USDA Animal Care Welfare Inspection Procedures for Birds

Last Modified:

Individuals and businesses that sell birds, exhibit them to the public, transport them commercially, or use them in research may need to be licensed or registered under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Our inspectors conduct unannounced visits to licensed or registered facilities where they review all areas of care and treatment covered under the law. We understand individuals may have some questions about USDA’s procedures for inspecting avian species at their facilities. We will review some of those commonly asked questions here.

Frequently Asked Questions

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What if I'm not available for an unannounced inspection?

If an authorized person is not present at the facility, efforts are made to contact them at the time of the inspection. Failure to have an authorized adult available for inspection may result in a citation.

If you or another adult knowledgeable about the facility are not always available during normal business hours (Monday-Friday) then it is recommended, you establish optimal hours with your inspector. Optimal hours are those times when you are typically available and are generally four-hour blocks of time during daylight hours, three days per week.

I'm concerned about diseases being brought into my facility. What are the biosecurity precautions and practices followed by USDA inspectors?

USDA inspectors will follow all biosecurity procedures you establish for visitors coming to your facility that are accepted professional standards as cited in professional journals or reference guides. Inform your inspector ahead of time on your biosecurity procedures at your facility. For facilities not open to the public, inspectors are instructed to wear new disposable shoe covers or sanitized boots, and not visit more than one facility with birds in a day.

Will USDA inspectors be handling my birds during inspections?

No. USDA inspectors on animal welfare inspections will not need to physically hold or touch your birds but will observe them from a safe distance.

How will USDA conduct inspections when birds are breeding, nesting, or raising young?

USDA understands that some birds will not be completely available for a routine inspection during breeding, nesting, or rearing chicks because it could negatively impact the welfare of these animals. Licensees/registrants may inform their inspectors of any concerns and let your inspector know the times in the year when your birds are expected to be breeding, nesting, or raising young. This does NOT mean USDA will not conduct an inspection during those times. Animal Care Inspectors and Veterinary Medical Officers understand the importance of not stressing animals during inspections, especially during these sensitive times; however, there may be times when APHIS inspectors must have access to your birds to ensure their welfare.

Licensees/registrants with concerns about how inspections in general may affect their birds can voice concerns their inspector and plan ahead accordingly. Plans with potential solutions may include using non-reflective one-way glass that discourage or prevent collisions or creating a blind/hidden area near the avian enclosures where an inspector can view inside without disturbing the birds. Additionally, a camera system around the enclosures or in the nest box may be beneficial in providing daily observations and viewing by inspectors. Binoculars are another solution to view birds at a distance to minimize stress to the birds.

How can I perform daily observations for birds that are breeding, nesting, or raising young?

It is important to remember under the Animal Welfare Act, breeders, dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities must observe all animals daily to assess their health and well-being. This ensures prompt detection of disease or injuries and abnormal behavior, helping to improve outcomes and save time and money. While it can be in the bird’s best interest to not disturb them, you can assess their health and well-being by monitoring food and water intake, droppings, abnormal sounds from the parents or chicks, and any other unusual behaviors or signs. Establishing consistent routines and times of day for daily observations, feeding/watering, and other tasks can further reduce the potential of causing stress.

I have a bird that feather picks. Will feather-picking or other abnormal behaviors be viewed as a noncompliance?

Feather-picking, feather-destructive behavior, and other abnormal behaviors are viewed as abnormal medical or behavior problems that must be evaluated and managed as directed by your attending veterinarian. USDA understands feather-picking and other behavior problems may never be completely resolved, but they must be managed as directed by your attending veterinarian.

Could my personal information, such as home address, become available to the public?

Any records that the USDA has in its possession may become publicly available through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Additionally, home addresses that are used as the address for license or registration is included on the inspection report and will be made available to the public through Animal Care's public search tool. Post office box addresses can be used in lieu of an individual home addresses for a license and registration. When FOIA requests are fulfilled any personally identifiable information is redacted.

What are the consequences of getting a citation on an inspection report?

Generally, Animal Care (AC) ensures regulatory compliance with the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) primarily through the use of inspections. Our inspectors conduct unannounced visits to licensed or registered facilities where they review all areas of care and treatment covered under the law. In some circumstances where an individual and/or business is found to not be in compliance with the AWA, APHIS may take action in addition to inspections to promote compliance, including issuing a Letter of Information or an Official Warning Letter. A Letter of Information is an informal warning letter documenting that AWA noncompliance was found and

advising an individual and/or business that more stringent action may be taken if they remain noncompliant. An Official Warning Letter is an official warning of an alleged violation of the AWA. It provides notice to an individual and/or business that the Agency may seek a civil or criminal penalty if noncompliance is found in the future.

APHIS' Investigative and Enforcement Services (IES) personnel investigate alleged violations when licensees or registrants have not taken corrective measures to come into compliance with the AWA, individuals and/or businesses are conducting regulated activity without a license or without being registered with USDA, or the noncompliance presents (or presented) a direct risk to the health and well-being of the animals involved. IES investigations may lead to the issuance of a regulatory compliance or enforcement action.

Can I ship unweaned birds?

Yes, if your attending veterinarian approves the unweaned birds can be transported safely, provides written instructions for the conditions of transport, and is signed within 10 days of shipment.

May cleaning supplies be stored in the same room where food preparation takes place or where food is stored if the cleaning agents are contained in a separate cabinet or storage unit?

Yes. Harmful cleaning supplies and other harmful chemicals may be stored in these areas as long as they are in properly labeled containers and kept in separate cabinets that are adequately secured to prevent potential harm to the birds.

How will free-roaming ground fowl be impacted by the bird rule at exhibitors?

Exhibited poultry such as peafowl, guineas, and chickens that are owned by the facility and allowed to roam freely with the public and in exhibit areas with other exotic or wild animals are covered under the bird rule. The regulations allow these types of birds to roam freely on the facility's property; however, birds that are flight-restricted or cannot fly (which most of these species are) that are allowed to roam free within the grounds must have access to safety pens, enclosures, or other areas that offer the birds protection overnight and all other times when their activities are not monitored. It's important to remember that these birds must stay on the facility's property. The facility must also ensure these birds' safety from predators and the public and provide adequate veterinary care. Please note, wild birds not owned or managed by the facility should not be included on the inventory; however, the facility should be assessing and minimizing negative welfare impacts on covered species.

For activities such as public feedings in walkthrough aviaries, will additional staff be needed during operating hours?

Yes, for exhibits offering public feedings and intended contact between the animals and public, a responsible, knowledgeable, and readily identifiable employee or attendant must be present at all times during these periods of contact. For public walkthrough aviaries with no intended contact or feeding, the facility must monitor the area as often as necessary to ensure public and animal safety.

Is secondary containment in aviaries required?

There is no regulation that requires a secondary containment or perimeter fence for birds. The regulations only require that facilities employ measures that contain all birds securely. These COULD/MAY include safety doors, entry/exit doors to the primary enclosure that are double-door, or other equivalent systems designed to prevent escape of the birds. This is a performance standard that requires a facility adequately contain all the birds. If a facility is experiencing escapes, they must

modify/improve those security measures to prevent escapes.

When is identification required for birds and in what form?

At the time birds are delivered for transportation or otherwise acquired or disposed of, birds must be identified by one of the following methods:

- Label (attached to the primary enclosure with the number of birds, species, distinctive physical features and identifying marks), or
- Leg or wing band applied to each bird, or
- Microchip

Contact Us

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