



## Summer Stress

### Looking after your birds in the hot weather

Each season has its stress-points – there are a few associated with summer – the main one being the weather

There are quite a few stress triggers for poultry, and our aim as chicken keepers is to keep our birds happy and calm; stress can adversely affect their immune system, bringing on illness and lack of condition. A stressed bird will look 'mopey'; it will sit in the corner, perhaps not feeding or drinking and its neck will be hunched down.

**Temperature:** chickens are susceptible to over-heating; they find it difficult to cool down. Firstly, their body temperature is quite a bit higher than ours.... 105deg! Add into the equation that they can't sweat to cool down, and you have a potential problem; they will tend to stick to the shade, so provide plenty of cool areas, they'll fan out their feathers to encourage air to pass through to the skin, they'll pant to lose heat and also drink more water as the cooler water takes heat away from their internal organs as it passes through the body; this is called excretory heat transfer.



Make sure that they have shady places to hang out in, and plenty of fresh, cool water – you can pop a frozen bottle of water into their drinker. Add some Vit Boost poultry tonic to their water, this contains B vitamins to help combat stress.

**Overcrowding and bullying:** these two factors can be stressors at any time of the year; it is really important to make sure that your birds have more than enough room in their run and plenty of feeders and drinkers to avoid squabbling and bullying. This can end in feather pulling or pecking and result in nasty injuries. If you have bullying issues within your flock, check first for stress points like overcrowding, a run which could do with more interest or just one plain nasty bird. Try taking that aggressor out first – pop her in a broody cage (with drink and water) inside the run and leave her there for a couple of days to bring her back down the pecking order slightly. You might find that you need to use an anti-feather pecking spray or fit her with a Bumpa Bit to prevent any serious injuries or cannibalism.



**Predator stress:** This doesn't just apply to obvious predators such as foxes stalking chooks in the run, but also dogs running around outside the run and barking at the flock, or small children chasing your birds. Chickens are sentient creatures and get stressed quite easily, so a quiet and calm environment is best for them; make sure that dogs are trained not to race up to the run barking, and that children are taught how to sit down and hold a chicken in their laps for a stroke.

**Introducing new birds:** this one has the potential to be a major cause of upheaval, so needs to be taken slowly and with consideration – we all know how tempting it is to get birds on an impulse, but it's advised to prepare a temporary coop and run for them so that the newbies can be quarantined, treated for worms and mites and your original flock can free range near them and get to know the new birds through their run mesh before attempting to free range together.

**Moving home:** a new and strange environment can cause stress and put a hen off-lay for a few days while she assesses any possible hazards and risks before settling. Again, dosing their water with Vit Boost will support the immune system and help to prevent stress.

Enjoy your birds, and your summer.