

RED MITES



How do you know you have them?

The red mite *Dermanyssus gallinae* are blood sucking ectoparasites that can infest and feed on chickens and turkeys. They can invade at any time but especially during the warmer summer months. Warmth gives the red mite the ideal conditions in which to breed so numbers can proliferate extremely quickly.

Red mite can be challenging to spot unless you have a population explosion whereby they are difficult to ignore. Being nocturnal, they hide in crevices and joints of the poultry house during the day then emerge at night to crawl up the bird's legs, through the feathers and take a feed of blood from your birds.

We suggest a regular check of any areas they can potentially hide so you can take action as soon as possible to prevent them impacting on your bird's health. Alternatively have a look in the coop with a torch after dark. If you get a sheet of white paper and press any red mites you find onto it, red streaks will appear. You may also see even smaller greyish cream coloured mites, these are ones which have not yet fed. Once they have sucked a feed of blood, they turn bright red and then as they digest it the colour changes again to a reddish-brown.

Health issues

Low numbers of mites mainly cause irritation and annoyance to the chicken and their keeper, making birds restless and the keeper to have itchy skin. However, large numbers of mites can suck enough blood causing anaemia,

shown by pale comb and wattles, weakness, dullness and reduced egg production. Death can occur when red mites get out of hand as so much blood is lost by the bird, they can't survive.

Chicks are very susceptible to a mite infestation as the saliva the mite leaves in and on the chicks skin is toxic.

The red mite lifecycle from egg to adult mite is only between seven and 10 days depending on the environmental temperature, so it is important to keep checking on a weekly basis.

The mites can also crawl up onto human skin and cause irritation, but do not live on humans.

Signs

- Presence of grey/red mites up to 0.7mm, around vent of birds and in housing, particularly crevices.
- Birds are often restless due to the irritation.
- May cause anaemia (pale comb and wattles) and potentially death.
- Loss of condition.
- Drop in egg production.
- Blood spots on eggs.
- Staff/owner complaints of itching.

Treatment options

There are a number of products available for the birds and also importantly, their environment. Begin using the products early in the spring to try and prevent an infestation outbreak, or use as soon as possible after you discover you have red mites.