

POULTRY VET HEALTH GUIDE - RED MITE

These Health Guides are available for download from www.practicalpoultryvet.co.uk. If you have any questions regarding this guide then "Ask the Vet" on our website or contact your own vet for advice.



Mite-y Problems

With the wealth of information available to the modern poultry keeper it can be overwhelming at times, especially with regards to mite and lice treatment. There are a number of options available, but nothing can replace good husbandry. This leaflet has been written to inform the poultry keeper of ways of controlling these pests and to right some of the common misconceptions.

Husbandry

Traditionally September was the month where you completely cleaned your wooden hen-house and applied a coat of creosote. This was perfectly timed to the point where mite levels were reducing.

It is important that treating the housing is done a couple of times a year, by shutting the birds out of the house and removing all boxes perches etc.

Creosote- is now a controlled product and can be hard to acquire, more modern oil based wood preservatives may help, even if it is by sealing the crevices that the mites inhabit or blocking the spiracles on the mite. Nest boxes are a common site for mite infestations so special attention needs to be given to this area. It is also wise to 'rest' the nest box for 14 days to ensure one full life cycle has passed before re-introducing birds

Flaming- by using a blowtorch on wooden housing can help to sterilise in the gaps especially if the housing has been scrubbed clean beforehand.

Chemical- Ficam W is available to larger poultry producers. The hen house needs to be treated for 3 weeks, and used by a suitably qualified person.

In small hen houses, a household acaricide (mite killer), can be purchased from your own vets. Your vets may suggest an egg withdrawal period during this time

Red Mites

The red mite is a small 'spider-like' parasitic mite that varies from a white to grey colour, which changes to red when it has had a blood meal. These mites live the majority of their lifecycle off the birds and in the environment of the poultry house. The mites are obligate blood suckers, so rely only on blood as a food source. The mites come out during the evening and take a blood meal on the roosting birds, then return to the crevices of the poultry house just after dawn. This means that treating the chickens alone does NOT treat the infestation.

Spotting the Mites

- Checking your hens at dusk or dawn with a torch can give you an opportunity of seeing the mites crawling about
- White powdery deposits around roosts and nest boxes are highly suggestive for red mites.
- If you notice something crawling across your hand when collecting the eggs, take a look.
- Blood spots on the eggs are highly suggestive
- Take a damp tissue and wipe around the roosts if blood spots are seen
- In severe cases anaemic chickens may be the first time any problem is noticed

Treatment

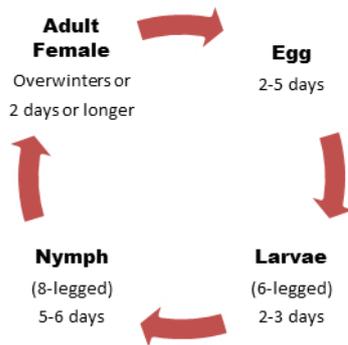
All treatments given should be supported by good husbandry (see opposite)

1. Empty house, remove feeders, perches etc, clean and disinfect
2. Acaricide treatment (focusing on the housing)
3. Flame wooden housing ± wood preservative



*A photograph of the red mite
Dermanyssus gallinae*

Red Mite Life Cycle



The life cycle can vary from 8 to 40 days depending on temperature and conditions. The cycle is quicker in the summer with eggs hatching in 2-3 days on average. Rapid infestations occur when the life cycle completes in around 8 days.

The adult mite can survive in the environment for up to 8 months without taking a blood meal, so vigilance and good husbandry is needed in the summer as well as the winter.

Chemical Controls

There are many powder based and 'natural' products on the market to help with infestations, which can help to control mite numbers. These are NOT to be relied upon on their own, and generally do not control heavy mite burdens.

Environmental powders are generally irritants if used in large quantities, to you and to the birds, so following the directions on the packet is extremely important.

Chemical controls that rely on topical treatments of the bird are of little clinical use. The application of an acaricide directly onto the hens will only kill any mites that happen to be on the bird at the time.

If husbandry are not enough it is worth seeing your vet about prescribing an environmental treatment. All acaricides that are available are not currently licensed for laying hens and because of this a 7 day egg withdrawal period must be observed.

Consequences of Infestation

The consequence of infestation can be deleterious for both the birds and economics, in larger units. The consequence of the mites 'blood meals' can cause irritation and restlessness in the more mild cases, to anaemia in the most severe. There is some anecdotal evidence that infestations can lead to feather pecking. It is known, however, that reduced egg production and quality (such as poor shells and blood staining) are common results of an infestation.

Red mites can act as a vector (disease transmitter) for a number of pathological poultry infections, both bacterial and viral. Salmonella species, Newcastle disease, chicken pox and others can be spread via the mite causing health problems within a flock. This is why control and eradication of mites is important for all poultry keepers.

Summary

1. Red mites have a rapid life cycle so a small infestation becomes a big problem quickly.
2. No single treatment is a replacement for good husbandry and complete cleaning of the housing bi-annually
3. Environmental controls are the best way of tackling this parasite as it spends most of its time off the host and in the crevices of the hen house.
4. Use marketed products as directed as these can be irritants if used outside the guided dosing
5. Some chemical acaricides are available, but these are off label in food producing animals, meaning a seven day egg withdrawal, and should be prescribed by a vet.
6. If you are still concerned regarding red mites a vet is contactable on the Practical Poultry Vet website at
7. www.practicalpoultryvet.co.uk

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