

Your letters

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→ WRITE IN AND SHARE YOUR IDEAS, COMMENTS, PHOTOS AND TIPS

Living the dream!



Rhonda Phelan's Lilly, making a new life in the country all the more special as only hens can!

Since moving to the country recently, I've fulfilled my dream of getting some chickens. I've also become an avid reader of *Practical Poultry*, and have learnt so much more about chickens.

Here's a photograph of my gorgeous red hen, called Lilly, with one of my two Sussex – Milly and Tilly – in the background. They are total pets and we love them. Just to see a photo in the magazine would make my day!

Rhonda Phelan, Co. Cork, Ireland

Seasonal visitor factsheets

As the cold weather approaches, we should all be aware that wild animals may search for warmth and sustenance within our homes. And, if they can get easy access and find sufficient food for the winter months, who could blame them?

Animal Aid would encourage people who do find a squirrel in their attic or a mouse in their kitchen, not to panic and call in 'pest' controllers. The traps and poisons they use can cause prolonged agony to animals, and do nothing to solve the underlying reasons why that animal moved in.

Instead, we ask people who have an unwanted houseguest to take a few practical steps to encourage that animal to move on. To that end, Animal Aid has produced a series of free factsheets to help residents deter squirrels and rodents from their homes, as well as foxes, moles and birds from their gardens.

The factsheets can be ordered from info@animalaid.org.uk or by calling 01732 364546. When doing so, please state if there's a specific species you require information about.

Kate Fowler, Animal Aid

Wise words

I'd like to thank you for the articles by Alan Holtham and Fred Hams in the December 2014 edition of *Practical Poultry* (PP131). In my view both articles were long overdue, because they highlight the serious flip-side of keeping chickens.

The pressing issue of what to do with surplus cockerels (both in the commercial production process for layers as well as with us hobby poultry keepers) requires a lot of thought.

I strongly agree that we are often too easily tempted by the prospect of hatching cute and cuddly, fluffy chicks, and too many beginners forget the fact that at least 50% of the chicks will be cockerels. Disposing of them thereafter is a serious problem.

For years I've followed the discussions around the disposal of day-old male chicks in the commercial layer production process. I know it's a very sensitive issue, but I'd like to add a few recent observations from Germany.

As Fred Hams rightly points out, for every hen that's produced, a day-old brother has to be culled. The public outcry on this highly controversial practice has led to recent changes in German law. The 'Bruder Hahn' Initiative has been particularly effective at publicising this issue to the wider public.

Since Germany is a federal country of 16 or so sovereign states ('The Unites States of Germany'), each one of them has its own legal system. In 2013, the state parliament of Northrhine-Westfalia and, in 2014, Hessen passed animal welfare acts whereby from January 1st, 2015, the culling of day-old male chicks will be an offence on grounds of animal welfare.

Although these two states only play a very minor role in the production of layers, the political signal is enormous, and it illustrates perfectly the power we consumers can have.

Still, what's missing is an alternative, commercially viable, dual-purpose chicken, as demanded by Fred Hams. Hens need to be good layers and their brothers need to develop into acceptable table birds; as they were up until in the 1960s, when the commercial poultry world split into the broiler and layer industries. So far the genetics excludes one from the other.

However, there could be a solution in sight. A few months ago, Lohmann Tierzucht – the world's largest breeder of commercial layers – announced a new 'product' to its range, the Lohmann Dual.

This commercial hybrid could potentially combine satisfying (however, not overly brilliant) egg laying performances and acceptable meat production from the cockerels.

Let's all hope that this new, dual-purpose chicken can help to minimise the irresponsible disposal of day-old chicks in the future. Also, I think everyone should think twice before switching on the incubator, and act as responsible guardians of our male chicks.

Markus Radscheit, Wisley, Surrey