

CODE OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WELFARE OF PET GERBILS

DUTY OF CARE TO A PET GERBIL UNDER THE ANIMAL WELFARE (GUERNSEY) ORDINANCE, 2012

Section 8 of the Animal Welfare (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2012 provides that the owner or keeper of an animal owes a duty to take such care as, in all circumstances, is reasonable to see that the animal is free –

- from thirst, hunger and malnutrition,
- from discomfort,
- from pain, injury and disease,
- from fear and distress, and
- to express normal behaviour patterns.

In determining what care is reasonable in all the circumstances described above, the owner or keeper of an animal shall have particular regard to -

- (a) good practice for the care of the animal in question,
- (b) any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept,
- (c) any lawful activity carried on in relation to the animal,
- (d) the physical activity undertaken by the animal,
- (e) seasonal climatic conditions,
- (f) the life-stage of the animal, and
- (g) any special or additional dietary and nutritional requirements that may arise -
 - (i) where the animal is pregnant, brooding or rearing young, and

- (ii) from the general state of health of the animal.

"normal behaviour patterns" means normal behaviour patterns for a domestic animal or a captive animal, as the case may be, of the kind concerned.

The duty of care includes providing the animal with -

- (a) a supply of fresh drinking water and food of sufficient quantity and quality to keep the animal in good health,
- (b) where appropriate, suitable shelter which is sufficient to maintain the animal in good health and such shelter must include -
 - (i) access from the shelter to water and food,
 - (ii) sufficient space for the animal to lie down or otherwise rest in comfort, and
 - (iii) where appropriate, adequate light, heat and ventilation,
- (c) protection from injury, disease or unnecessary suffering including, where appropriate, provide timely and appropriate medical diagnosis and treatment where necessary by a recognised veterinary surgeon, and
- (d) the opportunity to express normal behaviour patterns and living conditions that are conducive to maintaining those normal behaviour patterns.

The Welfare Recommendations below provide practical guidance on meeting this duty of care when caring for a pet gerbil.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE UNDER SECTION 13(1) OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE (GUERNSEY) ORDINANCE, 2012 FOR THE WELFARE OF PET GERBILS

A FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THE WELFARE RECOMMENDATIONS MAY BE RELIED UPON IN COURT AS TENDING TO ESTABLISH LIABILITY FOR FAILING TO MEET THE DUTY OF CARE

RECOMMENDATIONS – FOOD AND WATER

1. A gerbil should be provided with food that contains the correct balance of essential nutrients, in sufficient quantity to keep it, in all circumstances, in good health and vigour.
2. A gerbil should be provided with fresh, clean water in sufficient quantity to keep it, in all circumstances, hydrated.

RECOMMENDATIONS - LIVING ENVIRONMENT

3. As a minimum a gerbil should be provided with living accommodation that –
 - a. provides an enclosed space that is large enough to allow it to rest or sleep in a natural position and have a separate space for it to exercise,
 - b. is predator and vermin proof, dry, ventilated, but protected from draughts and which provides protection from direct sunlight and extremes of heat and cold,
 - c. has a solid base,
 - d. has a dust bath,
 - e. has burrowing material that is of a consistency and deep enough to allow gerbils to create dens and tunnels,

- f. provides predictable daylight or a light period equivalent to daylight in every 24 hour period,
 - g. allows continuous access to water and appropriate access to food (to ensure it receives a sufficient quantity of food as required to meet the duty of care), and
 - h. is constructed from materials that are not hazardous to gerbils.
4. Living accommodation should be provided with dust-free nesting and bedding material. Nesting and bedding material must not have been treated with substances which are hazardous to the health of gerbils.
5. A gerbil should be kept indoors.

RECOMMENDATIONS - HEALTH

6. A gerbil that is injured or ill should be provided with timely and appropriate treatment for the injury or illness or in the case of a serious injury or illness, medical diagnosis and treatment by a veterinary surgeon. In the case of doubt, advice should be obtained from a veterinary surgeon.
7. Veterinary medicines or treatments should only be administered in accordance with the directions of a veterinary surgeon or a person authorised to supply such products, or in the case of products that can be purchased by the general public, in accordance with the directions of the manufacturer of the product.
8. Hazardous substances should be kept out of the areas to which a gerbil normally has access and aerosol sprays should not be used in the vicinity of its accommodation.
9. A gerbil should be protected from hazardous household appliances by keeping such appliances out of the areas to which it normally has access or by using measures to ensure it does not suffer harm from the appliances.

10. A gerbil should be provided with untreated wood or twigs to gnaw on to prevent its teeth from becoming overgrown.
11. A gerbil should be handled so as to avoid distress or injury.
12. Food and water containers that are provided for a gerbil should be kept clean of waste food, droppings and other contamination.

RECOMMENDATION - BEHAVIOUR

13. Gerbils are social animals and should be kept in groups (single sex groups unless breeding is planned). A gerbil should not be housed on its own unless under the specific recommendation of a veterinary surgeon.

RECOMMENDATIONS - BREEDING

14. Only a gerbil that is adult, well developed and in good health and condition should be used for breeding.
15. Gerbils should be kept in single sex groups unless breeding is planned.
16. The male gerbil plays an active role in bringing up the young so should not be separated from the female after the birth of the young unless further litters are not wanted.

RECOMMENDATIONS - TRANSPORTATION

17. A gerbil should be transported in a secure container that contains nesting material and provides ventilation. It should be provided with a source of water in hot conditions and on extended journeys, with food and a source of water.
18. A gerbil should not be left unattended in a vehicle unless the environment within the vehicle is maintained below 24°C air temperature in the shade.

Further, more detailed guidance for the welfare of pet gerbils is set out in "Guidance for the Welfare of Pet Gerbils" issued by the Commerce and Employment Department and available on the States of Guernsey website. That guidance does not form part of this Code.