

Chicken Concerns, Problems and Ailments

Contributed by Treacodactyl

I thought it would be useful to cover some of the problems our hens have had since we have had them. Unfortunately chickens can suffer from quite a few problems so it is useful to be aware of what they will be so you can take preventative measures and not be too frightened if they do have a problem. A good book will cover far more, but it is always worth speaking to other poultry keepers as nothing can beat first hand experience. A valuable place to contact other people is in the forum section of various internet sites such as this one. Hopefully this article can be updated with other people's experiences to provide a useful reference.

Moulting Chickens

I have noticed new chicken keepers often get surprised by their hens' moult. It can be quite frightening as one day they can seem fine when they are put to bed and the next morning you are faced with a house full of feathers where your chooks were! The hen then stands for a preen and spends several minutes pulling even more feathers out and when they wander off there is another pile of feathers. I once went to pick Treacle up when she was moulting and she wiggled free and left most of her tail in my hand! I was a bit worried but after witnessing our hens moulting over the last couple of years it's just a normal occurrence.

If you think your hens are losing too many feathers or they are moulting at the wrong time it's worth checking them over. If you pick them up you can check for any mites and as you are examining them you should be able to see new quills emerging. If they are moulting they may be less keen to be picked up as I imagine it must be a little uncomfortable for them. When they preen you may also see the casings of the new quills come off and cover the floor with the old feathers.

Another interesting fact with Treacle is that she has change colour quite noticeably with her moults. The following picture shows her when she was a young girl and she is not overly speckly. This year she is just coming to the end of her third moult and she is half white! (top picture)

Chicken Lameness

One hen, Treacle, woke one morning with a very noticeable limp. After examining her foot and leg for any noticeable injuries there seemed nothing obviously wrong. Feet can become swollen if they get dirt impacted under them or if they have to jump too far off a perch. After a few days matters did not improve so we took her to a local vet who specialises in birds.

He checked her over to make sure there were no signs of damage or broken bones. As he could not see anything obvious he suggested it was likely to be a sprain and gave her an injection to help her recover. There was a small improvement but after a couple of weeks she still had a noticeable limp. We contacted the vet again and he prescribed and sent out some tablets. Over the next couple of weeks Treacie gradually improved and now has no limp.

For pet chickens I would recommend the vet, it was not very expensive and it helps put your mind at rest. However, I'm not sure if the medication helped or if Treacie would have managed to get better on her own. Either way it did take a month for her to recover. Laying chickens are occasionally known to pull a muscle while laying so this may have been what happened. **Chicken Claw Problem**

Although she seemed completely unaffected another hen, Marmalade, has managed to loose a claw on two separate occasions. The first time it happened I was very worried as I did not know what had happened. After looking around the ark I noticed a little blood and assumed she had caught it whilst scratching for food (the bottom of the ark is covered with wire mesh to prevent anything burrowing in or out). Her toe was fine and had stopped bleeding, it was just missing most of the claw. To make sure she was OK I bathed her foot in warm salty water for a few minutes and left her to it. I'm glad to say on both occasions she has made a full recovery and grown back the claws. **Chicken Crop Problems**

One day I noticed Treacle seemed lighter than usual, and when I felt her crop it seemed unusually plump. This was unusual as our hens tend to digest their crops overnight ready for another day's ravenous onslaught on our garden. Treacie was still happy and looked normal. Her crop was quite soft but very full. I gave her a little sunflower oil to loosen things up and left her for a couple of days, she carried on eating and drinking a little and didn't seem under the weather at all. The crop gradually went down a little but hardened up.

I was becoming very concerned so we did some research and came up with the choices of emptying the crop or leaving her to it to possibly die. To empty the crop we could either operate or try and make her sick. We decided to try and make her sick by giving her plenty of vegetable oil and massaging her crop while holding her upside down. After a few minutes of gurgling noises and some puzzled looks from her, nothing happened. I did not want to hurt her and it is possible for a

chicken to choke to death, so we decided to leave her for a while. Each day we gave her some more vegetable oil and gave her crop a firm massage. Luckily her crop started to go down and after a week she was much better and appears to be completely recovered. Looking at her droppings it seems she had become blocked by feathers and grass. She had been moulting and often does eat feathers so we need to make sure we tidy as many up as possible. Chicken Old Age

This is not necessarily an ailment as such, but it is useful to know how long chickens will live for. I have read they are capable of living to 14 years old and I imagine there are a few even older birds around.

Basically the life span will depend on the type of breed. Hybrid birds will live shorter lives, approximately 3-5 seems common. Old or pure breed chickens will live longer. If anyone has a chicken who has reached a ripe old age then please write in.

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