

END THE CAGE AGE FOR QUAIL



The life of quail in natural conditions

Quail are tiny birds who in natural conditions make their home in grassy fields, cropland and meadow habitats. They live on the ground, foraging, nesting and sleeping in the grass. Dust-bathing is an important natural behaviour for quail and they do it regularly.

When in danger, their first reaction is usually to hide in the vegetation. If this doesn't work, quail fly up rapidly to avoid a predator but drop back into the grass further away.

In the winter, quail usually live in large groups and then in the breeding season, many take to living in breeding pairs. Hens make a scrape in the ground and line it with dry grass to lay their eggs. Their quiet lifestyle living in the protection of grasslands means quail are more often heard than seen; their calls are quite distinctive.



Quail in their natural grassland habitat

Quail farming in the EU: 143 million birds, many in barren cages

Shockingly, there is no species-specific EU legislation to protect the welfare of quail farmed for meat and eggs. There are also no official statistics on quail, although it is known that at least 143 million are farmed every year in the EU. The vast majority are farmed intensively in battery cages or overcrowded barns which severely limit their natural behaviours. Use of antibiotics appears to be common, especially in very young quail, compounding the risk of humans becoming resistant to antibiotics used to treat disease.

Most quail hens used for eggs are caged. The hens start laying at around 7 weeks old and are slaughtered at around 8 months old. They cannot run, forage or dust-bathe, leading to extreme frustration. Some farms may cram eighty birds into a single cage, which stresses them and increases the risk of them pecking at each other's feathers. The uncomfortable wire cage floors cause sores on their feet which may become infected.



Caged quail cannot run, forage or dust-bathe, and they are at risk of injury when startled.

Quails' natural response to escape danger is to fly upwards rapidly and drop into the grass further away. When they are caged and are startled, for example by stockpeople, the quail can suffer potentially fatal injury as they hit the top of the cage, head first.

In other farms quail raised for meat may be kept in sheds rather than cages, but overcrowding is common, providing little chance for natural movement and bringing the risk of aggression and feather-pecking among the birds.

This suffering is completely unnecessary as humane alternatives are available.

Higher welfare alternatives for quail

Free-range systems provide better conditions for quail. These give access to outdoor pasture, allowing the birds to exercise their full range of natural behaviours, including foraging. Another alternative to cages are well-designed indoor barn systems that give more space and provide daylight, enrichment and the opportunity for dust baths. Some barn systems also provide outdoor access.



Access to a grassy aviary and choice of environments during the day

EU legislation to End the Cage Age for quail

Compassion in World Farming calls for the phase-out of cages in EU quail farming by 2027.

This could be included in a revision of Directive 98/58/EC on the protection of animals kept for farming purposes. The Directive stipulates that “the freedom of movement of an animal ... must not be restricted to cause unnecessary suffering”. It also states that “where an animal is continuously or regularly confined, it must be given the space appropriate to its physiological and ethological needs in accordance with established experience and scientific knowledge.”

Confining quail in cages does not fulfil these requirements.

Additionally, Article 13 TFEU requires “the Union and member states, since animals are sentient beings, to pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals.”

The vast majority of EU citizens demand reform for farmed animals; the 2016 Eurobarometer poll on animal welfare shows that 94% think protecting the welfare of farm animals is important. Since then the recent [End the Cage Age European Citizens' Initiative](#) has gathered well over the required one million validated signatures from across the EU.

It is time to End the Cage Age.

Compassion in World Farming EU
eu.office@ciwf.org
+32 2 709 1330 | www.ciwf.eu
Follow us on Twitter: @ciwf_eu

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in world farming 
ciwf.org

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