

APPENDIX D

NHC CODE OF PRACTICE

The NHC promotes a high standard of hamster care & welfare. Therefore membership of an NHC affiliated club means you automatically agree to follow your clubs' rules & those of the Constitution.

In addition, you also agree to follow the separate NHC Codes of Practice. The NHC expects ALL its members to keep their hamsters in suitable housing, with some type of enrichment. There are no exceptions.

Failure to adhere to any of these could mean expulsion from your club.

Housing

The hamster must be housed in a secure enclosure. The hamster must be unable to escape and be protected from potential predators.

The enclosure must be sited away from draughts and heat sources, (including direct sunlight), in an environment where the temperature remains relatively constant. The environment must be frost proof and temperatures should not rise above 25°C.

To prevent fighting, each mature Syrian hamster must be caged singly, (except for a female housed with the un-weaned pups that she is suckling). Other hamster species may be housed in compatible groups of their own species.

The design of the cage must be suitable and safe for hamsters. Particular care must be taken to ensure that the hamster is unable to fall from a height or become trapped in small spaces.

The NHC recommends a minimum of 1000cm² (useable floor space) x 19cmH for Syrian hamsters and 750cm² (useable floor space) x 17cmH for Dwarfs.

The enclosure must be large enough to allow the hamster to exercise and to establish separate toilet, feeding, food storage and nesting areas.

Environmental enrichment, (e.g. wheels, boxes and tubes of suitable size), should be supplied to encourage activity.

For reasons of hygiene, and to encourage natural burrowing behaviour, the floor of the enclosure must be covered in a layer of a suitable absorbent substrate.

Sufficient safe bedding material must be supplied to enable the hamster to build a nest adequate for the ambient temperature conditions.

Feeding

The basis of the hamster's diet must be a balanced hamster mix, containing hard foods suitable for keeping teeth in trim. The amount required per day will vary with the hamster's species; an egg cupful is adequate for an adult Syrian hamster.

Some vegetables and fruits, (not citrus fruits or onion but see full list on NHC website), can be given in small quantities, 2-3 times a week and all uneaten fresh food removed frequently (or regularly). It must be well washed before feeding to remove dirt and pesticides.

To prevent impaction of the cheek pouches, foodstuffs that are sticky or that melt must not be given.

Fresh, clean drinking water must be available in the enclosure at all times.

Handling

Handling should, ideally, take place in the late afternoon or evening, when the hamster is naturally awake and alert.

Hamsters should never be handled more than a few inches above a surface or the floor, in case of falls.

To remove food odours, (with consequent risks of nipping), hands should be washed before handling hamsters. As with any animal, hands must be washed after handling hamsters, for reasons of hygiene.

When taming a hamster, handling “little and often” is recommended, to help the hamster learn the owner’s scent and voice.

Health

Bedding and cage litter must be changed at intervals sufficiently frequent to maintain a hygienic environment. Where possible, it is recommended that the interval between cleanings should be at least a week, since cleaning disrupts the animals’ natural scent marking and hoarding behaviours, which may cause psychological stress.

All cages and equipment must be cleaned regularly, preferably with an animal safe disinfectant.

At all events, provision will be made to minimise risk of transfer of pathogens between hamsters and between hamsters and humans. This may be by barrier methods or by the use of animal safe disinfectants or cleansers.

Hamsters must be checked at regular intervals for signs of illness or disease. If and when these symptoms are found, prompt action must be taken to alleviate the source of the problem, seeking veterinary attention where necessary.

Breeding

Exhibitors should not breed hamsters, except for show purposes or for the continuation of a bloodline.

Stock used for breeding must be healthy and of good temperament. The individuals should have no known genetically inherited illnesses or disease in their ancestry. Pairings believed likely to result in pups with birth defects must be avoided.

Syrian females must be given a recovery period of at least six weeks after weaning a litter and should not rear more than three litters in their lifetime.

The hybridisation of any species of hamster is strongly discouraged by the National Hamster Council.

Careful thought must be given before breeding as to provision of suitable homes for any surplus youngsters.

Syrian hamster females should be aged between four and eight months when mated for the first time.

Records must be kept of all hamsters kept by an exhibitor. Each record should contain, as a baseline; species, age, sex, colour, parentage and history, (breeding and medical)

Re-homing

Only regular exhibitors who are members of an appropriate club may re-home animals at shows and other events organised by that club.

All hamsters re-homed must be accompanied by details of ancestry, a description, (species, age, sex, and colour), care information and breeder's contact details.

Hamsters re-homed must be healthy and fully weaned. They must be no younger than five weeks of age and no older than ten months.

Exhibition and transport

No hamster may be transported, exhibited or otherwise confined in any container that does not allow the animal to stretch out at full length, turn around or sit upright on its haunches.

The travelling or exhibition container must be sufficiently well ventilated for the animals' needs. There must always be provision for air circulation around the air vents, whether the container is in transit or at an event venue.

Suitable quantities of hard food and moisture supplying fruit or vegetable must always be available to hamsters in transport or exhibition pens.

Any animal believed by any Official exhibiting signs of illness, injury or disease must be returned to the owner as soon as practicable. The owner will be encouraged to seek advice, including veterinary attention if necessary.

Where any exhibitor suspects an infectious disease, that person must seek qualified medical advice (under the Animal Welfare Act 2006) and not expose their hamsters to other hamsters until the problem is resolved or a recommended period of quarantine has been completed.

Club Officials and owners will monitor ambient conditions, (temperature, noise, etc) at all venues, and take such action as may be needed to keep them at an appropriate level. During travel, this responsibility falls to the person transporting the animal(s).

Any handling of hamsters at events will be by persons recognised by the club as competent to do so, or under the direct supervision of such a person.

When the health or welfare of any hamster(s) at an NHC affiliated event is, or is likely to be, compromised, the situation must be brought to the attention of the Show Secretary or their appointed NHC Welfare Representative. They will then be required, on behalf of the NHC, to take reasonable steps to prevent or alleviate any animal suffering. The person(s) shall be selected on a show by show basis.