



Poultry Extension Collaborative newsletter

A collaboration between Purdue University, University of Maryland,
University of Georgia, and Virginia Tech



Photo credit: Leonie Jacobs

Free-range poultry predators

This newsletter provides an overview of potential flock predators, how to identify the predator, and approaches to avoid predation in your free-range poultry flock.

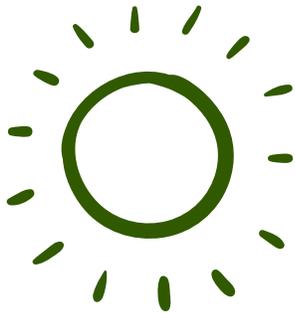
Predation is a common risk for poultry that are allowed to roam freely outdoors. Predator types may differ depending on the region. Therefore, this newsletter may not cover all possible predators for a specific geographical region.

Extension
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industry

Flock predator
identification
and prevention

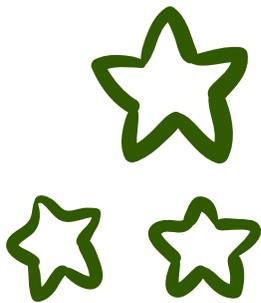
Predator risks depend on the time of day

Predator risk depends on the time of day. Predators can be nocturnal (active during the night), diurnal (active during the day), crepuscular (active mostly during twilight), or cathemeral (active during hours of daylight and darkness). The majority of mammalian predators are nocturnal.



Diurnal predators

- Cats (when birds are small)
- Dogs
- Birds of prey
- Snakes (eggs or when birds are small)



Nocturnal predators

- Rats
- Weasels and mink
- Racoons
- Bobcats
- Skunks
- Coyotes
- Opossums
- Bears
- Foxes
- Owls

Both owned and feral cats and dogs may predate on birds or eggs in the flock. Most predation will occur at night, in part because of the lack of people keeping the predator at bay.



Raccoon. Photo: Pixabay



Coyote. Photo: Pixabay



Skunk. Photo: Pixabay



Determining the predator based on evidence at the 'crime scene'

If predation occurs in the flock, it is sometimes possible to determine which predator attacked the flock. Predators can leave behind tell-tale signs that will be helpful in preventing future attacks.

Evidence	Likely predator(s)
Missing adult birds	Coyotes, bobcats, dogs, birds of prey, foxes
Missing birds, but lots of feathers are left behind	Coyotes, foxes, hawks
Missing eggs or chicks	Coyotes, foxes, birds of prey, opossums, skunks, rats, cats, snakes
Missing heads	Birds of prey, racoons
Missing limbs	Racoons
Lacerations near cloaca	Weasels (and relatives), opossums, other chickens (cloacal pecking)
Dead injured birds	Weasels (and relatives), dogs
Dead intact birds	No predation, but possibly due to piling (birds climbing on top of each other and suffocating birds below)



*Snake predating on eggs underneath a broody hen.
Photo credit: Stephen Norris*

TIP!

A wildlife camera could be just the tool to identify potential predators near your flock. These can be set to take a picture or video when motion is detected.

Prevention of predation

There are some options to prevent predation. Knowing what predator is roaming around your flock will help with choosing the best method of prevention. A digging predator will require a different approach than a flying predator. Improving flock housing and surrounding fences will be key to prevent predation. A forest-like area for the chickens will reduce chances of birds of prey attacking the flock, as these predators prefer open fields.

Tips for prevention

- Keep birds inside (during certain times of the day)
- Keep birds constrained to a specific area using a fence or enclosed run with overhead cover
 - Bury the wire (1-2 ft)
 - Include a skirt on the outside to prevent (successful) digging
 - Low voltage electric fencing
- Provide overhead cover for poultry on the range
 - Natural shelter like trees, shrubs, and other vegetation to hide in/under
 - Artificial shelters to avoid and hide from predators
- Owl/coyote decoys may work, but not for the long-term
- Remove debris for predators to hide/nest in near the coop
- Lock up/remove attractants such as feed, waste, and eggs
- Use a guard animal such as an alpaca, guard dog, donkey or even geese



Example of a fence skirt to prevent digging



Geese could help guard your chicken flock. Photo credit: Leonie Jacobs

Summary: predators and prevention

Poultry flocks that are allowed to range outside are at risk of being preyed upon by domestic and wild animals. Preventative measures can be taken to limit this risk. If predation does occur, there are clues to find out which predator has attacked to prevent future attacks.

Sources and additional resources

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