

Predators and Backyard Poultry Flocks

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Keeping predators away from the poultry flock is important. Even if you have never seen or noticed the presence of many of these predators, it does not mean that they are not around and it also does not mean that they will not seize an opportunity if one is presented.

Small flock owners typically have more difficulty with predators than their larger counterparts because of the differences in housing used for the flock. Keep in mind that housing for any size flock should be constructed to keep predators out. Proper use of wire, netting, and locking mechanisms for doors and windows are essential. Managers should also keep in mind that small rodents such as rats and mice may not be direct predators, but they can damage housing and provide burrow holes that can be used by larger, direct predators.

The use of chick wire fencing is a good idea for the coop and surrounding areas. Chick wire typically has smaller openings (1 inch or less) than chicken wire. Burying a portion of the wire with it turned outward is a good way to keep predators from being able to tunnel under the enclosure.

There are many predators that can attack a flock and the identification of these predators is the best way to develop a plan to keep attacks from happening. Common predators of backyard flocks include: canines (dogs, coyotes, foxes), felines (house cats and bobcats), weasels, raccoons, skunks, opossums, snakes, and predatory birds (hawks, owls, eagles).

CANINES—Domesticated dogs usually kill chickens for sport. Birds that have been attacked by a dog typically have a great deal of mauling of the carcass. Dogs tend to attack during the daylight hours. Remember that not all domesticated dogs will act as predators of a flock. Some dogs will protect the flock from other predators. Other canines, including foxes and coyotes, will attack in the early morning while it is still mostly dark. These canines rarely leave much evidence as they will carry the carcass away to consume it.

FELINES—Domesticated cats will typically attack younger birds within the flock as older birds may be too big to deal with. Cats tend to be messy when they consume their prey. They will often only eat the meaty parts of the carcass while leaving the skin with the feathers attached. Bobcats tend to be about twice the size of a large domesticated cat. Both domestic cats and bobcats have the ability to see in low light and may attack during twilight hours, but can attack at any time of the day. Since bobcats are larger, they will attack both young and full-size birds.

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Picture of a bobcat, a common predator of poultry. Photo courtesy of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Original image can be found [here](#).



Picture of a coyote, a common predator of poultry. Photo courtesy of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Original image can be found [here](#).



Picture of a gray fox, a common predator of poultry. Photo courtesy of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Original image can be found [here](#).

Additional information on predators of poultry can be found [here](#).

RACCOONS—Raccoons have very dexterous front paws and may be able to enter areas that other predators can't. Raccoons will often chew the head, breast, and crop of a bird. Raccoons have also been known to steal eggs from nest boxes. Cracked eggs around 30 feet from the enclosure is a sign of raccoon intrusion.

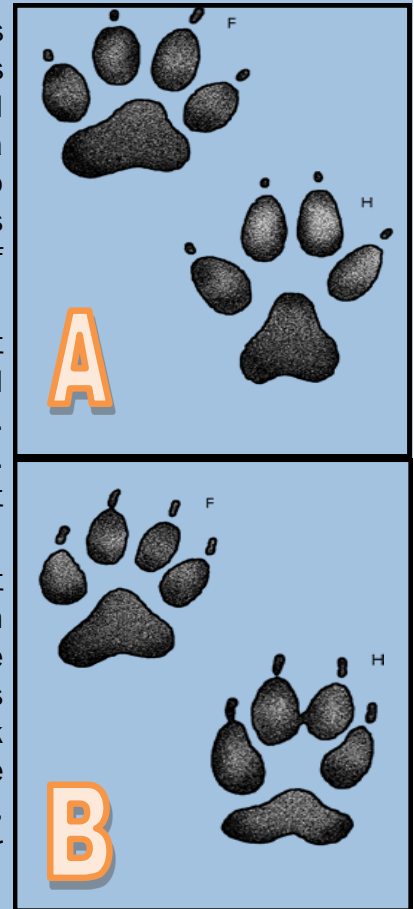
SKUNKS—Skunks do not usually attack adult birds, but prefer to go after chicks. They will typically eat the abdomen of the chick. Skunks will also steal eggs from nest boxes. The odor left behind is a good indication that a skunk has visited your flock.

WEASELS—Weasels are very wily animals that are rarely seen. Weasels can be active in daylight or nighttime hours and they are considered to be voracious eaters. Carcasses that may be left behind after a weasel attack often show a killing bite to the base of the head. Because weasels are long and slender, they can squeeze through holes that other predators may not be able to get through.

OPOSSUMS—Opossums tend to be nocturnal and they will both attack birds and steal eggs. Most attacks from opossums will show feeding from the cloaca area upward in larger birds. Smaller birds may be totally consumed.

SNAKES—Unlike some of the other predators on this list, snakes do not typically leave behind any trace of their attack. This is because snakes consume their prey whole. Snakes will most often go after eggs but have been known to attack birds of various ages. One of the more common predatory snakes of poultry is the rat snake. Although snakes do not typically leave behind evidence of their predation, many flock owners have found snakes in the growout or coop area after the snake has consumed a meal and was not able to leave the area because of its increased size.

PREDATORY BIRDS—Florida is home to many different types of predatory birds such as hawks, turkey vultures, owls, and eagles. These birds of prey may not leave behind much evidence of their attack. Hawks, turkey vultures, and eagles are primarily active during the daylight hours, while owls are most active at night. It should be noted that many owls will not bother poultry flocks (barn owls, screech owls). However, the Great Horned Owl is one of the top predators for poultry flocks.



Comparison of dog tracks (A) and coyote tracks (B). Notice that the paw shape is straighter and narrower for the coyote when compared to the dog. Please note that in this case the 'F' denotes the front paw and the 'H' denotes the hind paw. Track photos are from the US Geological Survey Website, located [here](#).

Enjoy Summer Grilling Safely

With the warm weather that we are currently enjoying and the “official” beginning of summer on June 20, many people will be heading outside to cook some of their favorite meals. However, cooking outdoors and serving food outdoors require an extra measure of care to make sure that you prevent foodborne illness and have the best tasting food on your table. By following the guidelines listed below, you can ensure that your cookouts are safe and fun for the whole family.

- Make sure to keep meat at 40°F (normal refrigeration temperature) or below until immediately before grilling.
- Do not thaw meats at room temperature. It may take a bit of extra planning, but thaw your meats in the refrigerator.
- Do not use leftover marinade as a base for sauces. The marinade may have picked up bacteria from the raw meat and unless it is heated to a high temperature, these bacteria may still be present and cause illness.
- Make sure to wash your hands, utensils, and surfaces well and often to prevent cross-contamination.
- Serve the meat as soon as you can after it is cooked. The maximum time that meat should be held without refrigeration is two (2) hours.
- All poultry meat (chicken, turkey, duck, etc.) should be cooked to an internal temperature of 165°F . This includes ground poultry meat.
- All ground meat (excluding poultry) should be cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F .
- Steaks, chops, other whole muscle cuts, fish, and shellfish should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145°F .
- Remember that excess smoke and flare-ups are caused by fat from the meat. To avoid these, use meats that are generally low in fat, or trim the excess.
- Aluminum foil can be used to cover the grill surface to prevent flare-ups and scorching. Poking a few holes in the foil will let juices drip without the worry of flare-ups.
- Make sure to refrigerate any leftovers as soon as you can. Do not reuse food that has been left out for over two (2) hours. Most grilled foods can be stored safely at refrigeration temperatures for two (2) days after cooking.
- Sanitizing your utensils and work area is a good idea. Mix 1.5 to 2 teaspoons of household bleach per quart of water to make a sanitizing solution.

For additional information on food safety, please visit the UF/IFAS EDIS food safety website at https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_food_safety or visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services food safety website at: <http://www.foodsafety.gov/index.html>.



Picture of a raccoon, a common predator of poultry. Photo courtesy of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Original image can be found [here](#).



Picture of a opossum, a common predator of poultry. Photo courtesy of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Original image can be found [here](#).



Picture of a striped skunk, a common predator of poultry. Photo courtesy of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Original image can be found [here](#).

Get your kids involved in food safety. Visit the **FIGHT BAC for KIDS** website [here](#).

According to the USDA and CDC, 90% of *Salmonella* cases are attributed to sources other than chicken.

Safe Food Handling

Safe food handling isn't just important while you are grilling. You should practice safe food handling techniques all year. The following guidelines are complimentary to those for grilling and should be used any time that you are preparing food. These practices are adapted from the Partnership for Food Safety Education. Additional information can be found [here](#).

CLEAN

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food and after using the restroom.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item before you move on to the next.
- If you use cloth towels to clean kitchen surfaces, make sure to wash them frequently in the hot cycle of the clothes washer.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water.

SEPARATE

- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other foods in your shopping cart, grocery bags, and refrigerator. This will decrease the chance of cross-contamination.
- Use a separate cutting board for fresh produce and raw meats.
- Never placed cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat.

COOK

- Use a food thermometer to determine the temperature of cooked foods.
- Cook whole muscle cuts, fish and shellfish to a minimum of 145°F.
- Cook all poultry to a minimum of 165°F.
- Cook all ground meats (other than poultry) to a minimum of 160°F.

CHILL

- Refrigerate all cooked foods within two (2) hours of their finish time.
- Never defrost at room temperature. Use the refrigerator, cold water, or the microwave.
- Always marinate foods in the refrigerator.
- Divide leftovers into smaller containers for quicker chilling.

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