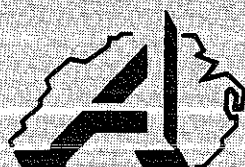


# Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock

## Deer



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

## **PREFACE**

The Code of Recommendations for the welfare of farmed deer, which is made under Section 3 Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, is intended to encourage all those responsible for looking after these animals to adopt the highest standards of husbandry. It takes account of five basic animal needs; freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; appropriate comfort and shelter; the prevention, or rapid diagnosis and treatment of injury, disease or infestation; freedom from fear; and freedom to display most normal patterns of behaviour.

The Code is backed up by the law of the land. To cause unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress to any farm animal is an offence under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

Without good stockmanship, animal welfare can never be adequately protected. The Code is designed to help stockmen — particularly the young and inexperienced — to reach the required standard (See reference 1).

This Code applies to all farmed deer but it is not intended to apply to feral deer which may be on agricultural land but are not within the occupier's control. Observance of the Code is urged even in circumstances where the 1972 Act does not apply.

# **CODE OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WELFARE OF FARMED DEER**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- 1 The Code relates to all farmed deer but, bearing in mind that the majority of species farmed are red or fallow deer, the recommendations have been drafted with these species particularly in mind.
- 2 The welfare of deer can be safeguarded and their behavioural needs met under a variety of management systems. The system and the number and stocking rate of deer kept at any one time should depend on the suitability of the conditions and the skill of the stockman. All stockmen should be familiar with the behaviour of deer and must be competent in their handling and management to safeguard the welfare of the herd and individual animals. It is strongly recommended that intending deer farmers/stockmen should attend a recognised training course prior to setting up their enterprise (see reference 1).
- 3 In general, deer are highly strung, nervous animals which can be easily excited or frightened. When accustomed to the sight and sound of man, wild deer can be tamed to a considerable degree. Hand-reared animals may become exceedingly tame. Nonetheless, they have different behavioural characteristics from other farmed animals.
- 4 Account should also be taken of the different behavioural characteristics within the species most commonly "domesticated", eg Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*), Sika (*Cervus nippon*), Fallow (*Dama dama*). Red Deer can become relatively tame. Fallow Deer are very flighty in behaviour and much less tractable than Red Deer; this is an important consideration when deciding which species to farm.
- 5 Badly managed deer do not thrive and the stockman needs to watch for signs of disease or distress. The good stockman will be able to recognise trouble in its early stages and may be able to identify the cause and put matters right immediately. If the cause is not obvious, or if the stockman's immediate action is not effective, veterinary or other expert advice should be obtained as soon as possible.
- 6 The signs of ill-health may include listlessness, loss of appetite, (except natural seasonal inappetence), failure to cud, lameness, persistent coughing, swollen joints and discharge from the nostrils and/or eyes. Calves being artificially reared indoors should be inspected twice daily for signs of scouring or respiratory disorders. This is important as such disorders can spread rapidly.
- 7 Deer, and in particular farmed deer, are susceptible to the same internal parasites and common bacterial diseases experienced in cattle and sheep. It is important that routine vaccination and anthelmintic programmes are established in consultation with a Veterinary Surgeon.

## HANDLING AND INSPECTION

- 8 Handling and movement of deer require special skills and they should be handled gently and never rushed. It is helpful to train deer, particularly as calves, to respond to a distinctive call or inducement, such as feed, and to continue this practice throughout their lives.

- 9 It is important there is minimum handling and disturbance of hinds during the calving season and that the stockman is known to the hinds concerned. He should be experienced and competent in the techniques of calving and should pay particular attention to hygiene, especially at assisted calvings. If assistance at calving is deemed necessary, it must be realised that hinds so assisted may abandon their calves. In addition, normally born calves if handled even several days after birth may be abandoned. Facilities for artificial rearing should therefore be available.

It should also be realised that newborn calves have very strong bonding instincts and are liable to bond to the handler if handled within a few days of birth.

- 10 For breeding, sires should be carefully selected taking into account breed, size, age and previous record, so as to reduce the likelihood of subsequent calving difficulties. Sires from larger breeds should not be used for hinds less than 3 years of age. Hinds should be managed so as to be in suitable bodily condition at the time of calving.
- 11 Adult stags must be considered as potentially dangerous at all times and their handling during the rut should be kept to a minimum. Hinds are also potentially dangerous and should be treated with respect at all times. Handlers of adult deer should therefore be vigilant at all times. (See paras 15-18 on darting.)
- 12 For the safety of handlers and the welfare of animals, it may be necessary to remove antlers above the coronet as soon as they are out of velvet (see reference 2).
- 13 The preferred method for handling small deer is to cradle them in the arms with hands positioned around the hind quarters and around the brisket. If of an appropriate size, deer can also be safely and effectively handled by restraining them against the wall of a handling pen by putting an arm around the neck, pressing as close to the animal as possible and using a leg to restrain the rear end just in front of the stifle.
- 14 Deer should be inspected daily when housed as well as in other special circumstances, eg at calving time.

## Use of Dart Guns

- 15 Darting to sedate the deer will sometimes be necessary, subject to the provisions of the Wildlife (NI) Order 1985. The use of dart guns should however be limited only to essential circumstances, eg when the transportation of a deer cannot be accomplished in safety for both the deer and the handler (see reference 3). The user of a dart gun will need to be familiar with all aspects of its use (including correct charges, etc).
- 16 Drugs for use in dart guns can only be obtained from veterinary surgeons. Those drugs will be supplied with directions regarding use and safekeeping of the drugs and also advice on what to do in an emergency situation, for example if an unintended target is struck (see reference 4). Advice will also be given by the veterinary surgeon concerning the use of any drugs used for revival. These directions must be observed. It must be borne in mind that it can take several minutes after impact of the dart for the drug to take effect and that the darted deer can run for some distance.
- 17 Where a drug is used to reverse the effect of a sedative given by a dart gun, recycling may occur in that the animal may pass in and out of the sedated state several times over a period of several hours. In these circumstances a responsible person should keep the animal under frequent observation until it is certain that it has recovered sufficiently from sedation to be left without supervision. With continued or prolonged sedation animals must be carefully handled.
- 18 Deer should not be darted in situations where they might injure or lose themselves eg near water or woodland, or on steep slopes.

NOTE: Animals sedated in this way should not be slaughtered for human (or animal) consumption until recommended withdrawal period for drugs used has elapsed.

## Deer Taken from the Wild

- 19 Deer taken from the wild are likely to be very nervous and will therefore need very careful handling until they become acclimatised to the farm situation (see reference 5).
- 20 Newly-captured deer should be left in their new surroundings for a few days with the minimum of disturbance. It is preferable that they are released carefully into enclosures large enough to allow them to find cover and to become gradually familiar with human presence. It may be advantageous to include a few "tame" deer in the enclosure who can "teach" the others to take concentrates (see reference 6) but careful supervision will be needed to ensure that the feral deer are not bullied and thereby prevented from feeding.

## **Fencing**

- 21 To prevent escape, a high standard of perimeter fencing, of around 2.0 m (6 ft 6 in) high, is essential. A wide range of fence types is available and advice should be sought as to the most appropriate type for specific conditions.
- 22 When deer are driven alongside fences, leading towards handling pens, they may seek to escape and injure themselves. Such fences therefore need to be free of projections and of a suitable mesh, covered with hessian or other suitable material to prevent the deer seeing through the fence.
- 23 Deer which have not been used to electric fencing are best run in a non-electrified enclosure until they have settled down.

## **Handling Pens**

- 24 When deer are to be handled, properly constructed handling pens should be provided. There is a wide range of satisfactory designs and layouts and it is recommended that specialist advice is sought before constructing new facilities.
- 25 Where deer are to be confined, pens should have solid sides with no projections so as to minimise the risk of injury to the deer. It is essential that they are of an adequate height, not only to prevent escape but also to discourage any attempt to escape, thereby preventing possible injury. Walls need to be higher for Fallow deer than for Red deer.
- 26 All species of deer handle better in subdued light. It is strongly recommended that close handling pens be covered to achieve this effect.
- 27 Provision for segregation should be made but it is desirable that segregated animals are able to see their fellows otherwise they may panic.
- 28 There is a tendency for deer to rush at any open fences in the handling area. To avoid the risk of injury, the approach fences to pens should be of close mesh or covered with a suitable material, such as hessian.
- 29 Properly designed and constructed loading facilities should be incorporated in the handling pens where possible.

## **Stocking Rates**

- 30 Most types of land can be used and the number of stock held will relate to such factors as the type and quality of the vegetation, the season, disease risk, etc.
- 31 Stocking rates on hill grazing need to be adjusted so as to ensure that animals will maintain an adequate body condition in winter, otherwise supplementary feeding should be offered.
- 32 Overstocking, particularly during the calving period, may lead to behavioural vices, eg hinds beating and trampling calves.

## **Provision of Shelter**

- 33 Deer, not being well insulated, are particularly sensitive to weather conditions and, if adequate topographic or vegetative shelter is not available, the provision of suitable artificial shelter is recommended.
- 34 Calving hinds and calves tend to seek solitude in natural cover, for example in patches of bracken. Where this is absent, suitable cover should be provided well in advance of calving so that the hind is used to her surroundings.

## **Feed and Water**

- 35 In all systems, deer must receive a daily diet which is adequate to maintain health and well-being.
- 36 Feeds used for other ruminant livestock are generally suitable for adult deer. Care must be taken to ensure that the content of any compound feed (see reference 6) does not include any substance harmful to deer. Natural foods, root vegetables and apples are all of dietary value. Provision of browse is also beneficial. The supply of ivy and/or good quality hay during periods of snow is essential to cudding animals. Because of winter inappetance, special care is required to ensure that deer do not lose excessive condition before and during this period.
- 37 Deer must have access to a plentiful supply of fresh, clean water.



- 38 Deer calves should receive colostrum from their dams, and should therefore have suckled before weaning. Calves can subsequently be artificially reared. During the first 5 to 8 weeks of life calves should receive liquid food, of a type suitable for this species, for example sheep or goat milk or milk substitute. (Calf food substitutes formulated for bovines are not suitable.) Such calves should have access to a palatable feed compound (see reference 6) and clean water and also have access to roughage from an early age.
- 39 Changes in diet need to be introduced gradually; sudden changes may cause digestive problems and even death.
- 40 Arrangements should be made in advance to ensure that adequate supplies of suitable food are made available to deer in emergencies (eg in heavy snow).

## **Housing**

- 41 Adult deer are normally not required to be housed but provision should be made for bullied, injured or sick animals to be protected and separated — preferably where they can still see other animals. Adult deer may also be housed temporarily just before or after transport.
- 42 On farms prone to severe climatic conditions or where competition for grazing or food may occur, consideration should be given to housing calves in particular, and also for winter housing of all classes of deer.
- 43 Most conventional farm buildings can be used for deer but may require modification. Advice on welfare aspects should be sought before housing deer.
- 44 Pen size should be of sufficient height to discourage escape, without projections or sharp edges and with fittings arranged so as to avoid injury. It is preferable for side partitions to be of solid construction to limit the spread of disease or vice and minimise the possibility of broken limbs.
- 45 Floors should be designed, constructed and maintained to avoid discomfort or injury and be adequately drained. The use of clean, dry bedding is desirable but part of the floor area may be kept free of bedding as a hard surface will contribute to maintaining sound feet.
- 46 Adequate ventilation should be provided with particular care being taken to avoid draughts.



- 47 Orphaned or hand-reared calves may be housed in pens or kept in outside runs with adequate shelter. It is helpful when housing any deer for them to be able to see other deer or general farm activity to prevent boredom and encourage tameness.
- 48 If for any reason deer are continuously housed, they should be kept in small groups of 10-15 and balanced for size and weight. Housed, mature stags (3 years or over) in antler must be penned individually.
- 49 The floor space allowance should take into account the age, sex, weight and the environmental conditions. There should be sufficient trough space or feeding and water points to avoid undue competition for food, especially when foods are rationed.
- 50 Paints and wood preservatives which may be toxic to deer should not be used on surfaces accessible to them. Particular care is necessary to guard against the risk of lead poisoning from old paint work in any part of a building or where secondhand building materials are used.
- 51 All electrical installations at main voltage should be inaccessible to deer, well insulated, safeguarded from rodents, and properly earthed (see reference 7).

## **FIRE AND OTHER EMERGENCY PRECAUTIONS**

- 52 Farmers should make advance plans for dealing with emergencies such as fire, flood or disruption of supplies, and should ensure that all staff are familiar with the appropriate emergency action. At least one responsible member of staff should always be available to take the necessary action.
- 53 Fire precautions should be a major priority for the good stockman. The provisions of Section 1.3 of British Standard BS5502 should therefore be followed. Expert advice on all fire precautions is obtainable from fire prevention officers of local fire brigades.
- 54 In the design of new buildings or alterations of existing ones, there should be provision for livestock to be released and evacuated quickly in the case of emergency. Materials used in construction should have sufficient fire resistance. Adequate doors and other escape routes should be provided to enable emergency procedures to be followed in the event of a fire.

- 55 All electrical, gas and oil services should be planned and fitted so that if there is overheating, or flame is generated, the risk of flame spreading to equipment, bedding or the fabric of the building is minimal. It is advisable to site power supply controls outside buildings. Consideration should be given to installing fire alarm systems which can be heard and acted upon at any time of the day or night.
- 56 In case a 999 call has to be made, notices should be prominently displayed in all livestock buildings stating where the nearest telephone is located. Each telephone should have fixed by it a notice giving instructions for the Fire Brigade on the best route to the farm and a description of the location of the telephone.

## **FIELD SLAUGHTER**

- 57 Humane slaughter of deer can be achieved by accurate shooting using a suitable rifle and ammunition (see reference 8).
- 58 Where a rifle is used safety is of paramount importance and the marksman should be trained and proficient in the use of firearms (see reference 9). Shooting at short range facilitates accuracy and safety.
- 59 A safe backstop for the bullet is needed and care must be taken in shooting one deer not to injure others. Shooting from an elevated position such as a high seat or trailer is often helpful in these respects.
- 60 Sensible precautions for public safety include shooting in the early morning when few people are around; walking the perimeter fence of small farms or paddocks on large farms to ensure all is clear; shooting away from roads, houses and gardens.
- 61 Where deer are so tame and quiet that they present a stationary target at close range (10 to 20 m), a frontal head shot by an expert marksman is wholly effective. With semi-wild deer up to 40 m range, a high neck shot (to break the spinal cord) is also suitable. Shooting at more distant targets in excess of 40 m on deer farms should be attempted only in exceptional circumstances by proven marksmen.

- 62 Shooting should be undertaken, preferably by the regular stockmen, when deer are quiet, as will occur at a selected regular feeding site when they are being hand fed. Under such circumstances it may be possible to shoot 10 or more deer from a large group before the remainder become unduly disturbed. Factors to be taken into account in assessing the effects shooting will have on the rest of the herd and deciding the number to shoot include the size of the original group, stocking density and the amount of cover. Care should be taken not to leave too few since small numbers become unsettled and try to escape. There is also a risk of panic if too small a paddock is used.

## REFERENCES

- (1) Training courses are arranged by the Department of Agriculture Agricultural Colleges.
- (2) The removal of antlers in velvet is controlled by:
  - (a) the Welfare of Livestock (Prohibited Operations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987, SR No 415;
  - (b) the Veterinary Surgeons Act (Schedule 3 Amendment) Order 1988;
  - (c) the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 as amended.
- (3) The possession of dart guns is controlled by the Firearms Order (Northern Ireland) 1981 (As Amended).
- (4) The sale and supply of all immobilising drugs is controlled by the Medicines Act 1968. These drugs are highly dangerous and can be lethal. In event of deer slaughtered for human (or animal) consumption manufacturers recommended withdrawal periods for the drugs used must be observed at all times.
- (5) The taking of deer from the wild is controlled under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, SR No 171 (NI.2). Details can be obtained from the Department of the Environment, Wildlife and Countryside Branch, Calvert House, Castle Place, Belfast.
- (6) The Diseases of Animals (Feedingstuffs) Order (Northern Ireland) 1990 (SR No 344) prohibits the feeding to any ruminant animal of any feedingstuffs containing animal protein derived from ruminants.
- (7) Any installation or extension involving mains electricity should comply with the Regulations for Electrical Equipment of Buildings issued by the Institution of Electrical Engineers.
- (8) Firearms used to kill deer must comply with the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, and are subject to the Firearms Order (Northern Ireland) 1981 (As Amended).
- (9) The British Deer Society runs courses which include instructions for marksmen who wish to shoot deer.

## **ADVISORY PUBLICATIONS — DEER**

An Advisory Booklet entitled "Practical Deer Farming" is available from the Department, Farm Advisory and Management Division, Duniris, Galway Park, Belfast, price at time of publication £1.00. Telephone Belfast 484300.