

Welfare of housed birds

Housing your birds during a disease outbreak may impact the welfare of your birds, especially if they're not used to being housed for long periods.

You are responsible for the welfare of your birds while they're housed. You should:

- make sure they're not overcrowded
- make sure they have natural light where possible - do not keep them permanently in the dark (during the day you should be able to see your birds clearly and artificial light should follow typical day and night patterns)
- monitor the temperature inside the housing - consider installing a thermometer at bird level and do not allow temperatures to go significantly above 21°C
- make sure there is enough ventilation
- make sure they have enough food and fresh, clean water (clean water-drinkers frequently and do not use standing water as it may have been contaminated by wild birds)
- use good quality litter that crumbles easily – you can use damp-proof membranes for earth floors to help keep litter dry
- provide enrichment items to prevent boredom like straw bales, shaving bales, low barriers, scattered whole grain, dustbathing boxes, pecking blocks, cabbages, rope and footballs
- check them more than once a day to make sure they're healthy and have enough food, water and dry bedding
- avoid sudden changes to their diet – if in doubt, speak to your vet
- check for skin parasites like red mite

Consider providing aerial perches for your birds. This helps prevent overcrowding and gives them:

- more vertical space
- space to move away from pecking by other birds

Welfare of pullets (young hens)

Pullets should be reared in an environment that matches the environment they will live in as adults. If pullets are reared in a range and then confined, it increases the risk of injurious feather pecking.

Pullet suppliers should make any confinement history available to buyers.

Signs of poor welfare and boredom

Look out for:

- injurious and aggressive feather pecking
- loss of feathers

If you see signs of feather pecking, you can:

- reduce the light (there should still be enough light for you to read a newspaper)
- provide more enrichment items to prevent boredom
- mash their food to increase eating time and keep your birds occupied
- add nutritional supplements to drinking water to help keep your birds calm

Get advice from your vet or check the [Featherwel website](#) if you have any concerns about welfare.

If you're a commercial keeper you can also use the [benchmarking tool for feather loss](#) from AssureWel and the British Egg Industry Council (BEIC).

Welfare of ducks, geese and game birds

You must house ducks and geese and game birds when possible.

If this is not practical, keep them in fully netted areas.

If you cannot house or net your birds because of unavoidable welfare concerns, you must:

- feed and water them undercover
- move them away from large bodies of water that attract wildfowl
- take steps to discourage wild birds

You must also speak to your private vet and put in writing:

- why you cannot house your birds
- the steps you are taking to protect them from bird flu

Avoid keeping ducks and geese with other poultry. Ducks and geese often do not show any signs of disease but can still pass it on to other captive birds.

Ducks need access to open water like troughs and buckets. They use them to preen and immerse their heads to keep their eyes, nostrils, beaks and plumage healthy.

To help keep bedding dry, you can:

- put open water sources on raised, perforated plastic floors
- place a container underneath to catch any water that drips through

Wet bedding can increase the spread and severity of infectious diseases.