

The World Pheasant Association



Breeding and Managing Pheasants

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ISBN No: 978 0 906864 16 6

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Published by the World Pheasant Association, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

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Introduction

Before deciding to keep pheasants, it should be remembered that these birds can be expected to live more than 10 years, and in excess of 20 years in some cases, so they are a long-term commitment. Other major considerations involve a commitment to provide fresh food and water every day. If you go on holiday, you will need someone reliable to provide this for your birds.

Some pheasants can be noisy and all require quite a large aviary which is secluded from pets such as dogs. Neighbours may object if they have not previously been consulted. Some aviaries can be classified as building structures and may require planning permission from local government inspectors, particularly if they are more than 2 metres high or can be seen from outside your property. Planning permission is also needed if you live in a listed building or in a conservation area.

Most countries have laws regarding the welfare of animals in captivity, and some countries even require a specific licence to keep birds such as members of the pheasant family, many of which are classified as threatened. Since this document has been prepared in the UK, it will refer to regulations and recommendations within this country, but anyone wishing to keep pheasants should make him or herself aware of the regulations existing within his or her country.

Many countries have a legal framework which demands that birds are kept in an area where they can spread their wings, but these very limited requirements have usually been drawn up for the welfare of chickens and other poultry for the domestic food market. Obviously, captive pheasants should be placed in an aviary which provides much more than the basic minimum if they are to have any quality of life, since the aim must be to allow the birds every opportunity to display behaviour which is as natural as possible. If the keeper is unable to provide birds with sufficient room to run and to fly, to be able to breed without being disturbed and to be able to keep sufficiently warm and dry, then perhaps he or she should not be keeping pheasants.

Within the UK, most veterinarians, zoos and major farming practices are committed to a Code of Conduct known as the **Five Freedoms** (Animal Welfare Act 2007; Farm Animal Welfare Council):

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
2. Freedom from Discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
5. Freedom from Fear and Distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Following this code will provide the best possible care for the birds in your care.

It might also be useful to bear in mind that any inspection by statutory authorities will probably use the Five Freedoms as a measure by which to make judgements about your ability to provide for your pheasants.

Creating aviaries for pheasants in captivity can be done in many ways and each construction will probably be uniquely prepared to fit the circumstances and environment. Construction will vary depending upon how much land is available, what natural features are to be retained and whether the birds are hardy or tropical. The materials to be used for construction may depend on weather conditions or on insects such as termites which, in certain areas of the world, will totally destroy wooden constructions very rapidly.

It is strongly advised that you try to establish contact with a number of experienced breeders with whom you can share experiences and problems. There is no point in repeating errors that others have already made, particularly when these might result in needless death or injury to your birds. The World Pheasant Association has avicultural members throughout Europe and most are usually very happy to help and advise fellow enthusiasts. WPA also has a forum on its website where concerns can be addressed. Training sessions for members are also organised within each of WPA's European Chapters. These can be contacted via the WPA website: <http://www.pheasant.org.uk>

Veterinarians

Regrettably, most vets have little training and experience of handling species of birds that are rare in captivity. For the majority, domestic chickens and pet birds form the basis of their avian knowledge. This has some advantages for the pheasant keeper since the chicken originates from a member of the pheasant family, the red junglefowl, and most illnesses encountered in pheasants are seen frequently in chickens. However, some pheasant species are extremely endangered and it may not be advisable to treat a critically endangered Edwards' pheasant in the same way as a domestic bantam.

There are a number of experienced avian veterinarians and it is strongly advised that pheasant keepers make the acquaintance of one of these at an early stage. Usually, their considerable experience will lead to a more rapid and accurate diagnosis, which is likely to keep birds fit and healthy and lead longer breeding lives. Some of the pheasant species, particularly tropical peacock-pheasants, suffer from stress very easily and catching them for examination can result in the bird dying in the vet's hands. If the owner can get his or her birds as tame as possible within their aviaries to reduce stress, they can be examined closely without the need to catch them, unless this is vital.

Post-mortem and autopsy

It is always worthwhile getting an experienced avian vet to undertake a post mortem when a bird dies unexpectedly. This action may allow preventative measures to be taken for other birds in the collection. If more than one death occurs in a short time, you should always seek post mortem diagnosis to ensure that infection is not spreading amongst the other birds in the collection. Inexperienced vets have been known to reach a conclusion which may not relate to why a bird has died. For example, almost every post mortem result seems to indicate white spots on the liver, which might indeed be indicative of a particular illness, but which also seem apparent just because the bird has been unwell. Renal failure is often given as the cause of death but may actually be just the terminal event because a sick bird stopped drinking. Post mortems of tragopans often state that the bird died of an elongated proventriculus, but this is normal in this species

that has a very high green food diet.

Registering your collection with the Government

In the UK, at the time of writing, all collections containing 50 birds or more must be registered with the governmental department known as the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). One of the jobs of this organisation is to deal with outbreaks of serious disease such as Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease. Pheasant owners should make themselves aware of the symptoms of these diseases and should report suspicious deaths. It is the legal duty of any veterinarian to report suspicious deaths to DEFRA.

A major advantage of registering with DEFRA is that, in the event of an outbreak of serious disease, the authorities will already be aware that endangered species are present on your site and that these birds may need to be afforded special protection.

Moving pheasants from one location to another

In the UK it is a legal requirement to use an Animal Transport Certificate if pheasants are transported from one site to another. Commercial companies that move large numbers of animals on a regular basis need special certification from DEFRA, which is not required for people who move a small number of birds infrequently. However, since birds can carry infectious disease, a form should be completed, obtainable from either the DEFRA or WPA websites, when birds are caught and moved. It is strongly advised that UK readers familiarise themselves with these regulations. The form is easy to complete but should be retained for future reference in case of an outbreak of disease. See a copy of this form on page 57.