UC Integrated Pest Management
University of California
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Home & Garden Pest Newsletter

In this issue:

Pests of Backyard Chickens p.1

Revised *Pest Notes* p. 3

Nuisance Flies p.4

Invasive Pest Spotlight p.6

Volume 6, Issue 2
Summer 2026

Editors: Karey Windbiel-Rojas, Belinda Messenger-Sikes

Reviewed by the UC IPM Urban Team

E-mail: ucipm-community@ucanr.edu

Online: ipm.ucanr.edu

Subscribe to this newsletter at https://bit.ly/3G3n8WG or use the QR Code:

Produced by the Urban and Community IPM Team of the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program, with partial funding from the USDA NIFA CPPM Extension Implementation Program.

Pests of Backyard Chickens

Backyard chickens are increasingly being raised as pets, for egg production, and for youth development and science projects. While raising chickens can be an interesting and economically beneficial activity, chickens and other fowl may also have pest problems. Chickens are natural hosts to a variety of arthropod pests (called ectoparasites), including mites, lice, and fleas which feed on chickens and use chicken coops as habitats. These pests may cause discomfort to birds and decrease their egg production. This article aims to help people who keep chickens understand and learn treatment options for the common ectoparasites that can affect their animals.

A Murillo, UCR

Figure 1. Adults and eggs of chicken body lice, shown in the circle.

Lice

The most common pests found on backyard chickens include several species of lice (singularly called a louse), including the chicken body louse and fluff louse. Lice live full-time on chickens and feed primarily on feather material. Lice are generally chicken specific but may infest related poultry species (such as turkeys or pheasants). Adult and immature lice are pale yellow in color, and eggs are found in white clusters, usually at the base of feathers. Lice may be found on any or all parts of the chicken, depending on the louse species (Figure 1). Lice can irritate birds, causing increased preening and decreased egg production.

A Murillo, UCR

Figure 2. Northern fowl mites feeding on a chicken, indicated by the black arrow.

Connect with us!
@ucipmurban
@ucipm

continued on page 2

Pests of Backyard Chickens *continued from p. 1*

Mites

There are two main species of mite found in backyard chicken flocks: the northern fowl mite (NFM; *Ornithonyssus sylviarum*) and poultry red mite (PRM; *Dermanyssus gallinae*). Both mite species feed on blood. NFM live on chickens in the fluffy feathers of the vent region (Figure 2). PRM live off the animal in cracks and crevices near the birds, such as on perches, in nestboxes, or in coops (Figure 3). Mites can bite people but cannot survive or reproduce on human blood and will not infest human bodies. Learn more about biting mites in homes and other structures.

Scaly leg mites (*Knemidocoptes mutans*) may also affect chickens. These mites are microscopic, and identification must be confirmed by an expert. However, the signs of a scaly leg mite infestation are obvious and include scabby or crusty legs or feet (Figure 4). Scaly leg mites spread by direct contact between animals, so quarantining infested birds can limit infestations within a flock.

Fleas

The sticktight flea (*Echidnophaga gallinacea*) can also be found on backyard chickens. This flea is not bird specific and is often introduced to flocks by rodents, cats, or other mammals. Adult fleas embed themselves in the skin of chickens while they feed on their blood (Figure 5). Females drop eggs without detaching, and immature fleas develop in the environment, feeding on detritus and adult flea feces. It can take a month or longer for fleas to complete development to the adult stage, resulting in newly emerging adults even after treatment of birds.

Management

Lice, mites, and fleas also parasitize wild birds and rodents and could be introduced to flocks by wild animals or even by contaminated equipment or people. To reduce pests in backyard flocks, focus on good biosecurity, which includes all practices that help to prevent or reduce disease in your flock. New chickens should be quarantined for at least two weeks to avoid introducing parasites (or other diseases) to the flock, washing hands and boots should occur before visiting the flock, and chickens should be separated from other animals. Birds should also be examined for signs of pests regularly to catch infestations early, which are easier to deal with than a large outbreak.

A Murillo, UCR

Figure 3. Poultry red mites on a perch in a chicken coop.

A Murillo, UCR

Figure 4. A chicken infested with scaly leg mite, shown within the circle.

Insects and mites are very susceptible to water loss, so using natural materials that cause desiccation can be highly effective for general control. One such compound is diatomaceous earth (DE). Food-grade DE can be mixed with clean play sand in containers to create dustbathing areas for birds.

continued on page 3

Pests of Backyard Chickens *continued from p. 2*

A Murillo, UCR

Figure 5. Sticktight fleas on the face of a chicken, indicated by black arrows.

Dustbathing is a natural behavior chickens perform to keep their feathers clean. The addition of DE helps to suppress pest populations.

Insecticides can be an effective tool for pest control. Farm stores often sell sprays or dusts that can be applied directly to birds or to coops for insect control. It is important to always read and follow the label instructions to avoid poisoning birds, people, or other animals. Pests that live in the environment, such as poultry red mites and sticktight fleas, are trickier to control since they may not be visible on chickens.

—Amy C. Murillo,
Department of Entomology,
UC Riverside,
amy.murillo@ucr.edu

References

Murillo AC, Mullens BA. 2016. Diversity and prevalence of ectoparasites on backyard chicken flocks in California. Journal of Medical Entomology. 53: 707-711.

Veterinary Entomology website: pest resources for professionals and the public

For more backyard poultry resources, check out:

Backyard Poultry, a UC ANR website

Video recording of the UC Community IPM webinar *Pests of Backyard Chickens*

Revised *Pest Notes*

Understanding Pesticides

Pesticides are helpful tools but must be used carefully to avoid injuring people or the environment. Deciding if you need a pesticide, what pesticide to use, and how to use it safely can be complicated.

Home gardeners can find this information in the newly revised *Pest Notes: Understanding Pesticides*, by UC Cooperative Extension advisors Cheryl Wilen, Darren Haver, and Karey Windbiel-Rojas.

Yellow Starthistle

This highly flammable and prickly noxious weed outcompetes other plants by growing in dense stands.

Pest Notes: Yellow Starthistle has been updated by UCCE advisor Scott Oneto and UC Davis emeritus plant scientist Joe DiTomaso with more about its impact and how to manage it with biological control agents and herbicides.

Visit UC IPM's Pest Notes web page ipm.ucanr.edu/home-and-landscape/pest-notes-library/ for these and many more titles

Nuisance Flies in the Home

In California, flies are often a nuisance during summer and fall. Several species of flies commonly enter homes, and while most are merely nuisance pests, others can transmit diseases. These nuisance flies vary in their habitat preference and breeding cycle. In this article, we discuss a few common flies you might find around the home, in the kitchen, bathroom, and even around houseplants.

Some common nuisance flies and their habitats

Filth-breeding flies like house flies and blow flies develop in compost, animal waste, dead animals, and garbage. These flies are commonly contaminated with bacteria, including those associated with food poisoning and can spread disease when landing on food.

Fruit flies, also called vinegar flies, lay their eggs in overripe, rotting fruit. As adults, these small flies are commonly seen flying around open areas where ripe fruit is stored.

Drain flies, also called moth flies and sewer flies, live in sink and sewer drains in their larval stage. The adult female flies lay eggs on the slimy organic matter that builds up inside drains where the larvae then feed.

Fungus gnats develop in soil as larvae. They can be found indoors breeding in potting media used for houseplants or hovering near windows.

Fly life cycles

The life cycle of flies is similar, but their breeding times and food preferences vary by species. In general, after breeding, female flies lay eggs which hatch into larvae (maggots) that feed on their preferred food sources. Once mature, the larvae migrate in search of a place to pupate (the resting stage where the larva is transformed into an adult insect). Adults emerge from the pupae to breed and feed. The entire life cycle is often completed in 7 to 14 days but depends on fly species and environmental conditions.

Managing flies

The best way to manage flies and prevent future infestations is to focus on exclusion, sanitation practices, and habitat modification that removes fly breeding sites and attractive conditions.

- Remove or cover garbage and clean up spilled animal feed, manure, and pet waste.
- Remove and dispose of overripe fruit that is attracting fruit flies. Wash the area with soapy water.
- Drain flies can be managed by removing the organic matter in drains with a hard bristle brush.

Alexey Goral, Wikimedia

LL Strand, UC IPM

J Berger, Bugwood.org

Jack Kelly Clark, UC IPM

Common nuisance flies, from top to bottom: house fly, fruit fly, drain fly, and fungus gnat.

continued on page 5

Nuisance Flies *continued from p.4*

- Fungus gnats thrive in overly moist potting soil. Let the soil surface of potted plants dry out between waterings or water plants from the bottom using saucers.
- Indoor fly problems can be managed by keeping them out with screening and other exclusion techniques. Caulk, screen, or cover all small openings into a home to prevent flies from entering.

Traps

Several types of traps for flies are also available and can supplement other control methods. Fly paper and electrocution light traps can kill flies but are effective only in areas where exclusion and sanitation efforts have already reduced the fly populations to low numbers. Single flies can be easily killed with a flyswatter.

Various food-based traps are also available. These traps often contain a protein or sugar-based bait, sometimes with the addition of a fly pheromone (sex attractant). As with other traps, they should be used along with sanitation and exclusion. These traps are effective for species that breed on dead animals and garbage, such as blow flies and house flies and should be placed near the highest concentration of flies.

Pesticides

Pesticides are also available for fly control but are usually only a temporary solution, so should be used with prevention, sanitation, exclusion, and trapping.

For more details about the nuisance flies described here and how to control them, see the Home and Landscape section of the UC IPM website. Look for the fact sheets in the *Pest Notes* section on Flies, Fruit Flies, Fungus Gnats, and Moth or Drain Flies.

—Urban & Community IPM unit,
Statewide IPM Program,
ucipm-community@ucanr.edu

K Hickman, UC IPM

Yellow sticky cards can be used in potted houseplants to monitor for fungus gnats and other pests. Trapping the adults decreases the number of the pests.

LL Strand, UC IPM

House flies caught on fly paper.

Invasive Pest Spotlight: Glassy-winged Sharpshooter

The invasive pest spotlight focuses on emerging or potential invasive pests in California. In this issue we are covering the glassy-winged sharpshooter (*Homalodisca vitripennis*).

Glassy-winged sharpshooter facts

The glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS) is an invasive insect pest that spreads a bacterium which causes Pierce's disease, a fatal grapevine disease threatening California's vineyards and economy. It is a large leafhopper insect with the adults measuring about ½ inch long, dark brown to black with a lighter underside. The upper parts of the head and back are covered with numerous ivory to yellowish spots. Their wings are partly transparent with reddish veins.

Glassy-winged sharpshooter eggs are laid together on the underside of leaves in groups of 8 to 12. The egg masses appear as small, greenish blisters. After hatching the masses appear as tan to brown scars on the leaves. The nymphs are wingless, mottled olive gray, and vary in size.

GWSS are strong flyers and can build up large populations on a variety of host plants, including agricultural crops, ornamental plants, native trees, and riparian vegetation. It is common to find this insect on acacia, avocado, eucalyptus, citrus, crepe myrtle, heavenly bamboo, grape, hibiscus, periwinkle, and some roses.

Sharpshooters use their stylet-like piercing mouthparts to feed on the xylem tissue of plants through the stem or leaves. GWSS can transmit disease-causing bacteria from one plant to another. During feeding, it also excretes excessive amounts of watery excrement in a steady stream of small droplets. When dry, the droplets give plants a whitewashed appearance, reducing fruit quality.

S Katovich, Bugwood.org

An adult glassy-winged sharpshooter next to an egg mass on a leaf.

What can you do?

If you find egg masses or insects you suspect to be the glassy-winged sharpshooter, please contact your County Agricultural Commissioner. Early detection and rapid response are critical to preventing the pest from spreading further. Current information about the spread and recent issues involving GWSS in California can be found on the California Department of Food and Agriculture Pierce's Disease Control Program website.

—Cherie Shook,
Invasive Species Educator,
UC IPM Urban & Community Unit,
cshook@ucanr.edu

For more information about managing pests, contact your University of California Cooperative Extension office, or visit the UC IPM website at ipm.ucanr.edu.

ANR NONDISCRIMINATION AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY STATEMENT
It is the policy of the University of California (UC) and the UC Division of Agriculture & Natural Resources not to engage in discrimination against or harassment of any person in any of its programs or activities. (Complete nondiscrimination policy statement can be found at https://ucanr.edu/sites/anrstaff/Diversity/Affirmative_Action/Resources/Policy-related_downloads/). Inquiries regarding ANR's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to UCANR, Affirmative Action Compliance Officer, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2801 Second Street, Davis, CA 95618, (530) 750-1343.