

Making Everything Easier!™

Chicken Health

FOR
DUMMIES®

Learn to:

- Keep your chickens in peak condition
- Diagnose and treat ailing chickens
- Grasp common and uncommon diseases and injuries and their cures

**Julie Gauthier, DVM,
MPH, Dipl. ACVPM
Rob Ludlow**

Owner of BackYardChickens.com



***Chicken
Health***
FOR
DUMMIES®

**by Julie Gauthier, DVM, MPH, Dipl. ACVPM,
and Rob Ludlow**



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Chicken Health For Dummies®

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
111 River St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774
www.wiley.com

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2012954765

ISBN 978-1-118-44427-6 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-118-46096-2 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-118-46097-9 (ebk); 978-1-118-46098-6 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



About the Authors

Julie Gauthier graduated from veterinary school at Michigan State University in 1993, earned a master's degree in public health from Yale University in 2002, and became board certified in veterinary preventive medicine in 2009. Julie practiced large and small animal medicine for nine years in three different states; during that time, her favorite patients were chickens. Joining the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in 2002 gave Julie the opportunity to see all kinds of flocks, great and small, all over the world, in her work as a veterinary epidemiologist (an animal disease detective). On her small farm in North Carolina, Julie raises heritage breed chickens, ducks, and turkeys for exhibition, good food, and conservation of these vanishing breeds.

Rob Ludlow owns and manages www.BackYardChickens.com (BYC), the largest and fastest growing community of chicken enthusiasts in the world. Rob is also the co-author of the books *Raising Chickens For Dummies* and *Building Chicken Coops For Dummies* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

Rob, his wife Emily, and their two beautiful daughters, Alana and April, are the perfect example of the suburban family with a small flock of backyard chickens. Like countless others, what started out as a fun hobby raising a few egg-laying machines has almost turned into an addiction.

Dedication

From Julie: To my family, Kenna, Garret, and Mark, who picked up the slack on the poultry chores.

From Rob: To the many wonderful chickens that have been part of our flock-family over the years including Goldie, Blackie, Blackie-Whitey, Whitey, Reddy, Cleo, Lilly, Sparkles, and especially Ginger!

Authors' Acknowledgments

From Julie: I want to send out a crow of thanks to my brother, Dr. Dave Gauthier, for photographing deconstructed feathered creatures (rather than his usual finned subjects) on one hot summer day. To my flock mates I.K., S.K., M.M., S.L, W.C., and J.L.: I'll express my thanks for your encouragement, support, and enthusiasm by saving the biggest, juiciest worms for you. Thanks also to Ms. Elizabeth Clark and Dr. Tahseen Aziz for contributing excellent photographs, and being just as intrigued as I am by cyanotic combs and torticollis. I sincerely appreciate the professionalism, skill, and good nature shown to me by staff of Wiley, especially Alissa Schwipps, Erin Calligan Mooney, Chad Sievers, David Hobson, and the Wiley Composition team. Our intrepid and patient illustrators Kathryn Born and Barbara Frake deserve an appreciative cackle, too. Best regards to my friends of the Delaware Poultry Club, the Triangle Area Gardeners and Homesteaders, and the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy; thanks for giving me my start as a flock keeper self-help coach.

From Rob: A ton of appreciation and love to the countless members of BackYardChickens.com, and especially the BYC moderators who have collectively (and patiently) educated me over the years. Thanks to the team at Wiley for all their amazing work, patience, expertise, and diligence, especially that from Erin Calligan Mooney, Alissa Schwipps, and David Hobson.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments at <http://dummies.custhelp.com>. For other comments, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002.

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Acquisitions, Editorial, and Vertical Websites

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Composition Services

Project Coordinator: Sheree Montgomery

Layout and Graphics: Jennifer Creasey, Brent Savage

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Illustrators: Kathryn Born, Barbara Frake

Publishing and Editorial for Consumer Dummies

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Introduction

Welcome to *Chicken Health For Dummies*. If you want to know practical ways to keep a small flock healthy, or know what to do when a backyard chicken is ill or injured, this book is for you.

At this point in your chicken-keeping career, more than likely, you're already (or you're about to become) thoroughly hooked on the freshest of eggs, you're perpetually surprised by the voracious curiosity of your foraging flock, and you're up-to-date with the soap opera of the hen house. Along with the joys of raising chickens, though, you (or one of your flock-keeping friends) probably have experienced at least one disappointment: a devastating predator attack, a droopy chick, or the horrifying discovery that the gorgeous hen you picked up at the swap meet is crawling with lice.

We've been there, and dealt with that, and we want to share our experiences — joyful and dismaying — to help you fly through the challenges of caring for your flock. In these pages, we have something for everyone, from wanna-be flock keepers to old hands, and from high-rise rooftop farmers to people at home on the range.

About This Book

We want *Chicken Health For Dummies* to be your second book about caring for chickens. Your first chicken raising how-to manual, *Raising Chickens For Dummies* by Kimberly Willis and Rob Ludlow (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), can help you begin with these feathered friends by giving you plans for hen starter homes and dropping hints about critical basic points on flock keeping, such

as, “hens don’t need a rooster to lay eggs.” That book touches on chicken health problems, but *Chicken Health For Dummies* can take you to the next level — what you *need* to know as a small flock keeper about keeping chickens healthy and treating illnesses and injuries. We wrote this book so that you can have an easy-to-use reference for poultry preventive care and chicken repair.

We’re confident that every procedure we guide you through is doable and practical in a backyard setting — because we’ve used the procedures ourselves to manage our own backyard flocks.

Another great part about this book is that you decide where to start and what to read. It’s a reference you can jump into and out of at will. Just head to the table of contents or index to find the information you want.

Conventions Used in This Book

We use the following conventions throughout the text to make things consistent and easy to understand:

- ✓ All web addresses appear in monofont.
- ✓ New terms appear in *italics* and are closely followed by an easy-to-understand definition.
- ✓ **Bold** is used to highlight the action parts of numbered steps and emphasize keywords.

Traditionally, books about animal health refer to livestock in a gender-neutral way, but we feel coldhearted calling a hard-working, personable hen or rooster “it.” The majority of backyard chickens are female, in part because rowdy roosters are unwelcome in many suburban and urban communities, so we bow to

majority rule and refer to any chicken with the pronouns *she*, *her*, and *hers* (except when we are specifically talking about male chickens, in which case, *he*, *him*, and *his* apply). We also use the word *who*, not *that*, to refer to our poultry companions. *It* and *its* are reserved for chicks or birds of unknown gender and inanimate objects.

What You're Not to Read

Although we're attached to every word on these pages, and we hope you feel the same way, we understand if you don't read the book cover to cover, and want to skip around instead. That's why we've set some text off from the main information, stuff that will fascinate poultry science nerds and start some unusual conversations at parties, but it's not crucial for most small flock keepers to know. You can live without reading these items, but they're interesting, so come back to them when you get a moment. These items are:

- ✓ **Text in sidebars:** Sidebars are shaded boxes that discuss poultry science topics in more depth or give information that's important to a small segment of flock keepers, such as organic producers.
- ✓ **Anything with a Technical Stuff icon:** If the information in these tidbits applies to your exceptional situation, you'll be really glad we answered your pressing, but not-so-common technical question.

Foolish Assumptions

We love to talk chicken: broilers, gamefowl, bantams, wild junglefowl, and fowl of all purposes and all sizes — they're universally interesting to us. Going off on a

tangent would be easy for us (What's your favorite "Why did the chicken cross the road" joke?), so to keep us focused on what you, a backyard flock keeper, want to know about chicken health, we need to understand your goals and concerns. We figure that your goals and concerns are similar to ours, because we're backyard flock keepers, too. Based on that connection, here's what we assume about you:

- ✓ Although you have some basic knowledge of chickens, you aren't a poultry expert.
- ✓ You take care of chickens (or plan to) and you want to find out more about keeping them healthy.
- ✓ You like animals and believe that taking good care of them involves understanding their needs and treating them with kindness.
- ✓ You keep (or are planning to keep) a small home flock. You don't intend to raise chickens on a commercial scale of 1,000 or more laying hens or broilers.
- ✓ You have some very basic first aid, gardening, carpentry, or crafts skills (or a friend who has these skills) and a desire to use them.
- ✓ You're not afraid to handle chickens or get your hands dirty.

Some things we *won't* assume about you are the reasons you keep chickens or your specific flock keeping philosophy. We think chickens are great, for many reasons — they're great for pets, eggs, meat, competition, a small family business, garden decorations, and more. In this book, we try to include a wide range of perspectives of small flock keeping. We're sure you can find tips and information in these pages that can suit your style of flock keeping, whatever that may be.

Just as you're certain to find advice in these pages that suits your particular style, you're bound to come across some uncomfortable notions, too. Is a diapered apartment chicken not your kind of pet? Skip that point and move on to the next. Does the thought of eating a chicken disturb you? Forgive us, please; the references to the nutritional qualities of chicken eggs or meat aren't aimed at you, but someone else who values that information.

How This Book Is Organized

Chicken Health For Dummies is organized into seven parts. We provide a nugget of an explanation for each part's topic here.

Part I: The Healthy Chicken

In order to spot a sick chicken, you need to know how a normal one looks and behaves. In [Chapter 2](#), we provide a primer on chicken anatomy and body functions, so you can recognize a healthy chicken, inside and out. [Chapter 3](#) gives a view of fowl society, behavior, and communication. Chapters [4](#), [5](#), and [6](#) focus on maintaining a healthy flock by keeping chickens clean, comfortable, and well-fed.

Part II: Recognizing Signs of Chicken Illness

How do you know a chicken is sick? In this part, we help you distinguish normal from abnormal chicken body functions and behavior, narrow down the possibilities to get you closer to a diagnosis, and provide advice about common concerns of flock keepers. We cover the most

common ailments of adult chickens in [Chapter 8](#) and health problems of chicks in [Chapter 9](#). [Chapter 10](#) tackles the extremes of chicken disease: mild, hard-to-put-your-finger-on-it illnesses on one end of the spectrum, and mysterious sudden death on the other.

Part III: A Close-Up Examination of Chicken Woes and Diseases

In this part, we discuss the major chicken diseases, briefing you on the cause, the signs and means of spread, prevention tips, and treatment advice. The chapters in this part are very helpful if you need to zoom in to a particular chicken disease that you've heard about. Wonder why you should buy chicks from a pullorum-clean flock? [Chapter 12](#) is the place to look. Worried about worms? Check out [Chapter 13](#).

Part IV: Your Chicken Repair Manual (and Advice for When to Close the Book)

We get down to the dirty work in this part. Here we help you make a diagnosis for a flock problem, whether you have the help of a chicken health advisor, or you're on your own. We show you how to do basic procedures, such as giving an injection or trimming a wing. Finally, we provide advice on closing the repair manual and killing a sick or injured chicken humanely.

Part V: The Chicken/Human Interface

The chicken/human interface is the time and place where chicken health and human health collide. These accidents can happen, but they're not common and they're rarely serious. What's good for you is often good