequate areas of shelter to minimise crowding (thereby risking further heat stress).

The range

R 1.9 * A minimum area of overhead shade and shelter (natural, artificial or a combination of both) of 8m² per 1,000 ducks must be provided.

* **i** Calculations of the overhead shade/shelter area will be based on the amount of shade provided by the object/facility.

* **i** Vegetation that does not provide overhead shade/shelter, and therefore cannot be included in the calculation of 8m² per 1,000 ducks, includes:

- a) immature trees that have yet to produce foliage
- b) deciduous trees when they have lost their foliage, e.g. during winter.
- c) commercial arable crops

In such cases, artificial shelters will need to be provided.

Hedgerows may be included in calculations of overhead shade/shelter, provided that there is enough room underneath for the ducks to access. However, at certain times of the day, the position of the sun may mean that the hedgerow is not offering any protection in terms of shade. As shade/shelter must be appropriately distributed, hedgerows alone will not satisfy R 1.9 and R 1.10.

Tractor trailers and simple shelters constructed of four downward posts and a solid roof, for example, are acceptable forms of shade/shelter provision. Fences, on the other hand, which do not provide overhead protection, are not suitable for this purpose.

R 1.10 * Shade and shelter facilities must be appropriately distributed to encourage full use of the range.

R 1.11 * The range must be managed in order to provide the most suitable conditions and to encourage the birds to roam.

* **i** Ways of satisfying Standard R 1.11 include:

- a) positioning shade and shelter facilities at varying distances from the house
- b) the rotation of artificial shelters in order to prevent poaching of the land around them
- c) the trimming of hedgerows so that access is provided underneath
- d) restricting access to certain areas of the range as and when necessary in order to prevent poaching of the land
- e) managing poached areas to aid recovery and prevent poaching reoccurring in the same area
- f) an appreciation of the need to take individual flock behaviour into account: some flocks may be reluctant to range and therefore need encouraging by, for example, providing a sheltered route onto the range
- g) the rotation and 'resting' of pasture areas.

R 1.12 Strict management procedures must be implemented to reduce the risk of disease outbreak, particularly where a large number of birds are kept within a certain area.

The range

- R 1.13 Where provided, ponds must be well maintained to prevent a build up of stagnant water with decaying vegetation.

i Filtering out plant debris and providing good aeration will help to avoid problems such as botulism in ponds.

- R 1.14 Young ducklings, when first introduced to the range, must be guided towards food and water and shelter areas to facilitate adaptation to their new environment.

- R 1.15 * Measures must be taken to prevent the area immediately surrounding any outdoor feeding and water facilities from becoming poached and muddy.

* **i** For example, water and feed facilities can be placed on a non-slip, solid concrete surface, or a surface that has good drainage, e.g. slats or perforations, or on a deep gravel bed. This drainage area should extend outwards from the water/feed facility by at least 1 metre.

Management

A high degree of caring and responsible management and stockmanship is vital to ensure good animal welfare. Managers and stock-keepers must be thoroughly trained, skilled and competent in animal husbandry and welfare, and have a good working knowledge of their system and the livestock under their care.

- M 1.0 * All records and other documentation that the '*RSPCA welfare standards for domestic/common ducks*' require to be kept and maintained, must be made available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.

Managers

- M 1.1 Managers must ensure that all stock-keepers:
- have access to a current version of the '*RSPCA welfare standards for domestic/common ducks*'
 - are familiar with its content
 - understand and apply its content.
- M 1.2 All staff employed who are responsible for the welfare of livestock must be identified, and records must be kept of all relevant training (including in-house) and experience received or gained.
- M 1.3 Managers must:
- ensure all stock-keepers have completed relevant and adequate training and can satisfy the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer of their competence in practical circumstances
 - develop and implement plans and precautions to prevent and cope with emergencies such as fire, flood, breakdown of environmental control systems or interruption of supplies e.g. food, water, electricity
 - provide an Emergency Action Board sited in a prominent position, which must include:
 - the telephone number of the premises
 - directions to the farm with a map reference and postcode
 - * the procedures to be followed by those discovering an emergency, e.g. fire, flood, power failure, notifiable disease
 - the location of water sources for use by the fire brigade.
 - develop and implement a biosecurity plan to minimise the risk of introducing disease onto a site
 - maintain records of production data for each house, which include documentation on:
 - incoming and outgoing stock
 - causes of illness and injury
 - feed consumption
 - * daily water consumption for each duck house
 - ventilation (including settings and any necessary changes)
 - the maximum number of birds permitted within the house, and actual number of birds placed
 - * the daily mortality (the cause of death must be stated if this can be identified)
 - the number culled (including reasons for culling)
 - the average weight of birds removed for slaughter
 - * maximum and minimum temperatures
 - * relative humidity
 - develop and implement a transport plan to Freedom Food approved abattoirs which minimises waiting time for the birds
 - develop and implement a waste management plan.

Management

- M 1.4 Managers must take into account the abilities of the stock-keepers when deciding on stocking densities for present systems, when considering expanding the unit, or when installing more complex equipment.
- M 1.5 For thorough overall inspection of the flock or group of birds, special attention must be paid to:
- a) bodily condition
 - b) movements and other behaviour patterns
 - c) respiration
 - d) condition of plumage, eyes, skin, bill, legs and feet
 - e) the presence of external parasites
 - f) the condition of droppings
 - g) feed and water intake
 - h) growth.

Stock-keepers

- M 2.1 Prior to being given responsibility for the welfare of livestock, stock-keepers must be properly trained and be competent to:
- a) recognise signs of common diseases
 - b) know the appropriate actions for treatment
 - c) recognise signs of normal behaviour, abnormal behaviour and fear
 - d) understand the signs which indicate good health and welfare
 - e) understand the environmental requirements for ducks
 - f) handle ducks in a positive and compassionate manner
 - g) euthanase ducks when necessary to prevent further suffering.
- M 2.2 * Stock-keepers must be able to recognise impending welfare problems at their earliest stages, to enable prompt identification of the cause and prevent the condition worsening.
- M 2.3 When an outbreak of abnormal behaviour occurs, it must be tackled immediately by appropriate changes in the system of management.
- M 2.4 Stock-keepers must be able to demonstrate their proficiency in procedures that have the potential to cause suffering, e.g. injections, neck dislocation.

Inspection

- M 3.1 All ducks must be inspected at least twice a day using an inspection procedure that will identify all birds that are sick, injured or behaving abnormally.
- M 3.2 In order that inspections are thorough, the stock-keeper must, at least once a day, walk within approximately 3 metres of each bird and encourage them to move.
- M 3.3 Where health problems have been identified, the stock-keeper must increase the number of inspections carried out each day to ensure all sick birds are treated or humanely culled without delay.
- M 3.4 All movement throughout the flock must be slow and deliberate, both to alleviate fear and reduce possible injury to birds.

Management

- M 3.5 On completion of inspection, records must be kept of ill, injured and dead birds.
- M 3.6 Inspection records must be dated, signed and the time of inspection noted.
- M 3.7 Any welfare problems seen during an inspection must be dealt with appropriately and without delay.

i **Welfare problems of sufficient severity that they should have been noticed on previous inspections and dealt with, shall be taken as evidence of negligence of duties by the stock-keeper.**

Equipment

- M 4.1 Stock keepers must inspect the equipment, including the automatic equipment, upon which ducks depend, at least once daily, to check that there is no defect in it.
- M 4.2 Where the birds' welfare is dependent on automated equipment, there must be:
- an alarm which will give adequate warning of the failure of that system to function properly (the alarm must operate even if the principal electricity supply to it has failed)
 - additional equipment or alternative means (whether automatic or not) of maintaining a satisfactory environment to prevent the birds from suffering unnecessary distress as a result of a failure.

i **See Freedom Food information sheet '*Requirement for Alarmed Ventilation Systems*' (Issue 3, August 2003).**

- M 4.3 Where a defect in the equipment is found (whether on inspection or at any other time):
- the defect must be rectified immediately
 - if this is impracticable, measures to safeguard the ducks from suffering unnecessary pain or distress as a result of the defect must immediately be taken and be maintained until the defect is rectified.
- M 4.4 For existing or new equipment which is used in management, e.g. heaters and lighting, stock-keepers must be able to:
- demonstrate an ability to operate the equipment competently
 - demonstrate the ability to carry out routine maintenance
 - recognise common signs of malfunction
 - demonstrate knowledge of action to be carried out in event of failures.

Pests and predators

M 5.1 Humane precautions must be taken to protect ducks from predators and rodents.

M 5.2 * A written pest control policy must be in place (see Appendix 1).

*  **The RSPCA is opposed to the use of poisons that cause animal suffering.**

The RSPCA is concerned about the welfare of all animals that have the capacity to suffer, and therefore the consideration and use of alternatives to baiting as a method of pest control is strongly encouraged.

M 5.3 When developing and implementing farm pest and predator control plans, physical exclusion methods, and the removal of elements in the vicinity of livestock that might encourage the presence of pests and predators (see information box below), must be included.

 **Methods of physical exclusion and discouragement of pests and predators include:**

- **construction/maintenance of fencing appropriate for excluding the pests/predators in question**
- **removal of shelter/cover (e.g. weeds) in the area surrounding livestock buildings**
- **removal/protection of obvious food sources**
- **maintenance/proofing of buildings against pests and predators.**

M 5.4 * The farm pest control plan must include provisions that specifically exclude the snaring or gassing of animals.

M 5.5 The intrusion of wild birds into non-free-range houses must be prevented with netting or similar material over roof ventilation ducts, windows, etc.

M 5.6 Farm dogs and cats must not be permitted in the duck house.

M 5.7 Where a predator problem has been identified, either in the house or range, producers must demonstrate that action has been taken to safeguard the welfare of the birds.

Health

Livestock must be protected from pain, injury and disease. The environment in which livestock are housed must be conducive to good health. All producers must develop a health plan in consultation with their veterinary surgeon.

H 1.1 A written Veterinary Health Plan (VHP) must be drawn up, reviewed and updated at least annually with the attending veterinary surgeon.

i **The Veterinary Health Plan (VHP) forms a vitally important part of the RSPCA welfare standards with regard to maintaining health and welfare of livestock on farm. The VHP should take into account specific health and welfare issues that are known to affect ducks, for example pododermatitis, and also health concerns that have been identified on farm on an individual basis.**

The VHP should include details of any medication and records of stock management e.g. water consumption, feed consumption, body weight, maximum and minimum house temperatures, relative humidity and flock mortality.

H 1.2 The VHP must include targets set for health aspects and records kept to identify whether targets have been met every year and at each assessment made by the veterinary surgeon.

H 1.3 * Managers must:

- a) have access to a copy of the Defra 'Code of Practice for the Control of Salmonella during Storage, Handling, and Transport of Raw Materials Intended for Incorporation into, or direct use as, Animal Feeding Stuff' (PB 2202, revised Feb 2003).
- b) be familiar with its content
- c) adopt its recommendations

H 1.4 There must be no recurring injuries of a similar nature seen on a number of birds attributable to physical features of their environment or handling procedures.

H 1.5 If injuries are found, a programme of preventative action must be specified in the VHP (see H 1.1).

H 1.6 Proper attention must be paid to foot lesions.

H 1.7 Flock performance data must be continuously monitored for signs of disease or production disorders.

H 1.8 * For each condition listed in S 3.1 ('health monitoring' in slaughter section), a plan must be developed which is designed to prevent any increase in and/or reduce the average level of that condition existing on the farm.

H 1.9 * The plans referred to in H 1.8 must be incorporated into the VHP (see H 1.1).

Health

- H 1.10 If any flock performance parameters fall below the tolerance limits identified in the VHP (see H 1.1):
- the veterinary surgeon must be informed
 - the VHP must be revised to include a programme of action that will remedy the problem.

i **The use of multi-vitamins is recommended as good practice during the early stages of rearing, in the event of suspected disease challenge and also prior to and following periods of possible stress.**

- H 1.11 Ailing ducks and any ducks suffering from injury, such as open wounds or fractures, must without delay be:
- segregated, but within sight and sound of other ducks,
 - treated, or
 - if necessary, humanely killed (see H 3.2)

i **The RSPCA is aware that a number of different factors such as genetics, nutrition and management can all have an effect on the health, especially the leg health, of ducks. The Society is currently investigating the genetic selection process to help address some of these issues. When considering the choice of stock, selection of the strain of bird should be made with the aim of reducing welfare problems associated with rapid weight gain, such as leg problems.**

- H 1.12 * Management plans must aim to prevent ducks from suffering chronic joint disease or leg deformation.

- H 1.13 * There must not be any lame birds.

- H 1.14 * Any bird that is:
- in uncontrollable pain,
 - found not to be recovering from illness or injury, or
 - is lame
- must be humanely killed without delay.

* **i** **Lame is defined as a bird that has an obvious gait defect that affects its ability to move. The bird may have a limp, jerky or unsteady strut, or may splay one leg as it moves. The bird often prefers to sit when not coerced to move, and is unable to run.**

- H 1.15 * Where used, facilities to segregate sick or injured birds must:
- be within the main house
 - provide birds with food and water, which is accessible without undue effort or discomfort, as specified in Food and Water section
 - be stocked at a density lower than the rest of the house to allow birds to rest quietly
 - be well littered, as specified in the Environment section
 - be inspected at least 3 times daily and an assessment made of each bird – this must be recorded.

Health

H 1.16 Stock-keepers must:

- a) take care when placing a duck into the segregation pen
- b) not, under any circumstances, drop it over the surround.

H 1.17 If the mortality level within a house is in excess of 0.5% in any 24-hour period, a veterinary investigation must be made and the outcome recorded.



Investigation of lower mortality levels is at the discretion of the attending veterinary surgeon.

H 1.18 Following depopulation, all houses must be thoroughly cleansed, disinfected and tested free from infectious agents as specified in the VHP.

H 1.19 Written procedures must be in place, and must be followed at all times, for the safe disposal of pharmaceutical waste, needles and other sharps.

H 1.20 Procedures relating to H 1.19 must be in strict accordance with the relevant waste disposal regulations.

H 1.21 Medicines must be clearly labelled and stored in accordance with the label instructions.

H 1.22 Medicines must be kept in a secure, lockable store, which is safe from children and animals, including pets and wild birds.

H 1.23 The medicine store must be separate from food producing areas.

H 1.24 Any medicine used must be licensed for use in the UK, and applied in accordance with UK and EU legislation.



It is recommended that producers obtain, read and where appropriate, apply the advice contained within the latest version of:

- a) **'Guidelines on Responsible Use of Antimicrobials in Poultry Production'**, issued by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance (RUMA, Acorn House, 25 Mardley Hill, Welwyn, Hertfordshire, AL6 0TT; www.ruma.org.uk)
- b) **'Code of practice on the responsible use of animal medicines on the farm'**, issued by the Veterinary Medicine Directorate
- c) **'Veterinary Medicines: safe use by farmers and other handlers'**, issued by the Health and Safety Executive

H 1.25 All personnel involved in the administration of animal medicines must be competent to do so.

Mutilations

H 2.1 Bill trimming, claw trimming, wing clipping and any other forms of mutilation are not permitted.

Casualty slaughter/killing

H 3.1 Each farm must have provisions for the humane killing/slaughter – without delay – of casualty birds.

H 3.2 Casualty killing/slaughter must be carried out by either:

- a) a named, trained, competent member of staff, or
- b) a licensed slaughterman, or
- c) a veterinary surgeon.

i It is not illegal to slaughter a bird to prevent further severe suffering if a method of humane slaughter is available on the premises and there is someone competent to undertake the procedure.

i The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) has produced a booklet '*Practical Slaughter of Poultry: A Guide for the Small Producer*'. Producers should obtain a copy of this booklet, from HSA, The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN.

H 3.3 If there is any doubt as to how to proceed, the veterinary surgeon must be called at an early stage to advise whether treatment is possible or whether humane slaughter is required to prevent suffering.

H 3.4 * Permitted methods of on-farm slaughter/killing are:

- a) captive bolt (e.g. Cash Poultry Killer)
- b) hand held electrical stunning, immediately followed by neck cutting; to be used if slaughter on a regular, routine or seasonal basis
- c) neck dislocation; only to be used in an emergency and for birds weighing less than 4kg.

* **i** Although the captive bolt device has been designed to effectively kill poultry, under current legislation it must be followed by neck dislocation or bleeding; except when used for emergency culling or during disease control operations. The RSPCA would strongly recommend the use of a captive bolt device for the culling of birds.

N.B. The term 'emergency' can be used to refer to the culling of casualty birds.

H 3.5 Neck dislocation must involve stretching the neck to sever the spinal cord and cause extensive damage to the major blood vessels.

H 3.6 For birds weighing 4kg and over, the only permitted method for casualty slaughter is either:

- a) captive bolt
- b) hand held electrical stunning, followed by manual neck dislocation or cutting.

H 3.7 Those responsible for using the captive bolt must:

- a) have received appropriate training
- b) be competent when using this equipment.

H 3.8 * The captive bolt device must be used and maintained according to the manufacturer's published guidelines.

Health

H 3.9 Equipment that crushes the neck (e.g. killing pliers) must not be used.



Equipment that crushes the neck is neither quick nor humane.

H 3.10 All carcasses must be disposed of strictly according to current legislation.

H 3.11 A record must be kept of how and where carcasses are disposed of.

Transport

Animal transport systems must be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The transport and handling of livestock must be kept to an absolute minimum.

T 1.1 All personnel involved in the catching and transportation of birds must be properly trained and competent.

i Where possible, training relating to T 1.1 should be validated.

Catching

i Managers should consider the construction of buildings and bear in mind the access to and from the area where birds are placed and removed. Particular attention should be paid to the width of doors.

T 2.1 * Catching team leaders must:

- a) be familiar with the content of the Humane Slaughter Association DVD '*Poultry Slaughter – Taking Responsibility*'
- b) convey the relevant content to other members of the catching team
- c) ensure that the recommendations are applied where appropriate.

* **i** Where possible all members of the catching team should be familiar with the content of the Humane Slaughter Association DVD '*Poultry Slaughter - Taking Responsibility*'.

T 2.2 Managers must prepare full and detailed written catching instructions for the catching staff.

T 2.3 All catching staff must:

- a) have a copy of the written catching instructions
- b) be aware of their duties

T 2.4 The farm manager/assistant must be made responsible for supervising and maintaining high welfare standards throughout the depopulation of the house and loading of birds onto the transport vehicle.

T 2.5 The farm manager/assistant must be present at all times during the catching operation.

T 2.6 Procedures must be in place to ensure that any concerns regarding the catching techniques used by the catching staff are recorded and raised with the area manager.

T 2.7 The catching of birds must be carried out quietly and confidently, exercising care to avoid unnecessary struggling and stress.

T 2.8 Ducks must be put in transport modules in the house.

Transport

- T 2.9 The top drawer of the module must be loaded first.
- T 2.10 Birds must be placed carefully into the module drawer.
- T 2.11 Birds must not be dropped or thrown into the drawer.
- T 2.12 * Care must be taken to avoid injury to the birds when loading them into the drawer.
- T 2.13 Drawers must be closed carefully to ensure that the birds' heads, wings or legs are not trapped in any way.
- T 2.14 Modules must be taken from the shed slowly and care must be taken to ensure no damage is caused to the birds.
- T 2.15 The stocking density in each tray must not exceed 62kg/m² of tray floor area.

*  **Based on the standard Anglia Autoflow crate (0.8m²) the stocking density in T 2.15 equates to:**

Weight	Birds per crate
Up to 3kg	16
3.1 to 3.5kg	14
3.6 to 4.0kg	12

- T 2.16 Stocking density must be reduced by 10% when birds are being transported during temperatures in excess of 20°C.
- T 2.17 Sufficient time must be made available to ensure birds are handled with care.
- T 2.18 Ducks must not suffer prolonged hunger, thirst, deprivation of rest, or thermal distress – specifically:
- birds must have access to water up to the time of catching
 - * no bird must be deprived of food for more than 10 hours prior to slaughter
 - during hot weather (in excess of 20°C) sufficient ventilation must be provided for uncaught birds until the time they are loaded and, if necessary, additional mobile fans must be provided during the catching operation.
 - during cold weather adequate draught-free ventilation at bird height must be provided for uncaught birds up to the time of loading.
- T 2.19 Catching must take place in low or blue lighting to minimise fear reactions of the birds.
- T 2.20 During catching, actions must be taken to prevent ducks from crowding together.
- T 2.21 Where crowding occurs, the house lights must be raised, the birds spread out calmly and quietly, then allowed to settle before catching is resumed.
- T 2.22 Managers must ensure that when birds are placed in transport crates, the handling of birds, design of crates, and method of transportation, minimise the soiling of feathers.
- T 2.23 Care must be taken to ensure that birds do not come into contact with moving vehicles whilst being caught.
- T 2.24 If ducks are caught by their necks, there must be no more than two birds carried in each hand.

Transport

- T 2.25 Ducks must not be carried:
- a) hanging head downwards
 - b) by the legs alone
 - * c) by the wing.
- T 2.26 Birds weighing more than 4kg must:
- a) be carried individually
 - b) have their body weight supported
 - c) be put into containers one at a time.
- T 2.27 Birds which are visibly unfit before loading must:
- a) not be transported
 - b) be humanely slaughtered immediately.

Transport

- T 3.1 * All birds must be slaughtered within 6 hours of loading the first bird into a module.
- T 3.2 * The time from when the birds leave the farm to arriving at the processing plant must be no longer than 4 hours.
- T 3.3 * All hauliers must have a written 'Standard Operating and Emergency Procedure' to implement during transportation (see Appendix 1).
- T 3.4 Fixed crate transport systems are prohibited.
- T 3.5 Modular transport vehicles must be parked as near as practically possible to the house being depopulated.
- T 3.6 The distance birds are carried/have to walk must be minimised, for example, by bringing transport containers as close to the birds as possible.
- T 3.7 Modular transport systems must:
- a) have completely open tops with a depth of not less than 210mm
 - b) permit adequate ventilation and protect birds from adverse climatic conditions
 - c) be well maintained
 - d) be thoroughly cleansed after carrying each consignment of birds.
- T 3.8 There must be no sharp edges or protrusions on the crates or vehicle that could cause injury to the birds.
- T 3.9 The cleanliness of the vehicle must be checked by the appointed supervisor before any birds are loaded on to it.
- T 3.10 Personnel in charge of duck transporters must:
- a) have completed an approved training course
 - b) be able to demonstrate their competence in handling ducks when loading and unloading them and while in transit.

Transport

T 3.11 All transporters must have a livestock capacity document on board at all times.

i The livestock capacity document will give data on the size of the transporter and the calculated carrying capacity for different livestock species under different climatic conditions.

T 3.12 An on-farm record must be maintained of all incidents causing death or injury to the birds during transport.

T 3.13 Where causes of mortality have been identified, prompt action must be taken to prevent further deaths, injury or suffering occurring.

T 3.14 Levels of transport mortality (in ducks from any single site) above 0.5% in any month must:

- a) be the subject of investigation
- b) be recorded.

T 3.15 On arrival at the destination, all birds must be unloaded immediately.

T 3.16 Noise levels, from all sources, must be minimised during loading, unloading and transport.

T 3.17 Every effort must be made to ensure:

- a) journeys are completed without unnecessary delays
- b) that drivers are aware of any potential traffic problems and plan their journey accordingly.

T 3.18 The person supervising the catching and loading of birds must liaise closely with the abattoir to minimise the time birds spend waiting on the vehicle.

T 3.19 If it is necessary to keep birds on board a stationary vehicle, the driver must take action to avoid heat/cold stress to the birds.

i In hot weather (in excess of 20°C) one of the most effective ways of providing a cooling draught is to keep the vehicle moving.

T 3.20 Plans must be made in advance, and appropriate action taken, to reduce the risk of heat stress, including the routine monitoring of weather forecasts of predicted temperatures.

T 3.21 Ducks must have shelter from extremes of weather during transport.

i The technology is now becoming available to monitor temperature and humidity on-board transport vehicles. This allows drivers to take appropriate action to maintain ideal conditions for birds. The use of such equipment is encouraged by the RSPCA. The RSPCA will monitor the development of such technology and review its use for inclusion in future development of these standards.

i At times of high ambient temperature or when high humidity poses a threat to the birds, catching, loading and transportation create particular risks of heat stress.

T 3.22 Drivers must carry some form of communication, e.g. mobile telephone, in case of an emergency when he/she may need to contact relevant personnel.

Slaughter/killing

All slaughter systems must be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The pre-slaughter handling of livestock must be kept to an absolute minimum.

S 1.0 * For those seeking Freedom Food accreditation, the standards relating to the slaughter/killing of ducks (standards with the 'S' prefix) must be assessed by the RSPCA's Farm Animals Department, prior to accreditation.

S 1.1 Ducks must be slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production.

Training

S 2.1 Managers must develop and implement an animal welfare policy.

S 2.2 The animal welfare policy must:

- a) include written procedures with regard to maintaining animal welfare in the abattoir, including the responsibilities and duties of staff for emergency procedures, such as escaped, trapped or injured ducks
- b) be reviewed and updated at least annually, or when there are changes to the design or operation of the handling, stunning or slaughter system.

S 2.3 Managers must appoint at least one trained Poultry Welfare Officer (PWO), who is responsible for the implementation of the animal welfare policy.

i Where possible, the PWO should have attended a recognised, validated training course e.g. Bristol University Animal Welfare Officer Training programme. Where possible, this training should be validated.

S 2.4 Managers, in conjunction with the PWO, must:

- a) develop and implement a training programme for all staff handling and slaughtering birds
- b) ensure that staff are properly trained and competent to carry out their duties.

S 2.5 * PWO's must:

- a) be familiar with the content of the Humane Slaughter Association DVD '*Poultry Slaughter – Taking Responsibility*'
- b) convey the relevant content to other members of the slaughter team
- c) ensure that the recommendations are applied where appropriate.

* **i** Where possible all members of the slaughter team should be familiar with the content of the Humane Slaughter Association DVD '*Poultry Slaughter - Taking Responsibility*'.

S 2.6 The PWO must make frequent checks throughout the day to ensure that birds are being effectively stunned and are insensible throughout the slaughter operation.

S 2.7 Records relating to standard S 2.6 must be kept.

Slaughter

S 2.8 Where the birds are not being effectively stunned the PWO must take remedial action without delay.

S 2.9 The manager and PWO must:

- a) have access to a copy of the Defra booklet '*The Welfare of Poultry at Slaughter: a pocket guide*' (PB 3476, 1998)
- b) be familiar with its content
- c) ensure that the recommendations are applied where appropriate.

* Health monitoring

S 3.1 * The level of the following must be recorded for each flock:

- a) pododermatitis (classified as score 1 or above in the information box below S 3.2)
- b) dirty feathers (classified as score 1 or above in the information box below S 3.2).

*  **Lesions to the foot pad (pododermatitis) are caused by contact with litter which is both wet and contains a high level of ammonia from faeces. Such lesions can cause pain and can act as a gateway for bacterial infection.**

*  **The term 'flock' refers to a group of ducks that are placed in a house of holding and present in this house at the same time.**

S 3.2 * The method used to score each condition outlined in S 3.1 must be objective and:

- a) differentiate between minor, mild and severe conditions
- b) provide consistent results within and between observers
- c) provide reliable and accurate data for the level of a condition within a flock.

*  **The following scoring system should be used to classify pododermatitis:**

0 (None): No lesion/s present

1 (Minor): Very small and superficial lesion/s, slight discolouration on a limited area, mild hyperkeratosis.

2 (Mild): Substantial discolouration, superficial lesion/s, dark papillae

3 (Severe): Ulcers or scabs of significant size, signs of haemorrhages or swollen foot pad/hock

If there is an absence of severe foot pad burns, but a lot of class 1 lesions are observed in a flock, then this should be seen as not necessarily a major welfare problem in itself, but as an indication that things can rapidly get worse and that remedial action should be taken.

*  **A minimum of 200 feet per flock should be assessed to determine the average level of pododermatitis for that flock.**

Slaughter

* **i** The following scoring system should be used to classify dirty feathers:

0 (None): clean – not significantly dirty

1 (Minor): lightly soiled

2 (Mild): medium soiling

3 (Severe): heavily soiled

* **i** Assessing birds for dirty feathers should take place on the farm during catching. This will avoid scoring birds that may have become dirty during transport and therefore provide a better picture of on-farm conditions. The stock-keeper and/or catching foreman should assess the birds.

S 3.3 * Data relating to S 3.1 must be reported back to the producing farm.

Lairage

i A number of abattoirs have installed closed circuit television (CCTV) monitors within the pre-slaughter handling and slaughter areas. This allows those responsible for animal welfare within the abattoir to ensure that welfare standards are maintained. The installation of CCTV systems is recommended by the RSPCA.

S 4.1 * All birds must be slaughtered as soon as possible on arrival at the processing plant and in any case within 2 hours.

S 4.2 * The lairage must be designed to minimise any distress caused to the birds.

* **i** The design of the lairage includes aspects such as the flooring. Uneven flooring can cause physical discomfort to birds when moving them through the lairage in modules.

S 4.3 On arrival at the slaughter plant all birds must be:

- a) unloaded immediately
- b) placed in an environmentally controlled lairage.

S 4.4 If birds are injured, heat or cold stressed then:

- a) immediate action must be taken to alleviate and suffering
- b) effective measures must be put in place to ensure similar occurrences are prevented.

S 4.5 Any bird identified as suffering from injury, heat or cold stress, must be slaughtered immediately and humanely.

S 4.6 Ducks that are held in slaughter facilities must be:

- a) protected from direct rays of sun and from adverse weather, i.e. wind, rain, hail, snow, etc.
- * b) provided with adequate ventilation to avoid heat and cold stress
- c) humanely killed immediately if found to be suffering.

S 4.7 Contingency plans must be in place to deal with occasions when unavoidable delays may occur.

Slaughter

- S 4.8 When a breakdown occurs which results in a delay in the slaughter process, birds may be held in lairage for up to 3 hours from the time of arrival, after which time they must be slaughtered using a permitted back-up method.
- S 4.9 * The lairage temperature and humidity must be regularly monitored and controlled.
- S 4.10 The lairage must have reduced or blue lighting.
- S 4.11 Once ducks have arrived at the premises at which they are intended to be slaughtered, they must not be moved on to other premises for slaughter.
- S 4.12 Standby equipment e.g. a generator, must be available for emergency breakdowns.
- S 4.13 Care must be taken when removing birds from the crates.
- S 4.14 Where live birds are removed from crates prior to shackling, unloading must take place as close to the shackle line as possible to minimise carrying distance and to avoid any stress caused to the birds.
- S 4.15 All deaths and injuries must be recorded and reported to the:
- a) driver
 - b) haulier
 - c) PWO
 - d) farm manager
- before the next consignment from the same source is collected.
- S 4.16 Records of all deaths and injuries must be kept.

Shackling

- S 5.1 Shackling teams must be:
- a) thoroughly trained and competent to handle the birds in such a way as to avoid injury
 - a) made fully aware of the risk of breakages that the hanging-on procedure can cause to ducks
 - b) supervised by a trained and competent person during the shackling process.
- S 5.2 Slaughterhouse managers must ensure that sufficient personnel are employed on shackling lines at all times to ensure due care and diligence.
- S 5.3 Shackles must be of a size and type, and the slaughter line run at a speed, which permits ducks to be hung on without causing unnecessary pain or distress.
- S 5.4 * There must be no unevenness in the line causing the shackles to jolt.
- S 5.5 Birds must be hung on by both legs.
- S 5.6 * The shackler must use a handling technique that calms the bird as it is being shackled.

Slaughter

- S 5.7 * From the point of shackling to entry into the stun bath there must be:
- a breast comforter to prevent wing flapping and birds raising their heads
 - no noises that cause unnecessary disturbance to the birds
 - a maximum light level of 5 lux

*  **The area of the shackle line that transports live birds may be lit with blue light.**

*  **The provision of a breast comforter and a reduction in noise and light levels all help to calm the bird and prevent it raising its head, vocalising and wing flapping. Breast comforters should be constructed from firm rubber or plastic curtain and extend below the eye level of the bird.**

S 5.8 Care must be taken to ensure that birds cannot escape from the holding area or fall from the shackle line.

S 5.9 * Where loose birds are found they must be taken immediately to the hanging on area or, if injured, immediately humanely killed.

S 5.10 Ducks must not be suspended for more than 1 minute before they are stunned.

*  **Shackling a bird causes discomfort and pain, so it is important to reduce the shackling period to as short a period as possible. However, for an effective stun, it is necessary for the bird to be shackled for a short period to allow it time to relax and stop wing flapping. Therefore, live ducks should not be suspended for more time than is necessary for wing flapping to cease. The RSPCA Farm Animals Department will be re-examining maximum shackling times for live ducks in the future.**

S 5.11 All crates must be checked to ensure no ducks are left inside them.

Stunning

S 6.1 The following types of stunning equipment are permitted:

- electrically live stunning bath
- dry stunner incorporating an electrically-live metal grid or bar
- hand operated stunner
- pneumatically powered poultry killer - however, this must not be used for routine killing purposes, i.e. only used in the event of a breakdown of one of the normal methods employed (above).

S 6.2 It must be possible to visually observe birds at all stages of the stunning procedure, i.e. on entry, during, and immediately on exit from the stunning bath.

S 6.3 Unstunned birds must be screened from dead birds.

Slaughter

- S 6.4 Where electrical water stunning baths are used:
- a) the stunning bath must be set at a height appropriate for the size and number of birds
 - * b) the height must be set to ensure the heads of the birds are fully immersed in the water
 - * c) there must be a voltage sufficient to produce a minimum current of 130mA (0.130A) per bird
 - * d) a sinusoidal (AC) waveform must be used (stunning using a DC waveform is prohibited)
 - * e) they must operate at a frequency of 50Hz
 - f) each bird must be in contact with the electrical current for a minimum of 4 seconds
 - g) the water bath used for stunning or killing ducks must be of sufficient size and depth and the water must not overflow at the entrance
 - h) the electrode, which is immersed in the water, must extend the length of the water bath
 - i) birds must not receive pre-stun shocks
 - j) the water bath must be fitted with an ammeter to accurately monitor current flow through the bath when loaded with birds.

* **i** **50Hz sine wave (AC) is the optimum frequency and waveform for inducing cardiac arrest. The heart muscle is particularly sensitive to this frequency and when sufficient current is applied to the heart it ceases to beat normally and pump blood around the body. Therefore, an effective stun-to-kill can be achieved when using this frequency, which is the most preferred outcome to achieve good welfare during slaughter.**

* **i** **A steeply inclined flat ramp bolted on to the entrance of the waterbath can be effective in avoiding pre-stun shocks. The ramp should extend over the water so the birds get drawn up the ramp by the shackle line and then swing down into the water in one smooth movement. This results in the bird's head entering the water first and the bird is stunned immediately.**

Care must be taken to ensure birds do not receive pre-stun shocks from the ramp itself. This may occur if the ramp is electrically live because of water flowing from the bath onto the ramp or if it is not isolated from the rest of the stunner.

Source: Humane Slaughter Association (HSA). 2006. HSA Technical Note 16: 'Prevention of Pre-Stun Shocks in Electrical Waterbaths'. HSA, Wheathampstead, Herts., UK (www.hsa.org.uk).

- S 6.5 * By 1st January 2010, the shackle - at the point where it meets the duck's foot - must be continuously sprayed with water using a fine spray, along the entire length of the stun bath.

- S 6.6 Where electrical hand-held stunners are used:
- a) ducks must be restrained in a cone or on a shackle
 - b) birds must be stunned without delay after being restrained
 - c) care must be taken to ensure that the stunning electrodes are applied in the optimum position, i.e. applied firmly to either side of the head between the eye and ear
 - d) hand-held stunners must deliver 400mA for at least 10 seconds and until initial wing flapping ceases (or if held in a cone, until legs become rigid and extended)
 - e) neck cutting must be carried out immediately (see S 7.1).

- S 6.7 All stunning and bleeding equipment must be properly and regularly maintained, cleaned and checked daily to ensure that it is in full and proper working order.

Slaughter

- S 6.8 An independent, qualified person must inspect the stunning equipment to test its efficacy.
- S 6.9 Any problems must be reported to the PWO and rectified immediately.
- S 6.10 Contingency plans must be made to deal with occasions when unavoidable delays may occur and it is not possible to process birds.
- S 6.11 If the slaughter line is stopped for longer than 1 minute, birds between the point of shackling and the killer must be humanely killed immediately.
- S 6.12 * There must be sufficient time after stunning and prior to neck cutting to assess the effectiveness of the kill.
- S 6.13 All birds must be checked to ensure they have been effectively stunned or killed.
- S 6.14 Birds which fail to be properly stunned must be immediately stunned using a permitted method as in accordance with S 6.1, and humanely slaughtered before entering the scalding tank.
- S 6.15 Staff must be trained to recognise the signs of an effective stun, and use these signs to recognise that birds have been effectively stunned or are dead.



The most reliable indicator that a bird is properly stunned by the low voltage method is the electroplectic fit. The characteristics of this condition are:

- neck arched with head directed vertically
- open eyes
- wings held close to the body
- rigidly extended legs and constant rapid body tremors.
- no breathing
- loss of nictitating membrane reflex.

The physical conditions of the electroplectic fit are shorter lasting and less pronounced when cardiac arrest is induced at stunning. They are followed by:

- completely limp carcass
- dilated pupil.

Bleeding

- S 7.1 Post-stunning, carotid arteries and jugular veins must be effectively severed using a ventral cut.
- S 7.2 The neck cut must be checked by an appointed member of staff who must be given sufficient time to sever the blood vessels manually, if necessary.
- S 7.3 No more than 10 seconds must elapse between stunning and neck cutting.
- S 7.4 All birds must be checked to ensure that they are dead before entering the scalding tank.
- S 7.5 * No further processing must take place until at least 90 seconds have elapsed since the major blood vessels in the bird's neck have been severed.

Transport – standard operating and emergency procedure (relating to standard T 3.3)

Items to be included

1. Out of hours telephone numbers and 'emergency procedure'.
2. Accident procedure.
3. Certificate of motor insurance and MOT.
4. Tyres – punctures Code of Practice.
5. Mobile phones or other communication equipment (and procedures for use).
6. Guidelines on correct environmental conditions during the journey, depending on length of journey and ambient temperature.
7. RSPCA welfare standards relating to transport of ducks.
8. Procedure for loading/unloading of poultry transporters.
9. Procedure for delivery of poultry to customer sites.
10. FTA – *'The Driver's Handbook'*, including Tachograph Regulations.
11. Fire extinguisher.
12. Operating procedures for roadside checks.
13. Defra leaflet *'Guide to Alleviation of Thermal Stress in Poultry in Lairage'* (PB 3724, 1998).

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