

PARASITES - FLUFF LOUSE (or "Why You Should Add A Magnifying Glass To Your Poultry Kit"):

.
"Goniocotes gallinae, the fluff louse, is one of the smallest lice of poultry, only 0.8 to 1.5 mm long. It is found all over the birds' body, (but less densely on the head and the wings), on the fluff or base of the feathers. It also feeds mainly on feather debris."

A couple years ago, Shawna and I retrieved a trio of Giants that we had previously sold to someone who was no longer able to keep them. We found them in poor facilities and learned they had been fed an equally poor diet. Their overall condition was...you guessed it....."poor". This had apparently been going on for quite some time and although they were immediately put on a high nutrient diet, one of the hens died shortly after getting her home.

.
One of the symptoms was extremely poor feather quality, which wasn't at all surprising considering the diet they'd been on. The feathers were so thin, you could read a newspaper through them. There were no common feather lice, nit sacks, or mites on them. After a stint in isolation, the remaining hen was transitioned into a pen with other hens and within a month, I realized the other hens were showing similar signs of thin feathers in their fluff. Turns out the new hen had introduced a case of fluff lice, so tiny that you need strong reading glasses, or a magnifying glass or you can't see them. At one time, they had been uncommon in North America. But because of the amount of poultry trading and trafficking, had apparently been spreading. (ie the guy we had retrieved them from did a lot of chicken trading with exhibition poultry folks across the U.S.) They are almost impossible to see and by the time the damage is evident, the bird is usually in pre-molt so the old feathers, which are usually starting to get ruddy, are ignored.

.
That first year, about half of the birds I helped table top (various breeds) had fluff lice and everyone I pointed them out to was in disbelief and then really surprised. We even walked past sale cages at a couple shows and found quite few birds with the same feather quality issues. One person pulled birds out from 3 different cages and all turned out to have fluff lice.

.
For all the posting we see about parasites on chickens, it's usually about northern fowl mites or the larger, more common (and easy to see) feather lice, all of which move pretty quickly and are big enough so they're easy to spot. I couldn't find any photos on the internet that showed them as well as the ones we took and are sharing with you here. We magnified a few of the pix so that you could get a closer look. It may work better if you download them and magnify them on your computer screen. When you check your own birds, you are looking for wispy fluff feathers, that are almost translucent. If you look more closely, you will see what looks like very, very tiny little specks of dandruff.....if you look very closely. If your bird has an infestation, you'll be able to see the little specks moving around with a magnifying glass or reading glasses.

.
They do not feed on the bird itself (they feed on the feathers & feather debris), so ivermectin and Frontline plus won't impact them. You'll need to use dust like Seven Dust or Poultry Dust that contains carbaryl. In addition to treating all of the birds in the facility of the infected birds, you'll need to completely clean out the bedding, treat the bare floor & sidewalls, then put fresh bedding inside. I use 50/50 pine/cedar in the sleeping area, and cedar in the runs where they take dust baths. DE doesn't work. Put the spent shavings from the infested areas in garbage bags and throw them away, don't use for compost. Change out of the clothes immediately, putting them in a garbage bag and then straight into the washing machine. Use surgical gloves and, of course, do not handle any other birds until you've changed.

