



# Poultry Capture and Handling

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As with any other species, the main objective when handling poultry is ensuring both the handler and the bird come away unharmed and relatively unstressed. The diversity among poultry species may require changes to how you capture and handle a specific bird (e.g., a Rhode Island Red chicken compared to a market turkey). Table 1 reports typical maximum body weights for various poultry species, but body weights vary depending on the birds' sex, breed, and variety.

A few things to keep in mind:

- Males are bigger than females.
- Adult birds are bigger than young birds.
- Market birds are bigger than fancy, ornamental, or heritage breeds.

**Table 1.** Adult bird body weight from different types of poultry species. Actual body weights will depend on the breed and age of the bird.

Species	Type	Sex	Body Weight (pounds)
Turkey	Market	Tom	50
		Hen	20
	Heritage	Tom	36
		Hen	25
Geese	Market	Gander	26
		Goose	20
	Heritage	Gander	26
		Goose	20

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Species	Type	Sex	Body Weight (pounds)
Duck	Market	Drake	6
		Duck	6
	Heritage	Drake	12
		Duck	7
Chicken	Market	Rooster	6.3
		Hen	5.4
	Heritage	Rooster	13
		Hen	10
Quail	Market/Heritage	Cock	0.3
		Hen	0.3
Pheasant	Market/Heritage	Rooster	3.5
		Hen	2.5
Peafowl	Market/Heritage	Peacock	13
		Peahen	8

Poultry may need to be captured in situations where they have:

- Escaped an enclosure
- Escaped from their owner while being handled or exhibited, or
- Become a nuisance that requires removal from an area by an animal control officer.

In any instance, these four points can help you more effectively capture a bird:

### 1) Birds are scared of you.

You are likely many times the body weight of most birds and viewed as a predator. Birds will engage a fight-or-flight response and try to evade you by running or flying. However, when birds are nesting or have young, their parental instincts will trigger aggression toward “threats” and protection of a nest of eggs or young neonates.

### 2) Remember flight zone and point of balance concepts.

The flight zone is the area surrounding an animal in which a person can approach before the animal moves away. An animal’s point of balance is located at the animal’s shoulder. A person standing in front of the point of balance will cause the animal to move backward. If a person is behind a point of balance, the animal will move forward. Understanding a bird’s flight zone and point of balance will help you direct the bird to the desired location. In addition, poultry are generally sensitive to rapid and unexpected movements. Move slowly and steadily, and avoid abrupt or sudden motions. Poultry have good hearing and will try to move away from a source of unfamiliar or unpleasant noise.

### 3) Corral birds into a corner, if possible.

The easiest, most efficient way to catch birds is to corral them into a corner and reduce the amount of space to escape. You can improvise a corner with materials from your surroundings. Attempt to make yourself “large” by extending your arms out and up, if needed. Again, keep the flight zone in mind. Also, if you’re working with someone else to corral the bird(s), discuss a plan on working together to ensure safe, effective capture.

### 4) Catch birds near dusk.

It is important to know your “prey” before catching them. Birds tend to become more docile as the sun sets; instinct drives them to seek a safe nesting place or area to perch for the evening. Therefore, birds are easier to catch once it is dark. Once birds have gone to roost for the night, you can use a red-light headlamp or flashlight to quickly identify the bird’s location, turn off the light, and catch the bird before it tries to escape.

Proper catching, handling, and carrying of poultry is species-dependent. In general, chickens, turkeys, pheasants, and peafowl are carried by the legs or wings; waterfowl are carried by the neck or wings; and quail are carried by the whole body. Remember: The more support you can offer the bird, the less the bird will flap and struggle. One should always try to carry birds in an upright orientation as much as possible. If you carry a bird by the wings, grasp the wings close to the body so you are holding a wing in each hand.

The following techniques can be used when catching different poultry species:

### 1) Turkeys

**OPTION 1:** Corral a turkey into a corner and back into that corner. Once you are close to the turkey, reach through your legs, grasp the turkey's shanks, and quickly pull the shanks through your legs — stopping when the wings hit your legs. Take care to step over — and not on — the wings and place both shanks in one hand. Reach down with the other hand and grasp either wing for control. At this point, you have full control over the bird and can carry it to a holding area or pen.



**OPTION 2:** Corral a turkey into a corner and walk toward it. Once you are close to the turkey, place its head between your legs, reach over its back, grasp its shanks, and quickly pull the shanks into the air. The turkey will likely flap, so firmly hold on and ride it out. Once the turkey stops flapping, place both shanks in one hand and reach down with the other hand grasping either wing for control. At this point, you have full control over the bird and can carry it to a holding area or pen.



### 2) Chickens

**CAGED BIRDS:** Caged birds are easy to catch. Reach into the cage and grab the bird's shanks. Remove the bird feet-first, supporting its breast as you take it from the cage. Once the bird is removed, grasp both shanks in a single hand, place the breast in the opposite hand for support, and carry the bird to the new location or pen.

**FREE BIRDS:** Birds running wild require more effort to catch. In this instance, use a catch hook or capture net. Corral a bird into a smaller area and, using either tool, proceed to catch it by the shanks. Once you've caught the bird, remove its shanks from the tool; grasp both shanks in a single hand, place the breast in the opposite hand for support, and carry the bird to the smaller pen.



### 3) Waterfowl

Waterfowl should be corralled into a smaller area to be captured. **DO NOT** catch waterfowl by the legs, as their shanks are easily dislocated or broken. A capture net is likely the best option. Once a duck or goose is caught, it can be carried by the wings or neck. Waterfowls' necks are flexible, and carrying them by the neck for a short distance will not impede respiration.

These general tips will allow you to capture and handle poultry. The techniques are a guide that can be modified to fit your particular situation. However, the main consideration when capturing and handling poultry should be safety of the handler and the welfare of the birds being handled.

## Resources

- American Poultry Association. 2010. American Standard of Perfection. Global Interprint, Santa Rosa, CA.
- Aviagen. 2014. Ross 708 Performance Objectives. Accessed Mar. 2018. [http://en.aviagen.com/assets/Tech\\_Center/Ross\\_Broiler/Ross-708-Broiler-PO-2014-EN.pdf](http://en.aviagen.com/assets/Tech_Center/Ross_Broiler/Ross-708-Broiler-PO-2014-EN.pdf)
- Aviagen Turkeys. 2015. Nicholas Commercial Performance Objectives. Accessed Mar. 2018. [http://www.aviagenturkeys.us/uploads/2015/11/13/nicholas\\_comm\\_perf\\_obj\\_select\\_2015.pdf](http://www.aviagenturkeys.us/uploads/2015/11/13/nicholas_comm_perf_obj_select_2015.pdf)
- FASS. 2010. Guidelines for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Agricultural Research and Teaching. FASS, Savoy, IL.
- National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC). Code of practice for the care and handling of hatching eggs, breeders, chickens, and turkeys. 2016. ISBN 978-0-9936189-6-3.
- North American Meat Institute. 2017. Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines & Audit Guide: A systematic approach to animal welfare.
- Poultry Catching and Handling – Humane Slaughter Association, 2017. <https://www.hsa.org.uk/catching-and-handling/catching-and-handling>.