

Backyard Chicken Behavior



RICHARD BLATCHFORD, PHD

UCCE ASSISTANT POULTRY SPECIALIST

CENTER FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

DEPT. ANIMAL SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

RABLATCHFORD@UCDAVIS.EDU

Why is Behavior Important?

- Promote Positive Interactions
- Decrease Negative Behavior
- Properly Manage Nuisance Behavior
- Increase Overall Experience of Owners



Brief Example



A Little History...



- Chickens domesticated in Asia ~10,000 years ago
- Despite many years of selection, behavior of modern chickens remains almost identical to wild ancestors



Positive Behavior



Foraging



Perching



Dust-bathing



Nesting



Negative and Nuisance Behaviors



Aggression



- Social Formation
- History



Social Formation

- One bird dominant, one bird subdominant, chained together becomes a dominance hierarchy
- Usually get a peck to the back of the head, hence the term “pecking order”



History: Roman Empire and its Decline

- Developed ag breeds
- Sacrificial/ Augurs
 - Publius Claudius Pulcher
- Fighting



Decline of Roman Empire



Aggression



- Is all aggression bad?
- When is aggression bad?
- When do you intervene?
- Can it be reduced?

Reducing Aggression



Feather Loss: Are These Signs of Aggression?



Feather Loss

- No, could be accidental



- Yes, feather picking

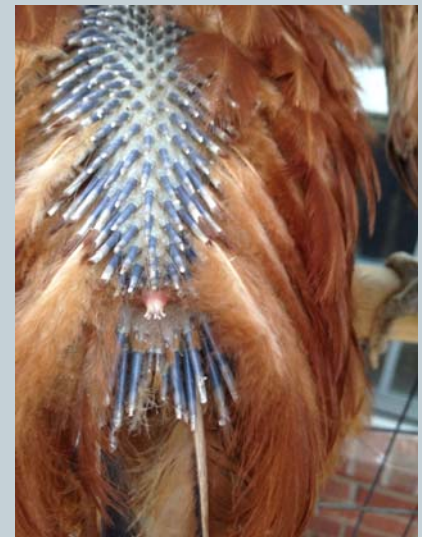


Other Causes of Feather Loss

- Cage abrasion/wear



- Molting



Egg Eating



- A Learned Behavior
- Prevention is Key!
- Identify the Culprit
- Other Causes



Conclusions and Questions

- **Increase Positive Behavior**
 - Foraging, dust-bathing, perching
- **Decrease Negative Behavior**
 - Aggression, Feather Picking
- **Know Your Chickens for a Super Experience**

