

Common Problems & Diseases of Free Range Poultry (part 1)

There are around over a hundred diseases of poultry, many of which are not common and some quite rare. We will concentrate here on the more common ones found in small flocks, problems and diseases you are more likely to come across. It's important to note that many of the diseases listed below are management related, e.g. rats and mice carry some disease as do wild birds, so many diseases can be prevented by good management.

Good poultry vets are hard to come by, but it is essential to involve a good veterinary surgeon if you have problems with your flock. Some medicines, such as wormers and louse powder can be obtained from other licensed sources; most drugs are only available from your vet.

Please note: In the following list * denotes that a product is not licensed for poultry.

Coccidiosis

Symptoms - Listless, head sunk into neck, white diarrhoea, blood in droppings.

Cause - Coccidia parasite.

Treatment - Baycox, Coxi Plus or Coxoid* in water for 5 days. Harkers Coxitabs* tablets (single dose only) good for dosing a single bird. Keep litter dry. Coccidiosis is a killer of young birds and chicks, best to feed young stock with medicated feed to help build immunity. Older birds will have developed some immunity, but a heavy infestation will need to be treated if the above symptoms are seen.

Birds Affected - All birds from 3 weeks onwards.

Blackhead

Symptoms - Listless, head sunk into neck, yellow diarrhoea.

Cause - Parasite carried by heterakis worm.

Treatment - Harkanker* in water for 5 days. Worm hens with Flubenvet to remove carrier.

Birds Affected - Turkeys, pheasants and guinea fowl. Uncommon in hens, chronic in peafowl.

Worms

Symptoms - Listless, green diarrhoea, dryish cough, gaping, waterfowl have trouble walking.

Cause - Up to 6 different worm species in different internal parts.

Treatment - Flubenvet mixed into feed for 7 consecutive days (no egg withdrawal).

Birds Affected - Chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, pheasants, guinea fowl, peafowl and quail.

Lice

Symptoms - Tubular egg cases on vent area, bird displays irritation and scratching, lice visible at base of feathers.

Cause - Four types of louse.

Treatment - Dust litter and nest boxes with a pyrethrum based louse powder. Birds should have a dust bathing area to help keep numbers down.

Birds Affected - All poultry.

Red Mite

Symptoms - Grey powder around perches (like cigarette ash). birds reluctant to enter coop or nest boxes, blood spots on eggs, reduced egg laying, pale combs on affected birds. Can kill if left untreated. Deadly to broody hens and chicks.

Cause - Two types of mite. Wild birds carry mites.

Treatment - Bedding must be changed regularly. Housing should be treated with Poultry Shield and/or a smoke fumer that kills and deters red mite. Badly effected birds can treated with Invermectin* 0.8%, one drop per week on skin for three weeks (easy to apply with the dropper provided). Use great care with Invermectin in geese. Develop regular and effective red mite management.

Birds Affected - All poultry.

Scaly Leg

Symptoms - Raised, encrusted scales on legs.

Cause - Mites burrowing under scales.

Treatment - Dunk legs in surgical spirit once a week for three weeks. Apply a thick coating of Vaseline on to legs (suffocates the mites). Alternatively, use Ivermectin* 0.8% one drop per week on to bird skin for three weeks. Do not pull off encrusted scales. Can take months to return to normal.

Birds Affected - All birds.

Mycoplasmosis

Symptoms - Sneezing, discharge from nostrils, foam in corner of eye, one or both eyes closed, rattly breathing. Swollen sinus under eye. Sweet sickly smell.

Cause - Mycoplasma.

Treatment - No cure, some birds develop immunity. Treat by injecting Tylan 200* 0.5ml or Baytril per adult in breast muscle, 1ml for turkeys. Repeat after 48 hours. Tylan, soluble in water for chicks. There is a new antibiotic called Denagard which involves no egg withdrawal. Only available from your vet. This is administered via the drinking water for flock treatment and control. Advised to use as a prophylactic (to prevent an attack of the disease). If used regularly, claims to increase egg production.

Birds Affected - Chickens, turkeys, peafowl, pheasants and ducks.

Wounds

Symptoms - Blood.

Cause - Feather pecking due to heat stress or overcrowding. Accidental cut. Fighting.

Treatment - Remove the red colour, spray with coloured antiseptic like gentian violet or iodine. Put Stockholm Tar on area. Isolate until healed.

Birds Affected - Young stock or any bird.

Common Problems & Diseases of Free Range Poultry (part 2)

Bumble Foot

Symptoms - Round black swelling on underside of foot.

Cause - Staphylococcus bacteria entry due to injury. Injury often caused by perches being too high.

Treatment - Can be very difficult to cure. Seek help of vet, pus in the swelling needs to be surgically removed. After surgery the wound should be well bandaged and the dressing changed daily, antibiotics are usually given via injection in the first few days after surgery. The bird should be isolated until healed.

Birds Affected - Old or heavy birds, any bird.

Heart Disease

Symptoms - Purple comb instead of bright red of healthy bird in lay.

Cause - Old age.

Treatment - No treatment.

Birds Affected - All Fowl.

Overgrowth

Symptoms - Top beak over grown, long claws.

Cause - Slight deformity of beak, not symmetrical, ground too soft to wear claws.

Treatment - Trim with dog nail clippers, being careful not to cut the quick, cauterise with styptic pencil if bleeding occurs.

Birds Affected - All Birds.

Sour Crop

Symptoms - Crop swings from side to side when bird moves, crop feels 'squashy' and smells sour.

Cause - Unbalanced diet (too much scraps) or feed which has gone musty.

Treatment - Hold the bird carefully upside down and gently massage the crop, this will empty some of the contents of the crop, must be done quickly so the bird does not choke or get any liquid in the lungs. Mix some probiotic yoghurt with some crushed garlic (anti-fungal) and further mix with pellets or mash. Feed this mixture for the next few days. Keep isolated during treatment.

Birds Affected - All Fowl.

Bareback

Symptoms - Base of back and sides of females are bare of feathers or bleeding.

Cause - Sharp claws or spurs of males.

Treatment – Trim lightly spurs of males, being careful not to cut into the quick, then file tip smooth. Use poultry saddle on females for breeding or remove male.

Birds Affected - All Fowl.

Ear Infection

Symptoms - Cheesy substance in ear canal.

Cause - Bacteria or mites.

Treatment - Antibiotic ointment or drops.

Birds Affected - All Birds.

Egg Binding

Symptoms - Listless, straining.

Cause - A form of cramp. Heavy or overweight birds are more susceptible. Danger of peritonitis if egg breaks inside bird, which is fatal. Seek help of vet quickly if bird fails to pass egg.

Treatment - Keep bird warm until egg is passed, put a little warm olive oil on vent.

Birds Affected - Any female bird.

Angel Wing

Symptoms - Wing droops then sticks out on young waterfowl.

Cause - Too much protein.

Treatment - Tape wing in natural position for 3 days, repeat if necessary. Reduce protein in feed (add wheat).

Birds Affected - Growing waterfowl.

Duck Viral Enteritis

Symptoms - Sudden death in breeding waterfowl .

Cause - Herpes virus.

Treatment - Vaccinate. Remove wild waterfowl.

Birds Affected - Waterfowl.