

SOCIAL BEHAVIOR AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Although man has studied animal behavior and utilized his knowledge to exploit animals since he first started hunting them for food in prehistoric times. Poultry producers and housing and equipment designers need to be aware of the behavior and characteristics of bird to produce more meat and eggs with concern for the welfare and well-being of the birds.

Because poultry are social animals, they live in flocks or groups. To live with one another and offer mutual protection, those communicate by housing voice, actions, and displays of plumage. Considerable research has been conducted to interpret avian behavior and the factors that motivate birds to react to the voices, actions, and displays of other members of the species.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

All groups of birds tend to develop a social order. Even people with little knowledge of chickens are aware of the order of rank and dominance in chickens commonly referred to as the “peck order”. A Norwegian Scientist was one of the pioneers in studying the social organizations of animals that live in groups. He observed that peck orders in chickens tend to become increasingly complex as group size increases. When both sexes are present, there are actually two peck orders, one for males and one for females. Peck orders for the two sexes are separate and unequal.

In the complex peck order (Fig. 6.1), the dominant hen (A) can peck all others but none dares peck her. The number two hen (B) but could peck (D), (E), (F), etc. The hen at the bottom right was pecked by all other hens but could not fight back.

Peck orders are useful in reducing conflicts in a group. Peck order appears to be related to an individual’s need for some space of his or her own. This space for chickens is primarily in front of the face. For example, cocks are prepared for fighting by face to face with other cocks to draw antagonistic behavior.

Scientist has classified bird behavior into actions created by the general stimuli:

1. Limited resources (aggression, competition, searching)
2. Food
3. Physiological needs(food, rest, warmth)

4. Parent- offspring relationship
5. Sexual relationship
6. Self-care needs (groom, comfort, movements)
7. Novel objects and environments
- 8. Strange birds**

BEHAVIOR OF FERAL CHICKENS

The behavior of feral chicken influence by several factors including sex, partner, breeding, number of male female, climate and season, environment, other animal and birds, hunter, disease, range area, plant and trees, availability of natural food etc. Changes in domestic behavior are observed when territory is limited to a small yard, as compared with a large territory. The domestic hen seems to be more dominating at the center of her home range.

COMMUNICATION

Communication and reactions generally expresses by chicken is a signal to understand other members of the group. Generally chicken show or produce sound to communicate within them. It can be said audio-visual. Cock crow, hen cackle, posturing of various movement of wing, carriage, head and tail. Sound is produced to attract partner, to call chicks, to aware from enemy, to hide, to attack or to alert. Sometimes they produce sound to locate them.

The crow was used by each male to identify himself to other males. Crowing would start 2 hr before sunrise and become almost continuous just before dawn. Mating calls are given in early morning and mating with each hen occurred as she descended from the roost. The crow was used by males in a verity of situations. Feral male chicken crows and patrol their territories to save eggs, chicks and female. “All clear” crows were sounded by males after danger had passed. A group assembly call used to gather the group together while a roosting call was given by the dominant male after he had taken his roosting location for the night.

The chicken shows various signal by wings. The male shows a circular movement by spreading its wing around the hen just before jumping over female during mating.

The female chicken produce several sound to communicate with cock and chocks. A distress squawk is given by female when sudden attack by another bird. The hen squawks more often, prior to laying and after laying.

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Feral chicken enjoys all freedom including breeding, feeding, roosting and defensive mechanism. Just after domestication their right and freedom decreased. But now at intensive farming their right and freedom are very limited. Modern agriculture is able to produce more animal protein at low cost in high-density house. More over artificial selection; AI in breeding; use of growth promoter, enzyme, steroid, antibiotics in ration; control and forced feeding etc are unethical practices. Now a group of animal activist in developed countries raises their voice for animal right. To produce safe organic food they want to back in scavenging production even at high cost.

ANIMAL WELFARISTS

Animal welfarists believe that animal should be treated humanely. The problem lies in the perception of what is humane. Humane treatment varies from concern about absence of gross cruelty (beating, starvation, mutilation) to concern about psychological deprivation of individual animals (lack of social contact, play activity, exposure to a natural environment). This group, in most cases, accepts the use of animals in agriculture, but may criticize particular production practices, for example, caging layers. Communication with animal welfarists by agricultural groups should be encouraged because it is an educational process for all people involved. On the one hand, members of the agricultural community must relax that some practices are objectionable and welfarists on the other hand need to increase their knowledge of modern agriculture, its benefits, and the price to be paid for change. Then the initiation of guidelines for “humane” production stands of agriculture will be success.

ANIMAL LIBERATIONISTS

Animal liberationists desire the overnight abolition of any exploitation of animals in any form including zoos, confinement agriculture, and research laboratories. A few members

of these groups are the potentially violent members of the humane movement, unwilling to wait or work for peaceful change. Propaganda is a standard technique utilized by this small and restless group.

NEED FOR A CODE OF ETHICS

To establish codes of ethics, one must first accept certain basic fact. Biologically, man is omnivorous and at the top of the food chain. He has always been a predator who gathered and ate plants and harvested animals and animal products for his own survival and well-being. This practice of systematically exploiting plants and animals for his own benefits is now called agriculture.

In the area of animal welfare, there is some general agreement on the extreme limits of acceptable and unacceptable humane practices; for example, unnecessary suffering and cruelty are not condoned. Unfortunately, some current animal husbandry practices are considered to be in a gray area.

A few examples of poultry husbandry practices that are unethical and have been questioned include the following:

1. Disposal of hatchery wastes including live and still hatching baby chicks.
2. Caging growing pullets or laying hens
3. Some practices used in catching and transporting broilers
4. Slaughter producers
5. Depriving birds of food and water to bring about forced molting
6. Lack of sufficient space for birds grown on the floor
7. Beak trimming, dubbing, dewinging, detoeing, and other hatchery initiated management practices

As a result of the many questions raised by debate on this subject, considerable research is being initiated to measure animals' physical and mental discomfort under varied conditions. Several indicators of poultry welfare have been investigated and the field of investigating continues to be an active one. Eventually the issue must be resolved by all segments of society by developing codes of ethics. Hopefully, such decisions will be based on facts and not on emotions.

The humane animal movement is growing and more legislation involving animal production practices' will result in the near future. For this reasons, the humane animal movement cannot be ignored. Poultry men will have to take animal welfare into consideration in planning future operations such more than they have in the past.