

COMMON LICE OF INDIAN POULTRY AND THEIR CONTROL

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THE fowl is subject to the attack of a large number of external parasites belonging to distinct arthropod groups, viz. lice, mites, ticks, fleas, flies, etc. The attack by these parasites causes enormous damage which is not generally realized, and is one of the most important factors operating against the development of the industry. Of these, I shall deal with lice here.

The biting lice are small, flat-bodied, wingless insects which are permanent ecto-parasites both in juvenile and adult stages, on birds. Fragments of feathers, hairs, scurf, scales and other epidermal products are their staple food, but they do not miss casual opportunities of imbibing blood oozing from a bruise or due to haemorrhage. The greatest injury suffered by the birds is due to irritation and itching caused by the crawling of the lice on the body and to the persistent biting and gnawing of the skin by these parasites.

Injury due to irritation

The violent irritation caused by the lice causes scratching, which in severe cases produces wounds on the skin and serves as inlet for disease producing organisms. A badly infested bird is in great distress, becomes restless and consequently emaciated, which predisposes it for the attack of pathogenic organisms. Moreover egg production falls.

Control methods : 'Prevention is better than cure' is too true in the case of pest control. Poultry houses should be well lighted, sufficiently ventilated and scrupulously cleaned every day. New birds should be kept in segregated runs for at least two weeks before they are turned in with home flock, and during this

period the former should be treated for lice. The breeding fowls should be given special attention, because they are the media of distribution of lice and other parasites to the new flock.

A very satisfactory way of eliminating lice from the birds is to treat each fowl separately with sodium fluosilicate and country tobacco snuff in equal proportions. It can be applied by the pinch method or by means of a dusting can. In the former method, the fowl is held by the wings over a sheet of paper and the pinch of the poison is rinsed thoroughly into the feathers, placing small pinches of the substance at different parts of the body—head, neck, back, breast, vent, thighs etc. It should also be scattered on the underside of the wings and tail when spread.

If the number of the birds is sufficiently large, the affected birds should be dipped in an insecticide such as sodium fluoride and common tobacco snuff. Two ounces of the insecticide are added in one gallon of hot water and stirred well. Dip the bird in this solution, holding the wings over the back with one hand and ruffling the feathers with the other when the bird is below the surface of water, duck the head once or twice, take it out and hold it for a moment on the bucket to receive the draining solution and then let it go.

The dip should always be given on warm and sunny days, so that the treated fowl may dry quickly before retiring for roosting. Very weak and young birds should not be dipped, especially in cold and damp weather.

The life-cycle of the common head louse suggests that the control measures should always be repeated after about a week to eradicate the vermin completely.



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