

Barling Poultry

Newsletter

September 2011



So why do our hens look gray?

Because in August we sprayed every house inside and out with good old fashioned traditional creosote to kill the red mites that were over running our houses! It's a horrible messy job and it rubs off on some of the hens but for us we find it is the best way to kill the red mites and stop them coming back for months, which is why we treat the houses every February and August. Plus it seems to keep the houses in very good condition! Red mites peak in numbers in August and then start to drop off as the temperature drops.

Newsletter back ☺

With the busy holiday season, house spraying etc we weren't able to send out a newsletter last month but here we are again.

Common health problems

We have had a lot of calls over the past couple of months from people with different hen concerns. Nearly every problem has been due to either red mites or worms, so sorry if we do go on about these two things so much. Typical concerns are "hens won't go in their house", "hen losing weight", "hen not laying", "runny poo", "hen lethargic and weak" etc



9 times out of 10 treating the house for red mite and treating hens for worms resolves it.

For local people, we have found that Blue House Farm Paints in Pitsea sell original creosote in 5 & 25 litre containers.

Recent changes to sales of Flubenvet make it harder to buy larger pots than 60 grams and with no prescription required the Internet is still the cheapest place to buy it for around £15

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Feather mites

Although sometimes referred to as fleas, the things that live on your hen around its bottom and under armpits are mites – they can't jump! They live on the hen, eating dead skin, laying their eggs at the base of feathers. An occasional mite is part and parcel of keeping hens and they do not live on humans, but if a hen is heavily infested (this often happens if they are unwell) this weakens and depresses the hen.

There are various ways to treat your hen;

Ivermectin 0.8% 2-3 drops on back of neck

Diatomaceous Earth applied to bedding and bird

Spray containing Pyrethrum to bedding & bird



Remember that red mites do not live on the birds, but feather mites do. Garlic is a good natural way to help hens keep mites at bay, and can be regularly added to feed. Feather mites are not to be confused with Northern Fowl Mite, which are smaller and appear as a 'mass' of tiny dark mites and are not as common as feather mites. Like most pests mites travel via wild garden birds.



Checking for feather mites

Parting the feathers between the vent and the legs allows you to see if your hen has mites living around the bottom area. They are around 2 mm long, golden brown and quickly move away from the light when you part the feathers. Their eggs look like grains of sugar stuck to the base of the feathers. A common place to find the eggs is underneath the armpit area, in clusters that look like squashed chewing gum.

Sometimes a hen's bottom may be bald, because other hens (with their very good daylight vision) may see the mites and try to eat them, pulling away feathers at the same time. Once bald, the mites will move further up the body and can often live on the back of the neck too.



Chicken skin injuries

The skin of a live chicken is similar to a loose jacket, in that it tends to 'float' on the hen's body being only 'attached' in occasional places. The result of this is that a hen might snag themselves on a nail, get bitten by a fox/dog etc and rip a large tear. It is common to find a hen with a piece of skin ripped the size of your hand exposing the body/muscle underneath.

Many people will tend to their animal themselves but if you do not feel comfortable then of course you should go to your vet. To treat the hen yourself, firstly clean the wound with warm salt water and cotton wool.

Pull the skin over the wound and using a fine needle and black cotton, place one stitch every 1cm closing the skin tight together. One person to pinch the skin together rather than trying to pull the skin together using the stitch. Pull the stitch tight, tie it and cut the cotton off leaving 2cm cotton exposed. It is easiest if one person holds the hen still on a towel whilst the other stitches. You can settle the hen by talking to it/stroking it. Normally a hen will lay still whilst you sew its skin back together, they seem to know you are making them better! Once stitched, apply some Stockholm tar or Iodine spray to the wound and keep the hen separated from others for a week. We used to remove the stitches after 10 days but found that hens pull them out themselves in time when they preen.

Reminder - Worm your hens every 3 months at the least...

Next Month..

Common hen questions, different breeds of hen, Incubators and fertile eggs

"It's a poultry matter"

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