





# Good Fences Make Good Neighbors

How to protect your chickens from predators

By Maurice Pitesky, DVM, MPVM, ACPVM

One of the many challenges in raising chickens is dealing with wildlife. Non-predatory wildlife such as rats and mice are typically associated with disease transmission, property damage and feed consumption. While non-predatory wildlife can cause sickness and death, in many ways flock owners consider non-predatory wildlife more of a nuisance than a direct threat. In contrast, predatory wildlife including raccoons, foxes, coyotes, mountain lions, wolves and raptors can cause a sudden and instantaneous loss of poultry.

A recent national survey of free-range and pastured poultry producers by our research group at UC Davis identified predators as the most common source of mortality on commercial free-range and pastured poultry farms. Specifically, in our national survey, 52% of the commercial-pastured poultry producers identified predators as the most common source of mortality (Elkhoraihi, 2016).

While this article will focus on mitigation of predatory wildlife on domestic poultry, it is important to recognize that many of the husbandry practices that are associated with control of non-predatory wildlife (e.g. fencing, controlling feed spillage, harborage management etc) will also benefit your flock with respect to predatory wildlife. In short when it comes to the relationship between predators and domestic poultry Robert Frost was correct when he wrote "good fences make good neighbors."





**All predators are not (all) bad!**

Predators are important components of a healthy ecosystem. Many predator species are considered “keystone” species in that they play a unique and critical role in the way ecosystems function.

In a general sense, without keystone species, ecosystems would be dramatically different. For example, predators—including raptors—are often responsible for helping control rodent populations which if left unattended would result in significant property damage and increased disease transmission to domestic animals and humans alike.

In addition, declines in predatory species in an ecosystem often result in ecosystems that are more likely to be invaded by non-native and potentially damaging species. Consequently co-existence between predatory wildlife and domestic poultry is very important.



**Fencing, deterrents, and feed cleanup**

Unfortunately there is no silver bullet when it comes to predator control, but by focusing on optimizing husbandry practices, losses can be prevented.

One of the simplest things you should consider is fencing and/or netting of the entire area where your birds live. When purchasing fencing, use thick wire mesh with gaps no bigger than ¾ square inches. In general, the thicker and closer together the squares are, the better.

**“ With respect to fencing, one of the most common mistakes I see is the lack of fencing covering coops and/or the area where the birds are active during the day.”**

Predators are smart and will probe a fence and eventually find gaps and/or areas where there is no fence. To paraphrase, the proverb, a fence is only as strong as its weakest spot. In summary, fencing is the most fundamental exclusionary approaches toward protecting your flock.

**The Egg Cart'n Chalet**



Four backyard chicken tractor models available plus one DIY Wheel/Lift Kit

- Virtually Maintenance-free
- Predator Safe
- Outstanding Longevity
- Unmatched Movability



**EggCart'n**  
The Chicken Tractor That Works and Lasts




**QUAIL MANUFACTURING**  
9815 W. Trail West Rd., Partridge, KS 67566  
877-567-5617 • WWW.EGGCARTN.COM





**Figure 1**  
Examples of shade or shelter structures

Next, make the coop as “unappetizing” as possible. Specifically, don’t have feed out either in feeders or spillage from feeders at night.

Outside of your coop, make sure your birds have shade/shelter structures (Figure 1). The birds can go underneath these structures for both shade and also to escape raptors. While not perfect, low lying structures make it much harder for raptors to attack.

Other things to consider are predator repellent tape, terror eye balloons and coyote/fox decoys. It’s important to remember (again) that predators are smart so you need to keep moving these type of decoys around or else the predator(s) will realize they are fake sooner than later...

Finally, one more expensive option that deserves note are electronic bird repellents which simulate natural predator sounds. Some models apparently even let you customize the sounds for your specific problem birds.



**Animals speak louder than words.** And hens fed with Layena® Plus Omega-3 poultry feed have eggs with 250mg of Omega-3. Store-bought eggs only have 50mg\*. Turns out one egg can say more than others.



**FEED GREATNESS™**

Your local Purina retailer can tell you more than this ad ever could.  
Or visit [purinamills.com/chicken-feed](http://purinamills.com/chicken-feed)

© 2017 Purina Animal Nutrition LLC. All rights reserved. Layena is a registered trademark of Purina Animal Nutrition. \*When fed a diet of Layena® Plus Omega-3 exclusively for at least 3 weeks. Based on large egg (56 g). Results may vary with factors such as total diet and hen health. A typical store bought egg contains 50 mg of Omega-3 fatty acids per large Egg (USDA: National Nutrient Base)



**critter-cages.com** [www.Critter-Cages.com](http://www.Critter-Cages.com)  
**Coops, Runs, Supplies for All Small Critters**



**Chick-N-Barn**  
49" x 43" x 47" high  
\$369.99  
+Shipping

**Welded Wire & Poultry Mesh**  
from 24.99  
+Shipping

**Incubators**  
from 59.99  
+Shipping

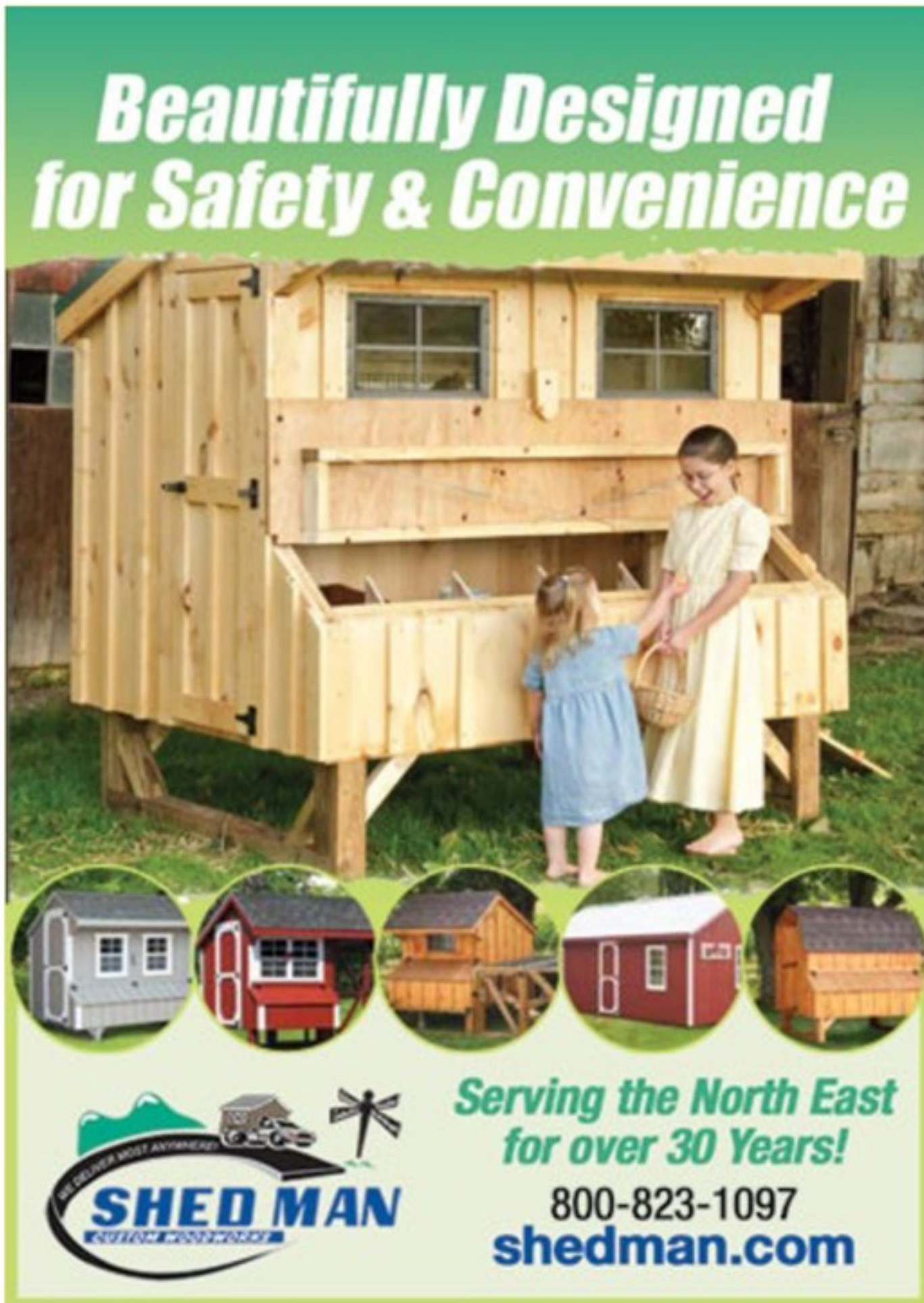
**Feeders & Water Fonts**  
from \$2.19  
+Shipping

**Chick-N-House**  
45.25" x 31" x 32.25"  
Free Shipping in the lower 48

310.832.9981 10am to 6pm Pacific [orderdesk@critter-cages.com](mailto:orderdesk@critter-cages.com)

Reader Service No. 1002

**Beautifully Designed  
for Safety & Convenience**



**Serving the North East  
for over 30 Years!**

**800-823-1097**  
[shedman.com](http://shedman.com)



**Take it to the enemy**

In addition to improving the husbandry practices described above, there are other options to consider when dealing with predatory wildlife. These can include trapping and lethal management of predatory wildlife. If you do consider trapping and/or lethal means, make sure you understand your state laws and get the necessary permits. For example, in California, depredation permits are administered by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW).

These type of permits are often granted after documented evidence of predation of 4-H animals and livestock. However, if the species are protected, permits are not allowed. You should also consider reaching out to USDA Wildlife Services which has regional and state offices.

Regardless, start by identifying predators. As we all know information is fundamental. Identifying scat, tracks and other signs will be helpful in gaining information for risk assessment and mitigation (Figure 2).





**Figure 2** Be a detective. Look at footprints and scat to identify what type of predators are around. You can use this information to adjust fencing

**Focus on fencing and feed**

While backyard poultry are increasingly popular, raising them in an environment with wildlife that includes predatory species is challenging. Improved husbandry practices with a focus on fencing and feed control is essential toward mitigating challenges associated with predators.

With a little more focus on improving husbandry practices in

combination with increased efforts toward understanding what types of predators are in your environment the challenge associated with predators can be mitigated.

Remember, don't make "perfect" the enemy of "good." It is impossible to eliminate risk completely. Focus on the low hanging fruit and enjoy your chickens. We want to promote good stewardship of wildlife and healthy chickens. 🐔

**About the author**

*Maurice Pitesky* is a faculty member at University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) with an appointment in poultry health and food safety epidemiology. Pitesky earned his BS in biology from UCLA and his DVM and MPVM from UC Davis. Pitesky is also boarded in preventative veterinary medicine (DACVPM).



**BREEDING TECHNOLOGY**

For over 55 years GQF has researched and built products for accuracy and dependability. We stand behind all of our products with a full one year warranty.

**THE GENESIS**

ADJUSTABLE DIGITAL THERMOSTAT WITH TEMPERATURE & HUMIDITY DISPLAY ACCURATE. DEPENDABLE. AUTOMATIC.



model #1588

For more information on the 1588 and other quality GQF products visit

**GQFinfo.com**

**912.236.0651**