

Bath City Farm Animal Welfare policy

Introduction

Bath City Farm keeps a wide variety of animals with a range of natural behaviours and needs. It keeps animals for various purposes including; for therapeutic benefits, for educational purposes, as visitor attractions, as tools for environmental and biodiversity conservation, as well as for meat and other animal products such as eggs, wool and honey.

Bath City Farm as an organisation and the staff who work here are determined to strive towards the highest animal welfare possible. Furthermore, it is in the farms best interest to uphold high welfare standards as a visitor attraction, a place for therapeutic volunteering, and as a place of education involving animals and their care.

This document, as well as our 'standard operating procedures' for animal welfare are informed by the 'Five Freedoms' which are internationally accepted standards of care that affirm every living being's right to humane treatment. These standards were developed by Britain's Farm Animal Welfare Council in 1965. We have consulted with veterinary professionals about this document and continue to use their advice and guidance when making decisions that affect our animals. We of course uphold all legal responsibilities for animal welfare.

Handling for work

All staff and volunteers require proper training before handling the animals. For volunteers and some staff, this may simply be a quick talk before starting, however staff who are running groups where they instruct people on how to handle animals must have had formal training by the Livestock Coordinator. Staff and volunteers involved with managing the beehives are given training by Bath Beekeepers Association.

All equipment needed should be ready and checked over before handling starts, and appropriate facilities should always be used and properly maintained.

Handling for events and therapeutic groups.

Sometimes animals are handled for therapeutic or educational purposes, or to promote human interaction with animals. This is an important part of what the farm does and has a wide range of benefits for the people involved. However,

it is important to consider animal welfare during these activities. Sometimes the people handling animals are young and/or inexperienced with animals, such as visitors. It is important that there is a competent member of staff or trained volunteer overseeing and supervising human/animal interaction throughout the activity.

Animal handling for events etc. will not take place if there is a serious risk of injury to the animal or a threat to the animal's welfare.

Enclosures, Housing and Bedding

Any area where an animal is kept must be safe, comfortable, with appropriate bedding and shelter. Permanent water is provided for animals, and animals are fed a nutritious diet to keep them healthy and happy.

Natural Behaviours

We are committed to providing animals with suitable facilities and conditions for them to express a wide variety of natural behaviours. We are passionate about allowing our animals to behave naturally and keeping them with appropriate company to improve their quality of life and to reduce stress.

Dogs

Dogs can cause high levels of anxiety and stress in all farm animals, especially when behaving aggressively or when off the lead. If a dog is particularly aggressive and manages to catch the animal, it can cause serious injury and even death.

When dogs chase larger animals such as cows, ponies and large sheep this also creates the possibility of injury for the dog. If these animals retaliate, they could injure or even kill the dog.

Because of the possible severity of dog attacks, Bath City Farm currently has a 'no dogs off leads' policy throughout the site. The only exemption to this is for staff who have well trained dogs, which are being kept inside a building or other area where access to the animals is not possible.

If a dog is acting particularly aggressively towards the animals, even while on a lead, and it is causing distress to the animals on the Farm, staff may ask the owner to move away from the animal areas or leave the site altogether.

Transport of animals

When transporting animals in vehicles, either on to or from the Farm, we prioritise animal welfare. We factor in needs for food and water, suitable bedding, and do our utmost to make sure the animals stay safe and calm throughout the process.

All transportation of our animals is carried out in accordance with appropriate legislation and UK law, including suitable space during transport, appropriate vehicles, movement procedures and licenses/certificates required for journeys exceeding 65km up to 8 hours, and over 8 hours.

Medical/veterinary care

Despite our best efforts to maintain healthy animals, animals sometimes get sick or injured. In these instances, we aim to provide the best and most effective care for these animals, whatever that may be. The Livestock Coordinator is responsible for providing treatment plans for sick and/or injured animals, and relies on regular consultation with Shepton Vets, as well as discussions with the Site Manager, to create and review these plans.

Euthanasia

Occasionally, euthanising an animal needs to be considered. When making these decisions, animal welfare should trump human attachments. Animals who are suffering severely, where it is deemed impossible to return the animal to good health, should be euthanised as quickly and humanely as possible.

Preventative treatments and routine care

We keep an up-to-date calendar of all routine care and treatments required to keep our animals healthy. It is the responsibility of the Livestock Coordinator to make sure these are carried out in good time.

We consult with Shepton Vets on an annual basis to review our farm health plan, which goes on to inform our actions through the year.

Some routine care, such as pony hoof clipping and shearing of sheep needs to be done by outside contractors with specialist knowledge. Booking appointments for these services is done well in advance of when they will be needed.

Ear tagging, tail docking and castration

Ear tagging is a legal requirement for pigs, sheep, goats and cows.

The farm keeps old-fashioned breeds of sheep that take longer to get to slaughter weight, as well as goats and some male sheep as pets. We castrate all of our male sheep and goats to avoid them reaching sexual maturity, to prevent unwanted breeding. The only exceptions are male rams and goats used for breeding.

We also often dock tails to reduce the risk of flystrike in woolly sheep, as this can present a serious issue for the sheep.

We complete all these tasks at once, in the first few days of life, to minimise stress to the animals. As of 2023 we will be trialling using localised anaesthetic to further improve welfare.

Family units and socialising

All the types of animals we keep at the farm are social animals that naturally exist in herds or flocks. Only in extreme circumstances do we keep them on their own, in pens or fields without any of their kind around, for example if they are injured, sick or acting aggressively.

We wait much longer than the minimum recommended time before animals are 'weaned' (separating them from their mothers for the first time), to minimise stress to both the young animals and their mothers. With some animals, such as pigs, after an amount of time together, younger and older animals prefer to be kept separate as they begin to fight, mothers cease sucking piglets etc. and older animals begin to bully the younger ones. When this happens, it is important that animals are separated quickly to avoid injury and stress.

Animals as a source of food

One of Bath City Farm's aims is to produce high quality, affordable and nutritious food for local communities, addressing issues of food security, whilst generating new income streams to be reinvested into the farm's social activities. As the ethics of meat production and use of other animal products comes under more and more scrutiny, it is important that the farm strives to uphold best practise in animal welfare, including and even especially the animals which are being farmed for meat. We are presented with an opportunity to champion animal welfare in farming, and the farm is an excellent educational resource when it comes to people being able to make informed decisions about their diet.

With this in mind, the farm and its staff put thought into managing the welfare of our animals at every stage of their lives, from birth to death.

While all abattoirs welfare standards are monitored by the government, we will always give preference to a slaughterhouse which is known to place extra importance on the good treatment of animals. Bath City Farm uses Langford Abattoir, which is attached to the University of Bristol, and is known to be an industry leader in animal welfare through the slaughter process.

Wild Animals

While we have less responsibility for wild animals who may live on or pass through the farm than animals which are officially in our care, we recognise that what we do on the farm, and how we do it, can have a profound effect on the welfare of wild animals. Bath City Farm is an area of environmental conservation, and so we strive to create and maintain a landscape where nature and wild animals can thrive. A brief overview of some of the considerations that should be given to certain species:

Invertebrates

The treatment of farm animals with antibiotics and worming treatments can have a detrimental impact on invertebrates, particularly those who feed off the dung of animals such as some beetles. The farm adheres to organic principles and will not routinely use antibiotics or worming treatments; an animal is only treated with medicine if it is sick.

The farm is home to hundreds of species of invertebrates. To effectively conserve rare and uncommon species it is important to accurately identify them. Records of invertebrates are also highly important to the scientific community. Where species cannot be identified in the field or from a photograph, accurate identification sometimes requires collection and killing of small numbers of invertebrates for microscopic examination. This practice is supported by most conservation organisations and informs site management practices that will benefit invertebrate populations in the long-term. Where there is a clear benefit to conservation and/or the scientific community, collection of invertebrates is occasionally permitted for experienced

individuals, natural history groups and academics adhering to Invertebrate link's 'A Code of Conduct for Collecting Insects and Other Invertebrates'.

Occasionally, 'bug hunt' events are held on the farm. These events are for educational purposes. Handling of invertebrates during these events is kept to a minimum, to reduce negative impacts to the creatures and to reduce instances of negative impacts to humans (such as bites, stings and defensive chemical secretions). Invertebrates may be placed in suitable containers for examination. All invertebrates are released in the location they were found in at the end of the event.

Chemical pesticides are generally indiscriminate and kill many non-target species, as well as being harmful to invertebrate predators such as birds and bats. The use of pesticides is therefore banned on the farm.

Birds

All wild bird species, their eggs and nests are protected by law. Control of scrub, tree surgery, hedgerow cutting etc. is only carried out outside of bird nesting season (generally March to August). When foraging for nut, berries and other wild edibles, we aim to leave a good amount for wild animals. Where activities have the potential to disturb or damage active bird nests, a check for active nests is undertaken. If active nests are discovered, no activity that could disturb or damage the nest is to be undertaken until they have finished nesting. We do not permit hunting of wild birds on the farm.

Amphibians

Any pond wildlife caught during pond-dipping activities must be kept in water-filled containers for observation and returned to the pond when finished with. Handling of creatures should be kept to a minimum to avoid unnecessary distress. Pond dipping, which could involve catching Great Crested Newts (GCN) is only to be done under the close supervision of someone with a GCN licence.

Foxes

Foxes can be problematic when keeping poultry. They can break in to pens to kill birds. It is important for us to keep our birds safe, and so enclosures are designed to be fox-proof. We aim to keep our fencing, especially around vulnerable animals such as chickens, in good condition at all times. Our policy

is never to cull foxes on site and so it is the responsibility of Farm staff to keep young or vulnerable animals safe from fox attacks.

Badgers

Badgers are a protected species under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, and it is illegal to kill or injure a badger or intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a badger sett. Several badger sets are present on site.

To date, there have been no incidences of bovine TB in cows on the farm. There is no badger cull in Bath at present and B&NES Council have passed a motion stating that they will refuse permission for badger culling on their land. We do not cull badgers.

Bats

Bat boxes and other roosts on the farm will only be checked by (or under the supervision of) a licensed bat worker. Bats will only be handed by licensed bat workers and trainees wearing appropriate gloves and vaccinated against European Bat 2 Lyssavirus.

Rats

Measures must be taken to keep the rat population low, as without constant vigilance they can become a serious problem, not only for food hygiene and aesthetic reasons, but also animal welfare and wildlife conservation issues. We try as much as practically possible to use non-lethal methods to deter rats, for example keeping spaces tidy and tidying up spilled animal feed. The reality is though that traps etc do have to be used in settings such as farms. We employ professionals to set and check traps and use their guidance to keep rat populations low to avoid having to take any more dramatic measures.