



5 Tips for Transporting Poultry Stress-free

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Introduction

Poultry is transported for a few different reasons, for instance to fairs or markets, to a new owner, the vet, or to slaughter. Unfortunately, few people put much thought into how to best transport their fowl. As a result, birds experience distress, get sick or die in transit. This can be easily avoided. Consider the following factors before transporting fowl (Figure 1).

1. Before transport

Transport starts with catching and crating your birds. Noisy, aggressive catching can cause panic and injury. Approach the birds quietly and calmly, possibly under dim lighting. For larger bird-types, always have two points of contact when catching a bird, for instance by holding the legs and the body. Never catch birds by their neck, head, or tail. Avoid catching by their legs or wings alone. Do not hold birds upside down, they get stressed, fearful and may even die because of inverted restraint.

More useful information about catching specific fowl can be found here at the Humane Slaughter Association:

<https://www.hsa.org.uk/catching-and-handling/catching-and-handling>

2. Thermal conditions

An important aspect during transport are the thermal conditions the birds are exposed to. Depending on the type of fowl, the birds may be more prone to heat stress (larger, meat-type birds) or cold stress (lighter, egg-laying birds). Warm weather with high humidity may cause heat stress, which can be avoided by proper ventilation, adapting the space allowance accordingly, and avoid exposure to sun.



5 TIPS FOR STRESS-FREE TRANSPORT OF POULTRY*

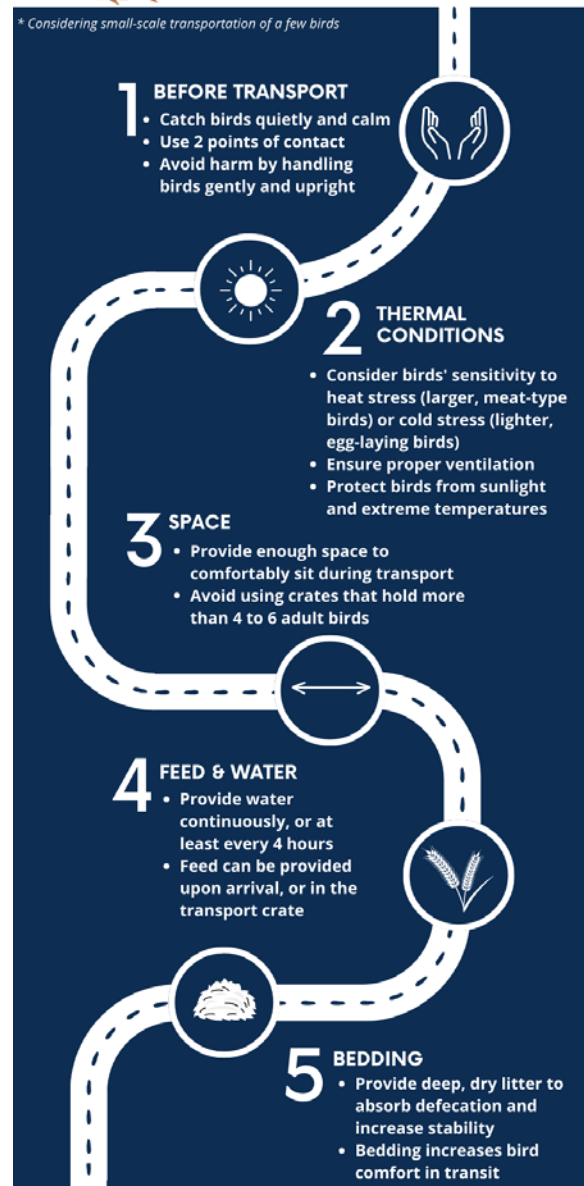


Figure 1. Infographic summarizing 5 tips for stress-free transport of poultry. Source: Leonie Jacobs

Ventilation

During hot weather, good airflow through the crate is very important. DO NOT use airtight crates, trailers or trucks to haul poultry in warm weather. Rather use crates that allows the air to flow through. Use care not to stack the crates to disrupt the air circulation. Never transport fowl in the trunk of a car, since they may suffocate, die due to exhaust fumes or heat build-up. Birds will show behavioral signs of heat stress (Figure 1).

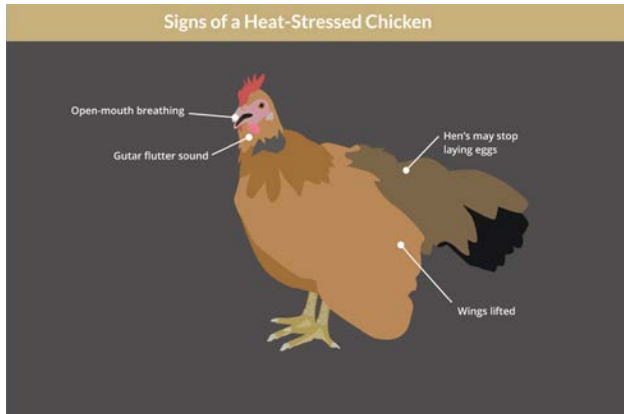


Figure 1. Observe the birds to assess whether ventilation is appropriate. Birds that are experiencing heat stress will pant (fast breathing, with clear breathing movements of the breast/throat, open beak), and may lift their wings to increase heat loss. Temperature of their feet or comb can also indicate whether they are experiencing heat or cold stress. Source: <http://www.poultrydvm.com/condition/heat-stress>

Remember, natural air circulation stops if you are stopped or in slow traffic. It may be necessary to open windows or doors until you get moving again. Open-air coops on open bed trucks and trailers can be too drafty at highway speeds and may cause eye and ear irritation, as well as feather damage.

In cold weather, avoid drafts and avoid birds getting wet. Excessively cold drafts can cause frostbite and colds. Observe your birds, if they huddle together, for instance in the corner of the crate, they may experience cold stress. A crouched posture, with fluffed up feathers may also be a sign your bird is experiencing cold.

Direct sunshine

Do not place crates in the direct sunshine. Dark colored trailers and crates can become deadly ovens

in hot, sunny weather. Shade the crate with a light-colored material or paint the cart a light color.

3. Overcrowding

Many hauling problems and deaths occur because of overcrowding. Allow enough space for the birds to sit comfortably during transport. Do not use crates that hold more than 4 to 6 adult birds. This will keep piling to a minimum, improve air-circulation, and limit accumulation of body heat.

Once you arrive at your destination, birds should be allowed the following cage space: One-half square foot per bird for bantams and pigeons, 1 square foot per bird for large chickens and pheasants and 2 to 3 square feet per bird for ducks, geese and turkeys. Leaving the birds packed in the carrying crate is inhumane.

4. Feed and water

Birds should be watered continuously if possible, or every four hours. Carrying coops can be equipped with removable waterers since full waterers may spill while driving. When you stop to eat or drink, give the bird a drink also. Feed could be provided upon arrival.

5. Bedding or litter

Provide birds with a deep layer of loose, dry litter to absorb defecation, avoid slipping, and increase stability for the birds during transport. This will help keep the birds clean and comfortable.

Other precautions

1. Avoid using wire-bottomed cages. When you slide cages with wire floors, you can damage the toes of birds if they get caught between the wire and the floor. It also provides less comfort and can be a biosecurity risk due to defecation.
2. Do not use crates that allow the birds to stick their heads outside of the crate. If they can stick their heads out of the crate, their necks can easily be accidentally broken if the crate shifts or are stacked.
3. Make sure the crate is securely closed. If birds get out of crates during transit, they can be lost or hurt.
4. Do not place two crates next to each other if they are both holding males and they can see each other. They may try to fight each other and damage their combs and feathers in transport.

5. **DO NOT** transport your bird in an air-conditioned vehicle unless you adapt the temperature slowly to match the temperature at destination. When you arrive at your destination the bird may not be able to adjust to the outside temperature.
6. Take enough feed and water from home to care for your birds while traveling. Some birds will not consume water or feed that they are not accustomed to for the first day or more.
7. Thoroughly clean and disinfect all crates after using. Reused litter and dirty crates promote the spread of bacteria, parasites and other contagious infections.
8. Store crates off the floor and empty. This discourages rodents from using them as nests between uses.
9. Very young birds often do not have the ability to maintain their body temperature. They will need to be kept warm (but stay vigilant for signs of heat stress, like panting).

Reference

Humane Slaughter Association. “Catching and Handling”. <https://www.hsa.org.uk/catching-and-handling/catching-and-handling>

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