

# Feeling on top of the world

Keeping your chooks in peak condition shouldn't be a drama. **Stephanie Bateman** discovers how to check them and prevent and treat nasty problems

**W**hen it comes to monitoring your chickens' health, the key is to examine them regularly so that you notice any changes quickly and are able to act promptly. "Your health check should include an assessment of your chicken's weight, an examination of her plumage — checking for pecking, evidence of mites or lice and a general eyes, nostrils, vent and leg inspection," advises Nettex's Claire Edmunds.

In addition to the regular health check, any keeper should also be aware of other threats to their chickens' health and take action to prevent issues arising.

## WRIGGLY WORMS

According to Claire, advice on worming should always be sought from a vet or suitably qualified person (SQP) at the point of purchasing worming medication.

"However, as a guide, you should worm your flock every quarter for optimum health and productivity, using a licensed wormer or a medicated wormer premix (where the wormer is mixed with feed or is contained within

the manufactured feed/pellets)," she advises.

Intestinal worm eggs are always present in the environment in wild bird droppings and so it is important to treat the ground as well as the birds to minimise reinfestation.

"Once you have treated your birds, clear the run of litter and sprinkle with Nettex Ground Sanitising Powder. This will help to clear the ground of worm eggs and bacteria before you lay clean litter.

"It's a good idea to support your flock's gut health while worming by feeding Nettex Herbal Gut Conditioner regularly and considering nutritional supplementation if your birds have a heavy worm burden," says Claire.

## PESKY PESTS

There are a number of pesky pests, including red mites, lice, northern fowl mites and scaly leg mites, that can live on your chickens or in their housing. Here, Claire Edmunds advises how to deal with each one:

## RED MITES

- These live in housing and emerge

after dark to feed off chickens. A heavy infestation will severely affect the health of your flock; it can stop them laying, cause anaemia and can even kill birds. Before this, however, there are more subtle signs that you may have an infestation, including:

- The birds may avoid going into the coop at night.
- There could be tiny blood spots on the eggs.
- Your birds may be more irritated with each other than normal and look pale or anaemic.
- You spot either mites, or their faeces — the latter look like grey ash-type deposits — along the crevices inside the coop.

Because red mites live in housing, a regular weekly inspection and prevention routine is essential to get rid of them and to keep them at bay. To remove the constant threat of red mites, a weekly three-step programme is advised:

1. Thoroughly clean out the coop, remove all faeces, dry matter and bedding.
2. Spray the entire coop with Nettex Total Mite Kill Ready to Use Spray. This

## HOMEOPATHIC HEALING

Homeopathy at Wellie Level (HAWL) has been established since 2001 and has taught hundreds of farmers and smallholders how to use homeopathy for their animals.

Here Jane Dobson of Broadstone Rare Breeds, a member of HAWL Farmers, offers advice on homeopathic remedies to help keep chickens healthy:

"Remedies can be put in water to treat the flock, or they can be given by dropper to individuals," says Jane. "Usually bought in tablet form, you just drop one table into fresh water daily."

The following remedies can be used to help with a variety of conditions...

- **Euphrasia** for eye injuries or early signs of infection.
- **Pulsatilla** is brilliant for respiratory problems.
- **Hepar Sulph** for any infections where pus is present.
- **Silica** (plus increased protein and oyster shell) for weak shelled eggs. To increase protein use worms and fats/oils such as sunflower seeds. Silica is the best remedy also for egg bound hens. Try aloe gel for lubricating their lady bits when they are



egg bound. Epsom baths are also good for egg bound hens.

- **Aconite** and **Arnica** to treat shock after predator attacks or any stressful situation or injury. You can put these in water or

use a dropper to dose individuals.

- **Nux Vomica** and **Arsen Alb** for sour crop.
- **Sulphur**, **Staphysagria** and **Psorinum** for mites and lice.



There are a range of diseases that can be vaccinated against, including infectious bronchitis and Marek's disease

will disinfect as well as eradicate mites.

**3.** Apply Nettex Total Hygiene Powder liberally over the surface of the coop interior, perches and nest boxes and refill with fresh bedding. It is also important to include the Total Hygiene Powder in dust baths.

Additionally, you should use Nettex Total Mite Kill Aerosol monthly to treat hard to reach areas. A regular routine like this will help to keep the mites at bay and ensure that your flock is parasite-free and healthy. However, should you have an infestation these products will need to be used more regularly initially.

## LICE & NORTHERN FOWL MITES

Unlike red mites, lice and northern fowl

mites live on your birds and are transmitted from wild birds in the garden. If there is an infestation you will see lice or their eggs around the vent area. Lice are small brown critters; northern fowl mites are smaller and black. Both lice and northern fowl mites feed off your birds' blood, which makes them irritable and grumpy. They may peck each other or pull out their own feathers. Infested birds may also look pale and they may stop laying for no reason.

It is relatively easy to treat these peaky pests, says Claire, and it is essential to treat the housing too to help prevent any re-infestation:

**1.** Thoroughly clean out the coop, removing all faeces, dry matter and bedding.

## TO VACCINATE, OR NOT TO VACCINATE?

THE DEMAND for vaccination of the backyard flock has increased with the popularity of keeping chickens. Here Ben Crisp BVSc MRCVS from The Chicken Vet offers the following advice on vaccinating chickens:

"Vaccination is commonly used in commercial poultry and increasingly in backyard birds to control disease," says Ben. "Vaccines mimic natural infection, allowing the birds to build up immunity to the disease without any of the harmful effects. This way you can prevent your birds getting the disease."

There are a range of diseases that can be vaccinated against, but below are some of the most common ones:

- Marek's disease
- Infectious bronchitis (IB)
- Avian RhinoTracheitis (ART)
- Mycoplasma gallisepticum (MG)
- Salmonella

"The need to vaccinate, and which disease you should vaccinate against, will depend on your holding, the number of birds you keep and whether or not you buy in or sell out birds," advises Ben. "With regard to Marek's disease, in general we recommend against vaccination unless there is a problem on the site. The vaccine is given to day-old chicks as an injection into their breast, thigh or the back of the neck, but remember that day-old chicks are small and fragile and can easily be injured by an inexperienced vaccinator."

The three respiratory diseases (IB/MG/ART) can all be vaccinated against.

"If you have respiratory disease on your holding, it is probably worth getting a blood test carried out to ascertain which of these diseases are involved to ensure that you are vaccinating against the correct ones," says Ben. "In general, if you are buying or selling a lot of birds it is worth considering vaccinating against all three. The vaccination consists of giving your birds two injections four weeks apart followed by an annual booster."

Salmonella vaccination in backyard flocks is possible. However, provided you have good hygiene, there shouldn't be any need for it. The vaccination consists of giving your birds two injections four weeks apart followed by an annual booster.

For more information, visit: [www.chickenvet.co.uk](http://www.chickenvet.co.uk)



Chickens love free ranging — if you have the space

2. Spray the coop with Nettex Total Mite Kill Ready to Use Spray — this will disinfect and kill any mites and lice in the housing.

3. Once this has dried, powder thoroughly inside the coop with Nettex Buz Busters Louse Powder before replacing the bedding and roosting bars.

### SCALY LEG MITES

These are particularly nasty and they spend their entire life cycle on the bird. They are spread by direct contact with other birds. Scaly leg mites burrow

under the scales of a bird's legs causing great irritation, which the hen tries to relieve by pecking. This creates painful sores on the legs. The scales will look raised, with a crusty exudate under them. This is the mites' excrement.

Scaly legs can be easily managed with the following programme:

1. Spray the legs of affected birds with Nettex Scaly Leg Remover, which will suffocate the mites, ease the discomfort

and provide a barrier to deter and protect the legs from further infection. Apply to the legs with a soft toothbrush in an upward motion, gently working it under the scales.

2. Repeat every 5-6 days (to break the egg cycle) until the infestation is gone, along with the scabs from under the scales. Note that the scales will remain raised when the mites are gone. It is important not to pick at any raised or loose scales.

"Birds are susceptible to stress, and parasites will cause an adverse effect on the immune system," explains Claire. "It is therefore essential to support them with appropriate nutrition and supplementation if required.

"Ensure that you check any new birds you introduce to your flock to ensure that they are free from lice and mites. New birds should be quarantined initially and introduced gradually."



Nettex's range of poultry treatments

## HAWL FARMERS' FIVE TOP TIPS FOR HEALTHY CHICKENS

- Move the chickens' run around on a regular basis (weekly if possible) to prevent build up of any parasites. If the run isn't movable then perhaps divide it in half, or preferably quarters, to allow the ground to rest. Chicken droppings tend to make the soil alkaline, so it might be necessary to add some other livestock manure from time to time on the resting areas and reseed scratched up areas to redress the balance.

- Try soaking and sprouting organic whole wheat grain which is packed full of nutrients — hens lay incredibly well on it. Have buckets lined up soaking ready to

feed as the grain sprouts. You just need a large sieve to rinse it each day.

- Add apple cider vinegar to chickens' water for one week per month to keep them in good general health.

- Always let them have access to greenery. It keeps them fit and healthy and gives the yolks a good colour.

- Another tip is to feed Marmite mixed with layers' crumb, which is meant to help boost them after the moult or before breeding as it contains lots of B vits.

To find out more about HAWL courses, visit: [www.hawl.co.uk](http://www.hawl.co.uk)

For information, visit [www.nettexpoultry.com](http://www.nettexpoultry.com)

How to keep poultry in **TIP TOP** health

# YOUR **chickens**

May 2019 £3.99

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT KEEPING CHICKENS IN THE HOME

**Waste not,  
want not?**

*The kitchen scraps conundrum*

**PLUS**

**CHICKPIX**

**BEFORE THE  
BACKYARD**

**ASK THE VET**

**ASK THE EXPERTS**

**HATTIE HEN**

**Eggs-traordinary  
Easter customs**

