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Introduction

The northern fowl mite is scientifically known as *Ornithonyssus sylviarum* and is the most important of the mites in commercial poultry and pheasants. The northern fowl mite feeds on blood causing anaemia itching and drops in egg production (typically 10-15%).

Heavy infestations can take 5-7% of a bird's blood a day, depress weight gain and in breeder males depress semen production. This mite also affects workers, typically causing an itch or rash on their arms.

Infestation

Infestation typically starts at the vent on the female and then moves to the tail, back and legs. Mites are more randomly scattered on male birds. A typical sign of northern fowl mite infestation is scabs on the vent. When the hen lays an egg these can open up and deposit pinprick spots of blood on the eggshell.

The northern fowl mite flourishes in cooler climates and becomes well established on birds after they have reached sexual maturity.

Life cycle

Egg >>> Larva >>> Nymph 1 >>> Nymph 2 >>> Adult

This cycle can be completed on the bird in less than a week.

Mites can survive off the host for several weeks and can be spread by rodents and wild birds.

Control

Control depends on keeping the poultry (layer) operation free from mite infestation and promptly applying acaricide when infestation is encountered.

Mites can be introduced via people, equipment, rodents and wild birds. Control should include close inspection of the vent region.

Treatment is most effective when applied to the vent, which is not a very practical proposition on a large layer unit. It can be done by directing a spray upwards from underneath the cages, but not every bird will present its vent at the right moment!

Mite populations are generally at their highest in the cooler months and decline over the summer.

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