Lice and Mites: Tiny but Mighty

SMALL FLOCKS COLLABORATIVE

Quick Facts

Harmful to Birds

Lice and mites cause itching, feather loss, stress, anemia, weight loss, and sometimes death in birds.

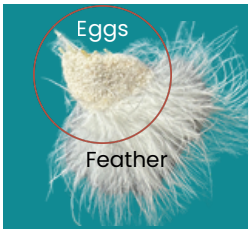
They Spread Quickly

Lice live on birds, while mites hide in the coop. Both reproduce rapidly. This makes them difficult to treat and reinfestation common.

Extremely Small

Mites and lice are tiny, making them hard to spot. This allows them to spread quickly unnoticed.

Lice Facts



1. Types of Lice

- Chicken Body Louse (on skin)
- Shaft Louse (on feathers)
- Head Louse (on head/neck)

2. Behavior

- Feed on skin flakes, feather parts and also blood feed by chewing on pin feathers
- Live full-time on the bird, often near the vent, under wings, or around the beard
- Spread from bird-to-bird through contact

3. Life Cycle

- Lay eggs (nits) at the base of feathers
- Eggs hatch in 4–7 days
- An adult louse can lay up to 300 eggs
- Entire life cycle happens on the bird

4. Signs

- Tiny tan or yellow insects on skin or feathers
- White clumps of eggs stuck to feather shafts
- Feather damage, itching, and drop in egg production

Mite Facts

1. Types of Mites

- Northern Fowl Mite
- Red Mite
- Scaly Leg Mite

Can look like dirt on feathers

2. Behavior

- Northern mites live and feed on birds
- Red mites hide in cracks and feed at night
- Scaly leg mites burrow in legs, causing crusty buildup.

3. Life Cycle

- Mites mature in 5–7 days and reproduce quickly
- Can survive in bedding and cracks for a month
- Hard to treat once established

4. Signs

- Tiny dark specks moving on skin or feathers, often near the vent
- Pale combs, worn feathers, or blood specks on eggs
- Crusty legs or thickened scales (leg mite)

Prevention

1. Keep Coop Clean and Dry

- Change bedding often and clean coops regularly.
- Seal cracks, paint wood, and clean nest boxes.
- Provide dust boxes with sand and insecticidal dust (e.g., diatomaceous earth).

2. Inspect Coop Weekly

- Wrap tape (sticky side out) around roost bars overnight; check for mites stuck to the tape.
- Shine a light into cracks near roosts and nest boxes, look for tiny moving specks at night.

3. Check Birds Often

- Isolate new or returning birds. Inspect and treat before adding them to your flock.
- Check under wings, vent, and neck for signs.

When Birds Get Sick

1. Deep Clean the Coop

- Remove bedding and apply insecticide to walls, nest boxes, and equipment.
- Treat all birds and the coop at the same time.

2. Apply Treatment

- Use poultry-safe dust or spray on birds and coop surfaces. Follow the label.
- Most products kill live bugs but not lice eggs.
- For leg mites, isolate bird and apply petroleum jelly daily for two weeks to suffocate mites.

3. Repeat

- Re-treat birds and coop every few weeks.
- Lice and mites may develop resistance to treatments, follow product instructions.

Find out more at
www.healthybirds.info