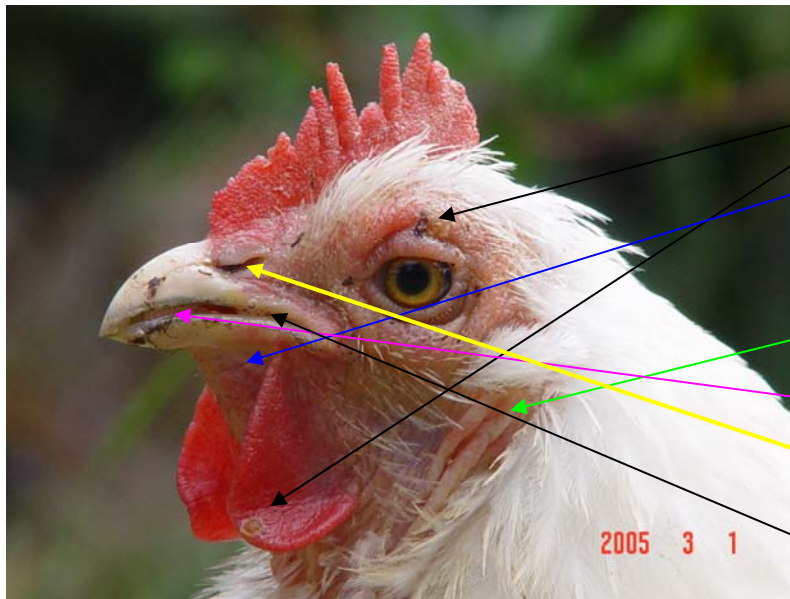


CHAPTER FOURTEEN:

IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY BIRD?



Signs to look for:

Scabs, here they are on the eyebrow and wattle.

Breathing
- enlarged throat and the act of breathing is quite noticeable.

Paleness of ear lobe and general pale face.

Dirt on beak.

In this case the **nostril** is clear.

Frothy or sticky **saliver** or blood

Some birds look obviously sick and some need very careful observation that can be imperative to successful early treatment. However to a beginner a healthy behaviour may be diagnosed as abnormal or the sick bird may be overlooked and the death of a bird is a sudden unexplained phenomenon of a stiff lifeless pile of feathers at the bottom of the cage. Sometimes one knows the bird is not well but one is unable to describe the symptoms either through lack of knowledge of what to look for or how to describe them. Sometimes there is only a gut feeling that the bird is not right. The following chapter is not how to diagnose an illness or heal your bird but how to notice an abnormality and describe it so that you can consult a vet or book or someone who maybe able to give advice. Early detection is essential if a birds' life or the flocks' health is to be maintained.



This is one sad rooster. He is huddled in a corner, his eyes are often closed and his head is tucked in. Also his comb is pale and shrunken.

The following are obvious symptoms that one can look for; they do not always go together, the bird may not be sick only cold or miserable, but it may be a sign that your bird is not feeling well. Always be alert for them and allow for time to sit and watch your birds. The birds should be observed in their normal environment first so that they are acting as natural as possible, then closer examination can follow after the bird is caught with the minimum of stress. A bird stressed by rough handling or changing the environment may not reveal its true symptoms. Night time maybe the best time to remove a bird when the whole flock has settled, flapping squawking birds is not conducive to trust and relaxation.



This cockerel has a head cold. The symptoms are enlarged head around the eyebrow and causing slight distortion of the eye. Not so common is the frothy secretions in the corner of the eye.

Other causes can be a musty or dusty environment. Also Indian Game fowl will get this when stressed.

First look at the head. Pale face and wattles, maybe comb drooping when it does not usually droop or wattles very dark red, almost black, eyes dull or sunken or slightly wild looking. A discharge from the nostrils or bits of food or other things stuck around the nostril opening, lesions such as scabs, spots or dried blood on the face, eyes closed or the flicking of the head. Maybe the head appears to be enlarged and rounder or sunken and elongated, the feathers on the top of the head maybe standing up a little more than usual.



This cockerel has a long snippy head. It could be normal or it could be a sign of an under lying problem.

Watch the birds' behaviour. A bird that stands off alone hunched up or remains on the perch should be regarded with suspicion. Watch to see if the bird is interested in food, pushing others around, which is healthy or being pushed around itself sifting uninterestedly through its food [bad], actively foraging or preening itself [good] or hunched up with ruffled feathers [bad]. Is it standing on one leg, are its eyes closed, has it tucked its head into its wing, is it sitting or standing? Is it panting or gasping or has rasping breathing? Is its behaviour in anyway different to usual? Watch to see if it is flicking its head, sneezing or coughing. Does the bird appear to be straining as if to pass an egg or has it been sitting on the nest for longer than it reasonably should and does not appear to be broody? How does the bird walk, does it drag a leg or limp? A lot of symptoms cannot be noticed with a quick look around the yard once a day when you change the feed and water, if they are then they may very well have been there for a lot longer. These symptoms may only be due to stress due to bullying and if not looked into will result in a sick bird.



Why is this pullet staying on the perch when the rest are fossicking around the pen?

Is she being bullied or is she ill?

Look around the pen and at the birds. Are their feathers littering the place, does it feel hot or cold and draughty, is it damp or wet and muddy, does the pen smell bad or musty or dusty? Is the water still clean when you come to change it or do you wait till it's contaminated, the same with the feed? Is the feed clean and dry or damp and musty, are the birds eating it and if so do they like it? Are they laying, and are the eggs normal in shape and texture? Have they got enough room? Do you feel itchy after visiting the pen? Are there signs of rats or mice, do the wild birds come in? these are some of the things one should know about your pen which may help explain problems that have or may occur and is helpful for diagnosis.

If a birds behaviour or appearance appears suspicious in any way check it more closely. In fact one should routinely physically check all your birds, at least once a week - randomly if you cannot check all of them. Handle the bird carefully and never upside-down by the legs. Hold the legs firmly with the hand that is under the breast and restrain the wings from flapping with the other hand. Wait until the bird has calmed,

if possible, before proceeding further and if necessary stop regularly to calm it and talking gently to it seems to help. It is best to do this in a bright light with your glasses on if you need them. Check the feathers around the vent are clean and not stuck with faecal material.



This pullet has putrid faeces stuck to her vent feathers.

Often antibiotics cause runny droppings.

It is important to note colour, smell and texture.

It is also important to keep the bird clean.

Feel the weight and develop an idea of what a normal weight should be. If necessary compare weights to what you regard as a healthy bird of the same age, sex, breed and cycle of laying. Check for mites and lice and lice eggs on the feathers and skin that can be especially found around the neck or vent feathers. Check the condition of the feathers; are they hard and dull or soft and glossy? Are there lots of pinfeathers, which will indicate the bird is moulting, check to see if the pen is littered with feathers, moulting can be an excuse for a bird to be off colour. Look for injuries cuts, scabs, growths or other unknown entities. Does the bird smell bad? Does it smell all over or worst around its beak? Is there any thing unusual inside its mouth? Look under the feet and check areas for swellings, scabs, inflammation, does one foot feel hotter than the other? Is the beak over grown, the face gaunt and narrow compared to other healthy birds? Check the nostrils, are they clean and open and no little mites running in and out.



This is the same pullet. After seeing her hunched like this (on the left) she was immediately wormed and was better within 2 days (on a later date). The black on her comb was harmless tomato juice she liked to eat.

The next decision is to isolate the bird from the others. If in any way one thinks the bird has an illness that could spread to the others isolate it in a cage well away from other birds, however if one feels the bird needs to be isolated for other reasons such as bullying or injury then the isolation cage can remain in the same pen. If the bird needs treating for lice or worms then it is pointless isolating it and treating it alone, as the whole pen needs to be done. Ensure there is clean food and water in the isolation pen at all times and it is of an even temperature, warm and free of draught however if a bird is suffering heat stroke it will need to be kept cool. By isolating the bird one can observe it further, even if one is not sure whether one has a problem or not or there is not time at the moment to give it a through examination.



It is often a good idea to cage a bird for a number of reasons:

*Quarantine
Isolation
Observation
Treatment
Warmth.*

Once the bird is in isolation one can be more observant of symptoms. If the bird takes an overwhelming dislike to its confinement then the cage will need to be covered. Ensure the birds' environment is quiet and comfortable away from disturbing influences such as other pets, children, noise and activities that may cause fright. A light bulb can supply heat but allow the bird the ability to move closer or away from the warmth otherwise one will have to judge if the bird is too hot or too cold. Newspaper is a good floor cover unless the bird has difficulty keeping its legs under it, otherwise a clean rag will be comfortable and enable the bird to grip and not slip causing its legs to splay out. Ensure food and water dishes are placed where the bird will not trample in them, foul them or wet itself or the cage, however ensure that the bird can reach them if necessary. If the bird is calm enough or cannot see, gently dip its beak into the water.



Sometimes a bird needs lights:

Warmth:

No mother, cold, or increase temperature to help fight illness.

Emergency drying:

Especially if they have got wet some way like dew or rain.

Obviously unwell birds should be brought inside where one can keep a constant vigilance, unless there are too many or there is other hospital type accommodation. Note whether the bird is frightened or calling for it's mates {chickens will do this} or if it is uninterested in its surrounds. If the bird is wet and filthy one may need to quickly wash and dry it. It is very easy to see is whether it will eat or drink. Wet bread or a treat one knows the bird would normally find irresistible is a good test. Usually birds will start to eat and drink if they have been deprived of food or once they start to feel more comfortable, for example warm and dry and away from birds that are being aggressive. This does depend on how adaptable the bird is to its new circumstances, its nature and severity of illness. And just because it is eating and drinking does not mean it is on the road to recovery or it won't be worse or dead next morning. For your own comfort and that of the bird if it is lice or mite infested it is best to delouse it, trying not to cause the bird any more stress and discomfort.



Birds do not normally hold one eye closed.



This chick has a swollen eye and a scab from scratching.

Another very important observation to make is the bird's droppings. Because the bird is isolated one knows that they belong to that bird alone. Observe the colour; are they green, white, red, black or other?

What is the consistency, are they white and minimal or pasty, are they runny or thick, lumpy, wormy, tarry. Does the bird produce a lot of droppings or barely any? Are they sticking to the feathers around the vent, in this case ensure the vent area isn't clogged and the bird is able to pass faeces freely. Is there something like an egg blocking the way of the vent? Is the bird straining?



White pasty droppings can be a sign of many problems or as simple as becoming chilled.



This scab is fowl pox. Eventually the beak will recover as long as the scab is not removed prematurely.

There are other important points to consider when observing a bird. What is its age – 2 days, 2 weeks, 8 weeks, point of lay, 1 year, 2 years, 8 years? Weight, age, breed and sex are also important. Where did the bird come from, was it vaccinated, what treatments has it had, has it had any treatments lately? What changes have there been for example; food, water, climate [heatwave or cold snap] visitors, pets, new birds brought in? Has anything been happening to neighbours birds, have you visited someone else's birds recently and they don't have to be poultry, has a bird been to a show or school "show and tell", how is the health of the wild birds? Has there been any spraying around for example aerial or local? Has there been any rat baits used? Are you using a different batch of wood shavings? There are so many things to consider.

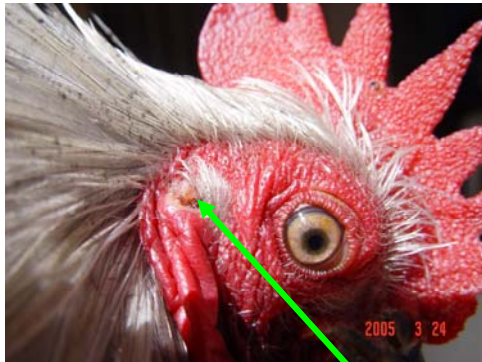


Visiting cockatoos share the same feed and water dishes.



Lots of native birds are attracted to the area of free ranging chicks as they feel safe as well as attracted by food.

This chapter was not written to answer questions but to create them. It has been written to encourage observation of your poultry, to help eradicate ignorance, to put power in the hands of the poultry owner, to allay anxiety and to create it. Never take anything for granted like the health of your birds because you feel you have done every thing right. Do not take for granted your right to keep birds. Beware one day we may have restrictions due to the advent of so called new animal diseases and their cross over to humans or perceived contamination to our export industries. Our political leaders are only too quick to put limitations on our rights or order the eradication of whole areas of birds regardless of there rarity, there strain or our hurt. Ignorance is a dangerous state of mind leading to manipulation and control by those who may not be less ignorant.



Don't forget to check the ears.



Birds don't always have to look this sick to be gasping.