



Red mites and scaly leg mites

How to get rid of those pesky critters

While we are all loving this hot summer weather, unfortunately so are the crawly parasites which can infest and feed off our flocks.

There have been some serious infestations reported this year of 2 types of parasites:

Red mites

These live in the chicken housing, preferring to hide in nooks and crannies, coming out after dark, attracted by the warmth of the birds, to feed on their blood before returning to their hiding places. While you can have a few in the housing and perhaps not notice them, it is very easy for them to multiply quickly in warm weather, resulting in a serious problem which will endanger the health of your flock. Red mites are grey before they have had a blood feed, turning red afterwards, they are about double the size of the full stop on this page. Red mites come from wild birds and are usually found in wooden structures which provide hiding places for them, they don't live on the birds and can survive for long periods without blood feeds.



Detecting them: a regular weekly cleaning regime, taking apart the housing, will help you to be vigilant and notice any mites quickly, they will usually hide in crevices or cracks in the wood, on the ends of roosting bars and in the nesting box. Wiping along the roosting bars in the morning with a piece of white kitchen towel would show some blood stains. You may notice tiny blood spots on the eggs, your birds could be nervy, fractious and refusing to go in to roost at

night (because they get bitten!) you may also notice mite droppings, which look like fine grey cigarette ash in the bottom of the coop. Don't be tempted to skip a clean if you can't see any mites – they will be craftily waiting for this to happen so they can take hold!

How can you get rid of them? Vigilance is the best weapon, that and a very thorough cleaning programme with the right products. Buy housing for your birds, which is easy to take apart and clean – many people are now using plastic housing for this reason. Take it all apart, clear out any litter from the inside of the coop (if you have an infestation, this should be bagged and binned or burned, not used on the compost) scrub it down with hot soapy water and leave the sections to dry in the sun; the UV light will sterilise it and kill off any bugs. Before re-assembling the coop, spray it all with [Nettex's Total Mite Kill ready to use spray](#), shaking it first. This spray contains anti-bacterial ingredients to kill off any bacteria, and also an insecticide which will knock down any red mites. It cleverly has a coating ingredient, which is why you need to shake it, this coats the surfaces so that the knock down effect continues after it has dried. Shake [Buz Busters Louse Powder](#), which contains the same active ingredient, into all the corners, roosting bar ends and brackets and the nesting box, then re-assemble the housing. You should repeat this every 3 days until the infestation has been knocked back, then revert to a weekly routine using these products.

Your birds may well have been left anaemic by the mites, so I would recommend that you add [Vit Boost Tonic](#) to their feed for the next week.

Scaly leg mites

These are a slightly different type of mite, still picked up from wild birds, these mites burrow under the scales on the chicken's legs. They are more common in older birds which have slightly raised leg scales. You may notice that your birds are pecking at their own legs, or a white crust forming under the scales, serious cases can cause the bird great pain, and it would eventually go lame if left untreated. Fortunately it's easy to deal with and eradicate; use [Nettex Scaly Leg Remover spray](#), spray some onto a soft toothbrush and gently brush it upwards under the



scales on both legs. Repeat this every 4-5 days to break the mite breeding cycle. You will notice that the crusting under the scales goes as the mites die, the scales will remain raised, but will improve in appearance after the next moult. Please don't be tempted to pick off any damaged scales as this could cause bleeding and infection.

Using [Total Hygiene Powder](#), along with fine wood ash in their dust bath will also help to provide a natural anti-mite action to their social behaviour as they dust bathe together.

Some chicken-savvy vets have started to prescribe the use of a spot-on containing Ivermectin. This is prescribed off-licence as it's not yet licenced for use on poultry in the UK. It acts in the same way as the spot-on flea treatments you use on your dog or cat, and prevents lice and mite infestations.