

## Common Vices of Poultry and Their Management

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### Introduction

Poultry vices means bad habits that birds suffers from and this may incur huge losses to poultry farmers. Abnormal behavior of birds in captivity has been found to occur among both domesticated and wild birds. When housed under captive or commercial conditions, birds often show a range of abnormal behaviours. These are often self-injurious or harmful to other individuals, and can include cannibalism, pica, Vent pecking, feather and toe pecking, egg eating, egg hiding as well as abnormal sexual behaviours such as chronic egg laying.

### 1. Cannibalism

Cannibalism is defined as the act of consuming all or part of another individual of the same species as food. Cannibalism is a condition in which birds of flock attack their pen mate and eat its flesh, which may cause deep wounds and heavy mortality. Vent pecking is common in laying birds.

#### Cause of cannibalism:

- Protein deficiency in the diet /provision of less diet/ excess of corn in diet are said to be important factor.
- Deficiency of amino acids like arginine and methionine, salt and minerals are also supposed to be important factor for cannibalism.
- Overcrowding in the poultry house which gives less opportunity for exercises and less active birds pick up vices.



- Hemorrhages in the external genitalia due to laying of large eggs by hens attract the other birds, loss of feathers from the body or hemorrhage from the skin due to parasitic infestation may develop the cannibalism.
- Wounds inflicted by fighting between the birds may also activate the activity of cannibalism.

### **Prevention**

- The most and cheapest way to prevent cannibalism is debeaking which can be done right from the day old chicks to any age. It is done by mechanically or manually by a competent and trained person. Debeaking by mechanical method is advantageous. One third of the upper beak and tip of the lower beak is to be cut.
  - Overcrowding of birds in pen should be avoided.
  - Wounded birds become segregated and proper treatment of wound should be given. Margosa oil is very effective in wound healing in poultry.
  - Birds involved in cannibalism must be identified, isolated and debeaking immediately.
  - Increased amount of vitamins, mineral mixers, salt, and some amino acids like Arginine and Methionine in the diet is said to prevent this type of vices.
  - Feed must be available in sufficient quantity at all the times.
  - Addition of raw meat in the feed or increased in the fish meal in the feed will serve the purpose.
  - Laying nest must be built at peaceful isolated places and provision of red bulbs near laying nest may also prevent from cannibalism.
2. **Pica:** Birds start eating materials other than feed which are not fit for consumption such as feathers, litter materials, threads etc. phosphorus deficiency, parasitic infestation, new litter material may predispose the birds towards the pica. Good managerial cares as well as balanced diet are advice to prevent the pica.
  3. **Vent Pecking:** Vent pecking is an abnormal behaviour observed in birds in captivity that involves pecking and causing damage to the cloaca, its surrounding skin, and underlying tissue of another bird. Occurrence of vent pecking is primarily immediately after a bird has oviposited when the cloaca is red and enlarged.
  4. **Feather and Toe Pecking:** Birds like hen and ostrich kept in captivity are more likely to engage in abnormal behaviors such as toe pecking. It occurs when one bird peck the toe of other bird by using the beak.

### **Cause**

Each of these behaviours have been tied to physiological stress (i.e., extremely enlarged adrenal glands)



likely caused by housing conditions in captivity.

High energy and low fiber diets cause chickens to have increased activity levels and aggression; this may lead to toe-pecking and other pecking behaviours.

Prevention: "Anti-peck" ointment application on damaged birds, this may be applied onto the affected area which prevent toe pecking.

A balanced diet for the type and age of bird are rising is an important factor in their behaviour. This includes the availability of the food to the birds.

Stress is typically the main contributing factor to abnormal behaviour such as toe pecking and therefore should be controlled as much as possible. Egg eating: sometimes birds are develop to tendency to eating own eggs. This may occur due to presence of cracked eggs, accidental breaking of eggs, thin or soft egg shell, lack of sufficient bedding materials in laying area. Presence of eggs for longer period in the pens may also encourage the birds for egg eating.

#### **Prevention**

Identified and isolate this type of birds. Egg collection should be on time. Debeaking the birds and provide darkness in the laying area prevent the egg eating. The quantity of lime stone and protein should be increased in the poultry feed diet.

5. **Egg Hiding:** More common in wild birds. Egg hiding is a maternal instinct of jungle fowl and may common in domestic fowl which are allowed freedom movement. They hide the egg in the field and bushes. To prevent this type of vices laying area should be built inside poultry house and restrict the movement of the birds freely.
6. **Chronic Egg Laying:** Is the production of an excessive number of eggs or repeated clutches (or collections) of eggs. Chronic egg laying may be seen in any hen, however this problem is most commonly observed in small psittacines like the budgerigar parakeet, lovebird, and cockatiel.

#### **Prevention**

Chronic egg laying is a complex problem with no easy solution. But it can be prevented by Management of diet, environment, social life, and activity. By medication-given oral calcium supplementation, hormonal therapy may reduce chronic egg laying and surgical removal of oviduct and uterus may be recommended.

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