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Introduction

The red mite or roost mite (*Dermanyssus gallinae*) typically infests chickens but can occur in turkeys or breeders. They are visible to the naked eye and after feeding on the chicken's blood assume a red colour – hence their name.

This mite has been implicated in the spread of fowl cholera (pasteurellosis) and can be carried from house to house or site to site by wild birds or rodents. It can survive off the host bird for approximately four weeks and can infest poultry workers, often giving them itchy arms.

Behaviour

Red mite spend periods of time on and off the host. Typically, red mites move on to the birds at night to feed having come from cracks, holes and other hiding places in the poultry house.

One way of confirming infestation is to take birds at night and back comb them over a white sheet. Mites fall on to the white sheet where they can be easily seen.

Life cycle

Egg > larva > protonymph > deutonymph > adult.

Within 24 hours of her first blood meal the adult female fertilised mite lays three to seven eggs in a crack or under debris in the poultry house and these hatch within two or three days to produce protonymphs. These feed on blood and moult within two days to produce deutonymphs. These do not feed but moult within two days to produce adults. Thus, the whole life cycle is just a week.

If feed is not immediately available, nymphs and adults can survive/wait for four or five weeks for a meal.

Control

Historically, control relied on the use of chemicals, many of which are no longer available in some countries. Success was difficult because of the fact that mites and the various stages of their development could be on the birds or within the poultry house environment.

Nowadays, integrated control programmes are used which utilise combinations of control strategies including the use of chemicals.