[Template:Hatnote](/wiki/Template:Hatnote" \o "Template:Hatnote) [Template:Pp-move-indef](/wiki/Template:Pp-move-indef) [Template:Pp-semi-protected](/wiki/Template:Pp-semi-protected) [Template:Use mdy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_mdy_dates) [Template:Taxobox](/wiki/Template:Taxobox)

The **chicken** (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) is a type of [domesticated](/wiki/Domestication) [fowl](/wiki/Fowl), a subspecies of the [red junglefowl](/wiki/Red_junglefowl). It is one of the most common and widespread [domestic animals](/wiki/Domestic_animals), with a population of more than 19 billion as of 2011.[[1]](#cite_note-1) Humans keep chickens primarily as a source of food, consuming both [their meat](/wiki/Chicken_(food)) and their [eggs](/wiki/Egg_(food)).

Genetic studies have pointed to multiple maternal origins in Southeast-, East-,[[2]](#cite_note-2) and South Asia, but with the [clade](/wiki/Clade) found in the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Africa originating in the [Indian subcontinent](/wiki/Indian_subcontinent). From India, the domesticated chicken was imported to [Lydia](/wiki/Lydia) in western [Asia Minor](/wiki/Anatolia), and to Greece by the fifth century BC.[[3]](#cite_note-3) Fowl had been known in Egypt since the mid-15th century BC, with the "bird that gives birth every day" having come to Egypt from the land between [Syria](/wiki/Syria) and [Shinar](/wiki/Shinar), [Babylonia](/wiki/Babylonia), according to the [annals of Thutmose III](/wiki/Annals_of_Thutmose_III).[[4]](#cite_note-4)[[5]](#cite_note-5)[[6]](#cite_note-6) The chicken genome has changed less from its [feathered](/wiki/Feathered_dinosaur) ancestors eradicated by the [Cretaceous–Paleogene extinction event](/wiki/Cretaceous–Paleogene_extinction_event) than other sequenced birds have.[[7]](#cite_note-7)

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## Terminology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

In the UK and Ireland adult male chickens over the age of one year are primarily known as cocks, whereas in America, Australia and Canada they are more commonly called [roosters](/wiki/Rooster). Males less than a year old are *cockerels*.[[8]](#cite_note-8) [Castrated](/wiki/Castration) roosters are called [*capons*](/wiki/Capon) (surgical and chemical castration are now illegal in some parts of the world). Females over a year old are known as *hens* and younger females as *pullets*[[9]](#cite_note-9) although in the egg-laying industry, a pullet becomes a hen when she begins to lay eggs at 16 to 20 weeks of age. In Australia and New Zealand (also sometimes in Britain), there is a generic term *chook* [Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en) to describe all ages and both sexes.[[10]](#cite_note-10) The young are called *chicks* and the meat is called [*chicken*](/wiki/Chicken_(food)).

"Chicken" originally referred to young domestic fowl.[[11]](#cite_note-11) The species as a whole was then called *domestic fowl*, or just *fowl*. This use of "chicken" survives in the phrase "Hen and Chickens", sometimes used as a British [public house](/wiki/Public_house) or [theatre](/wiki/Theatre) name, and to name groups of one large and many small rocks or islands in the sea (see for example [Hen and Chicken Islands](/wiki/Hen_and_Chicken_Islands)). The word "chicken" is sometimes erroneously construed to mean females exclusively, despite the term "hen" for females being in wide circulation.

In the [Deep South](/wiki/Deep_South) of the United States chickens are also referred to by the slang term [*yardbird*](/wiki/Yardbird).<ref name=berhardt>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref>

## General biology and habitat[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

[thumb|200px|upright|In some breeds the adult](/wiki/File:Rooster_portrait2.jpg) [rooster](/wiki/Rooster) can be distinguished from the hen by his larger [comb](/wiki/Comb_(anatomy)) Chickens are [omnivores](/wiki/Omnivore).[[12]](#cite_note-12) In the wild, they often scratch at the soil to search for seeds, [insects](/wiki/Insect) and even larger animals such as [lizards](/wiki/Lizard), small snakes or young [mice](/wiki/Mouse).[[13]](#cite_note-13) Chickens may live for five to ten years, depending on the [breed](/wiki/Breed).[[14]](#cite_note-14) The world's oldest chicken, a hen, died of heart failure at the age of 16 according to [Guinness World Records](/wiki/Guinness_World_Records).[[15]](#cite_note-15) Roosters can usually be differentiated from hens by their striking plumage of long flowing tails and shiny, pointed feathers on their necks (*hackles*) and backs (*saddle*), which are typically of brighter, bolder colours than those of females of the same breed. However, in some breeds, such as the [Sebright chicken](/wiki/Sebright_chicken), the rooster has only slightly pointed neck feathers, the same colour as the hen's. The identification can be made by looking at the [comb](/wiki/Comb_(anatomy)), or eventually from the development of spurs on the male's legs (in a few breeds and in certain hybrids, the male and female chicks may be differentiated by colour). Adult chickens have a fleshy crest on their heads called a comb, or cockscomb, and hanging flaps of skin either side under their beaks called [wattles](/wiki/Wattle_(anatomy)). Collectively, these and other fleshy protuberances on the head and throat are called [caruncles](/wiki/Caruncle_(bird_anatomy)). Both the adult male and female have wattles and combs, but in most breeds these are more prominent in males. A *muff* or *beard* is a [mutation](/wiki/Mutation) found in several chicken breeds which causes extra [feathering](/wiki/Feather) under the chicken's face, giving the appearance of a [beard](/wiki/Beard). Domestic chickens are not capable of long distance flight, although lighter birds are generally capable of flying for short distances, such as over fences or into trees (where they would naturally roost). Chickens may occasionally fly briefly to explore their surroundings, but generally do so only to flee perceived danger.

### Behaviour[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[thumb|x200px|Hen with chicks, India](/wiki/File:Hen_with_chicks,_Raisen_district,_MP,_India.jpg)

#### Social behaviour[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

Chickens are [gregarious](/wiki/Gregarious) birds and live together in [flocks](/wiki/Herd). They have a communal approach to the [incubation](/wiki/Avian_incubation) of eggs and raising of young. Individual chickens in a flock will dominate others, establishing a "[pecking order](/wiki/Pecking_order)", with dominant individuals having priority for food access and nesting locations. Removing hens or roosters from a flock causes a temporary disruption to this social order until a new pecking order is established. Adding hens, especially younger birds, to an existing flock can lead to fighting and injury.[[16]](#cite_note-16)When a rooster finds food, he may call other chickens to eat first. He does this by clucking in a high pitch as well as picking up and dropping the food. This behaviour may also be observed in mother hens to call their chicks and encourage them to eat.

A rooster's crowing is a loud and sometimes shrill call and sends a territorial signal to other roosters.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) However, roosters may also crow in response to sudden disturbances within their surroundings. Hens cluck loudly after laying an egg, and also to call their chicks. Chickens also give a low "warning call" when they think they see a predator approaching.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

#### Courtship[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

To initiate courting, some roosters may dance in a circle around or near a hen ("a circle dance"), often lowering his wing which is closest to the hen.[[17]](#cite_note-17) The dance triggers a response in the hen[[17]](#cite_note-17) and when she responds to his "call", the rooster may mount the hen and proceed with the mating.

#### Nesting and laying behaviour[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[thumb|200px|Chicken](/wiki/File:Chicken_eggs.jpg) [eggs](/wiki/Egg_(biology)) vary in colour depending on the hen, typically ranging from bright white to shades of brown and even blue, green, and recently reported purple (found in South Asia) ([Araucana](/wiki/Araucana) varieties). [thumb|right|200px|Chicks before their first outing](/wiki/File:Küken_vor_dem_ersten_Ausflug.jpg)

Hens will often try to lay in nests that already contain eggs and have been known to move eggs from neighbouring nests into their own. The result of this behaviour is that a flock will use only a few preferred locations, rather than having a different nest for every bird. Hens will often express a preference to lay in the same location. It is not unknown for two (or more) hens to try to share the same nest at the same time. If the nest is small, or one of the hens is particularly determined, this may result in chickens trying to lay on top of each other. There is evidence that individual hens prefer to be either solitary or gregarious nesters.[[18]](#cite_note-18) Some farmers use fake eggs made from plastic or stone (or [golf balls](/wiki/Golf_ball)) to encourage hens to lay in a particular location.

#### Broodiness[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

Under natural conditions, most birds lay only until a [clutch](/wiki/Clutch_(eggs)) is complete, and they will then incubate all the eggs. Many domestic hens will also do this–and are then said to "go [broody](/wiki/Broodiness)". The broody hen will stop laying and instead will focus on the incubation of the eggs (a full clutch is usually about 12 eggs). She will "sit" or "set" on the nest, protesting or pecking in defense if disturbed or removed, and she will rarely leave the nest to eat, drink, or dust-bathe. While brooding, the hen maintains the nest at a constant temperature and humidity, as well as turning the eggs regularly during the first part of the incubation. To stimulate broodiness, an owner may place many artificial eggs in the nest, or to stop it they may place the hen in an elevated cage with an open wire floor. [thumb|left|200px|Skull of a three-week-old chicken. Here the opisthotic bone appears in the occipital region, as in the adult Chelonian. bo = Basi-occipital, bt = Basi-temporal, eo = Opisthotic, f = Frontal, fm = Foramen magnum, fo = Fontanella, oc = Occipital condyle, op = Opisthotic, p = Parietal, pf = Post-frontal, sc = Sinus canal in supra-occipital, so = Supra-occpital, sq = Squamosal, 8 = Exit of vagus nerve.](/wiki/File:1911_EB_Chicken_skull.png)

Modern egg-laying breeds rarely go broody, and those that do often stop part-way through the incubation. However, some "utility" (general purpose) breeds, such as the [Cochin](/wiki/Cochin_(chicken)), [Cornish](/wiki/Cornish_(chicken)) and [Silkie](/wiki/Silkie_(chicken)), do regularly go broody, and they make excellent mothers, not only for chicken eggs but also for those of other species—even those with much smaller or larger eggs and different incubation periods, such as [quail](/wiki/Quail), [pheasants](/wiki/Pheasant), [turkeys](/wiki/Turkey_(bird)) or [geese](/wiki/Goose). Chicken eggs can also be hatched under a broody duck, with varied success.

#### Hatching and early life[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

At the end of the incubation period (about 21 days),[[17]](#cite_note-17) the eggs, if fertile, will hatch. Development of the egg starts only when incubation begins, so they all hatch within a day or two of each other, despite perhaps being laid over a period of two weeks or so. Before hatching, the hen can hear the chicks peeping inside the eggs, and will gently cluck to stimulate them to break out of their shells. The chick begins by "pipping"; pecking a breathing hole with its [egg tooth](/wiki/Egg_tooth) towards the blunt end of the egg, usually on the upper side. The chick will then rest for some hours, absorbing the remaining egg yolk and withdrawing the blood supply from the membrane beneath the shell (used earlier for breathing through the shell). It then enlarges the hole, gradually turning round as it goes, and eventually severing the blunt end of the shell completely to make a lid. It crawls out of the remaining shell, and its wet down dries out in the warmth of the nest.

The hen will usually stay on the nest for about two days after the first egg hatches, and during this time the newly hatched chicks live off the egg yolk they absorb just before hatching. Any eggs not fertilized by a rooster will not hatch, and the hen eventually loses interest in these and leaves the nest. After hatching, the hen fiercely guards the chicks, and will brood them when necessary to keep them warm, at first often returning to the nest at night. She leads them to food and water; she will call them to edible items, but seldom feeds them directly. She continues to care for them until they are several weeks old, when she will gradually lose interest and eventually start to lay again.

### Embryology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[thumb|Earliest gestation stages and blood circulation of a chicken embryo](/wiki/File:Embryo.ogv) In 2006, scientists researching the ancestry of birds "turned on" a chicken [recessive gene](/wiki/Recessive_gene), *talpid2*, and found that the embryo jaws initiated formation of teeth, like those found in ancient bird fossils. John Fallon, the overseer of the project, stated that chickens have "...retained the ability to make teeth, under certain conditions... ."[[19]](#cite_note-19)

## Breeding[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

### Origins[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[250px|right|thumb|Male red junglefowl.](/wiki/File:Gallus_gallus_male_Kaziranga_0.jpg)

The domestic chicken is descended primarily from the [red junglefowl](/wiki/Red_junglefowl) (*Gallus gallus*) and is scientifically classified as the same species.<ref name=nature>[Template:Cite journal](/wiki/Template:Cite_journal)</ref> As such it can and does freely interbreed with populations of red jungle fowl.[[20]](#cite_note-20) Recent genetic analysis has revealed that at least the gene for yellow skin was incorporated into domestic birds through hybridization with the [grey junglefowl](/wiki/Grey_junglefowl) (*G. sonneratii*).[[21]](#cite_note-21) The traditional [poultry](/wiki/Poultry) farming view is that chickens were first domesticated for cockfighting in Asia, Africa, and Europe, rather than for egg or meat production. In the last decade there have been a number of genetic studies to clarify the origins. According to one study, a single domestication event occurring in the region of modern [Thailand](/wiki/Thailand) created the modern chicken with minor transitions separating the modern breeds.<ref name=oneMatriarch>[Template:Citation](/wiki/Template:Citation)</ref> However, that study was later found to be based on incomplete data, and recent studies point to multiple maternal origins, with the [clade](/wiki/Clade) found in the Americas, Europe, Middle East, and Africa, originating from the [Indian subcontinent](/wiki/Indian_subcontinent), where a large number of unique [haplotypes](/wiki/Haplotype) occur.[[22]](#cite_note-22)[[23]](#cite_note-23) It is postulated that the jungle fowl, known as the bamboo fowl in many Southeast Asian languages, is a special [pheasant](/wiki/Pheasant) well adapted to take advantage of the large amounts of fruits that are produced during the end of the 50-year [bamboo](/wiki/Bamboo) seeding cycle to boost its own reproduction.[[24]](#cite_note-24) In domesticating the chicken, humans took advantage of this prolific reproduction of the jungle fowl when exposed to large amounts of food.[[25]](#cite_note-25) It has been claimed (based on paleoclimatic assumptions) that chickens were domesticated in Southern China in 6000 BC.[[26]](#cite_note-26) However, according to a recent study,[[27]](#cite_note-27) it is unclear whether those birds were the ancestors of chickens today. Instead, the origin could be the [Harappan culture](/wiki/Indus_Valley_Civilization) of the [Indus Valley](/wiki/Indus_River). Eventually, the chicken moved to the [Tarim basin](/wiki/Tarim_Basin) of central Asia. The chicken reached Europe (Romania, Turkey, Greece, Ukraine) about 3000 BC.[[28]](#cite_note-28)Introduction into Western Europe came far later, about the 1st millennium BC. Phoenicians spread chickens along the Mediterranean coasts, to Iberia. Breeding increased under the [Roman Empire](/wiki/Roman_Empire), and was reduced in the [Middle Ages](/wiki/Middle_Ages).[[28]](#cite_note-28)Middle East traces of chicken go back to a little earlier than 2000 BC, in [Syria](/wiki/Syria); chicken went southward only in the 1st millennium BC. The chicken reached [Egypt](/wiki/Egypt) for purposes of [cock fighting](/wiki/Cock_fighting) about 1400 BC, and became widely bred only in [Ptolemaic](/wiki/Ptolemy) Egypt (about 300 BC).[[28]](#cite_note-28) Little is known about the chicken's introduction into Africa. Three possible routes of introduction in about the early first millennium AD could have been through the Egyptian [Nile](/wiki/Nile_River) Valley, the East Africa Roman-Greek or Indian trade, or from Carthage and the Berbers, across the [Sahara](/wiki/Sahara_Desert). The earliest known remains are from Mali, Nubia, East Coast, and [South Africa](/wiki/South_Africa) and date back to the middle of the first millennium AD.[[28]](#cite_note-28)Domestic chicken in the Americas before Western conquest is still an ongoing discussion, but blue-egged chickens, found only in the Americas and Asia, suggest an Asian origin for early American chickens.[[28]](#cite_note-28) A lack of data from Thailand, Russia, the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa makes it difficult to lay out a clear map of the spread of chickens in these areas; better description and genetic analysis of local breeds threatened by [extinction](/wiki/Extinction) may also help with research into this area.[[28]](#cite_note-28)

#### South America[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

An unusual variety of chicken that has its origins in [South America](/wiki/South_America) is the [araucana](/wiki/Araucana), bred in southern [Chile](/wiki/Chile) by the [Mapuche](/wiki/Mapuche) people. Araucanas, some of which are tailless and some of which have tufts of feathers around their ears, lay blue-green eggs. It has long been suggested that they pre-date the arrival of European chickens brought by the [Spanish](/wiki/Spanish_colonization_of_the_Americas) and are evidence of [pre-Columbian](/wiki/Pre-Columbian) trans-Pacific contacts between Asian or Pacific Oceanic peoples, particularly the Polynesians, and South America. In 2007, an international team of researchers reported the results of analysis of chicken bones found on the [Arauco Peninsula](/wiki/Arauco_Peninsula) in [south-central Chile](/wiki/Zona_Sur). Radiocarbon dating suggested that the chickens were Pre-Columbian, and DNA analysis showed that they were related to prehistoric populations of chickens in Polynesia.[[29]](#cite_note-29) These results appeared to confirm that the chickens came from Polynesia and that there were transpacific contacts between Polynesia and South America before Columbus's arrival in the Americas.[[30]](#cite_note-30) However, a later report looking at the same specimens concluded:

A published, apparently pre-Columbian, Chilean specimen and six pre-European Polynesian specimens also cluster with the same European/Indian subcontinental/Southeast Asian sequences, providing no support for a Polynesian introduction of chickens to South America. In contrast, sequences from two archaeological sites on Easter Island group with an uncommon haplogroup from Indonesia, Japan, and China and may represent a genetic signature of an early Polynesian dispersal. Modeling of the potential marine carbon contribution to the Chilean archaeological specimen casts further doubt on claims for pre-Columbian chickens, and definitive proof will require further analyses of ancient DNA sequences and radiocarbon and stable isotope data from archaeological excavations within both Chile and Polynesia.[[31]](#cite_note-31)

## Farming[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|upright|A former](/wiki/File:BatteryChicken5DaysOutOfCage.jpg) [battery](/wiki/Battery_cage) hen, five days after release. Note the pale comb - the comb may be a reliable indicator of health or vigor.[[32]](#cite_note-32) More than 50 billion chickens are reared annually as a source of food, for both their meat and their eggs.[[33]](#cite_note-33)[Template:Better source](/wiki/Template:Better_source)

The vast majority of poultry are raised in [factory farms](/wiki/Intensive_animal_farming). According to the [Worldwatch Institute](/wiki/Worldwatch_Institute), 74 percent of the world's poultry meat and 68 percent of eggs are produced this way.[[34]](#cite_note-34) One alternative to intensive poultry farming is free range farming.

Friction between these two main methods has led to long-term issues of [ethical consumerism](/wiki/Ethical_consumerism). Opponents of intensive farming argue that it harms the environment, creates human health risks and is inhumane. Advocates of intensive farming say that their highly efficient systems save land and food resources owing to increased productivity, and that the animals are looked after in state-of-the-art environmentally controlled facilities.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

In part due to the conditions on intensive poultry farms and recent recalls of large quantities of eggs, there is a growing movement for small-scale micro-flocks or 'backyard chickens'. This involves keeping small numbers of hens (usually no more than a dozen) in suburban or urban residential areas to control bugs, to utilize chicken waste as fertilizer in small gardens, and of course for the high-quality eggs and meat that are produced.

### Reared for meat[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumb|right|A commercial chicken house with open sides raising broiler pullets for meat](/wiki/File:Florida_chicken_house.jpg) Chickens farmed for meat are called [broiler](/wiki/Broiler) chickens. Chickens will naturally live for six or more years, but broiler chickens typically take less than six weeks to reach slaughter size.[[35]](#cite_note-35) A [free range](/wiki/Free_range) or [organic](/wiki/Organic_(food)) meat chicken will usually be slaughtered at about 14 weeks of age.

### Reared for eggs[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

Chickens farmed for eggs are called egg-laying hens. In total, the UK alone consumes over 29 million eggs per day. Some hens [breeds](/wiki/List_of_chicken_breeds) can produce over 300 eggs per year, with "the highest authenticated rate of egg laying being 371 eggs in 364 days".[[36]](#cite_note-36) After 12 months of laying, the commercial hen's egg-laying ability starts to decline to the point where the flock is unviable. Hens, particularly from [battery cage](/wiki/Battery_cage) systems, are sometimes infirm or have lost a significant amount of their feathers, and their life expectancy has been reduced from around seven years to less than two years.[[37]](#cite_note-37) In the UK and Europe, laying hens are then slaughtered and used in processed foods or sold as "soup hens".[[37]](#cite_note-37) In some other countries, flocks are sometimes [force moulted](/wiki/Forced_molting), rather than being slaughtered, to reinvigorate egg-laying. This involves complete withdrawal of food (and sometimes water) for 7–14 days[[38]](#cite_note-38) or sufficiently long to cause a body weight loss of 25 to 35%,[[39]](#cite_note-39) or up to 28 days under experimental conditions.[[40]](#cite_note-40) This stimulates the hen to lose her feathers, but also reinvigorates egg-production. Some flocks may be force moulted several times. In 2003, more than 75% of all flocks were moulted in the US.[[41]](#cite_note-41)

#### Artificial incubation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[thumb|200px|right|An egg incubator](/wiki/File:Egg_incubator.jpg) Incubation can successfully occur artificially in machines that provide the correct, controlled environment for the developing chick.[[42]](#cite_note-42)[[43]](#cite_note-43)[[44]](#cite_note-44)[[45]](#cite_note-45) The average incubation period for chickens is 21 days but may depend on the temperature and humidity in the incubator. Temperature regulation is the most critical factor for a successful hatch. Variations of more than 1 °C (1.8 °F) from the optimum temperature of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) will reduce hatch rates. Humidity is also important because the rate at which eggs lose water by evaporation depends on the ambient relative humidity. Evaporation can be assessed by candling, to view the size of the air sac, or by measuring weight loss. [Relative humidity](/wiki/Relative_humidity) should be increased to around 70% in the last three days of incubation to keep the membrane around the hatching chick from drying out after the chick cracks the shell. Lower humidity is usual in the first 18 days to ensure adequate evaporation. The position of the eggs in the incubator can also influence hatch rates. For best results, eggs should be placed with the pointed ends down and turned regularly (at least three times per day) until one to three days before hatching. If the eggs aren't turned, the [embryo](/wiki/Embryo) inside may stick to the shell and may hatch with physical defects. Adequate ventilation is necessary to provide the [embryo](/wiki/Embryo) with oxygen. Older eggs require increased ventilation.

Many commercial incubators are industrial-sized with shelves holding tens of thousands of eggs at a time, with rotation of the eggs a fully automated process. Home incubators are boxes holding from 6 to 75 eggs; they are usually electrically powered, but in the past some were heated with an oil or paraffin lamp.

## As pets[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Some people find chickens' behaviour entertaining and educational[[46]](#cite_note-46) and they are sometimes kept as [pets](/wiki/Pet). Chickens can be tamed by hand feeding, although roosters can sometimes become aggressive and noisy. Aggression may be curbed with proper handling. Some have advised against keeping them around very young children[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed). Certain breeds, such as silkies and many [bantam](/wiki/Bantam_(poultry)) varieties, are generally docile and are often recommended as good pets around children with disabilities.[[47]](#cite_note-47)

## Diseases and ailments[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

Chickens are susceptible to several [parasites](/wiki/Parasite), including [lice](/wiki/Lice), [mites](/wiki/Mite), [ticks](/wiki/Tick), [fleas](/wiki/Flea), and [intestinal worms](/wiki/Roundworm), as well as other diseases. Despite the name, they are not affected by [chickenpox](/wiki/Chickenpox), which is generally restricted to humans.[[48]](#cite_note-48) Some of the diseases that can affect chickens are shown below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Common name** | **Cause** |
| [Aspergillosis](/wiki/Aspergillosis) |  | fungi |
| [Avian influenza](/wiki/Avian_influenza) | bird flu | virus |
| [Histomoniasis](/wiki/Blackhead_disease) | blackhead disease | protozoal parasite |
| [Botulism](/wiki/Botulism) |  | toxin |
| Cage layer fatigue |  | mineral deficiencies, lack of exercise |
| [Campylobacteriosis](/wiki/Campylobacteriosis) |  | tissue injury in the gut |
| [Coccidiosis](/wiki/Coccidiosis) |  | parasites |
| [Colds](/wiki/Common_cold) |  | virus |
| [Crop bound](http://www.budgie-parakeets.com/cropbound.html) |  | improper feeding |
| [*Dermanyssus gallinae*](/wiki/Dermanyssus_gallinae) | red mite | parasite |
| [Egg bound](/wiki/Egg_bound) |  | oversized egg |
| [Erysipelas](/wiki/Erysipelas) |  | bacteria |
| [Fatty liver hemorrhagic syndrome](/wiki/Fatty_liver_hemorrhagic_syndrome) |  | high-energy food |
| [Fowl cholera](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10370_12150_12220-26650--,00.html) |  | bacteria |
| [Fowl pox](/wiki/Fowl_pox) |  | virus |
| [Fowl typhoid](http://epix.hazard.net/topics/animal/ftyphoid.htm) |  | bacteria |
| [Gallid herpesvirus 1](/wiki/Gallid_herpesvirus_1) or infectious laryngotracheitis |  | virus |
| [Gapeworm](/wiki/Gapeworm) | *Syngamus trachea* | worms |
| [Infectious bronchitis](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PS039) |  | virus |
| [Infectious bursal disease](/wiki/Infectious_bursal_disease) | Gumboro | virus |
| [Infectious coryza](http://www.peafowl.org/ARTICLES/15/) |  | bacteria |
| [Lymphoid leukosis](/wiki/Avian_leukosis_virus) |  | avian leukosis virus |
| [Marek's disease](/wiki/Marek's_disease) |  | virus |
| [Moniliasis](/wiki/Moniliasis) | yeast infection or thrush | fungi |
| [Mycoplasmas](/wiki/Mycoplasmas) |  | bacteria-like organisms |
| [Newcastle disease](/wiki/Newcastle_disease) |  | virus |
| [Necrotic enteritis](http://www.thepoultrysite.com/diseaseinfo/101/necrotic-enteritis) |  | bacteria |
| [Omphalitis](/wiki/Omphalitis) | mushy chick disease | umbilical cord stump |
| [Peritonitis](http://www.henkeeping.co.uk/)[[49]](#cite_note-49) |  | infection in abdomen from egg yolk |
| [Prolapse](http://poultryone.com/articles/feedinghens.html) |  |  |
| [Psittacosis](/wiki/Psittacosis) |  | bacteria |
| [Pullorum](/wiki/Salmonella) | [salmonella](/wiki/Salmonella) | bacteria |
| [Scaly leg](/wiki/Scaly_leg) |  | parasites |
| [Squamous cell carcinoma](/wiki/Squamous_cell_carcinoma) |  | cancer |
| [Tibial dyschondroplasia](/wiki/Tibial_dyschondroplasia) | speed growing |  |
| [Toxoplasmosis](/wiki/Toxoplasmosis) |  | protozoal parasite |
| [Ulcerative enteritis](http://www.merckvetmanual.com/mvm/index.jsp?cfile=htm/bc/201500.htm) |  | bacteria |
| [Ulcerative pododermatitis](/wiki/Ulcerative_pododermatitis) | bumblefoot | bacteria |

## In religion and mythology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

[thumb|right|200px|Vatican Persian Cock — A 1919 print of a fabric square of a Persian cock or a Persian bird design belonging to the Vatican (](/wiki/File:Persian_Cock.jpg)[Holy See](/wiki/Holy_See)) in Rome dating to 600 CE. Notice the [halo](/wiki/Halo_(religious_iconography)) denoting the status of being [holy](/wiki/Holy) in that religious schema. Since antiquity chickens have been, and still are, a sacred animal in some cultures[[50]](#cite_note-50) and deeply embedded within belief systems and [religious worship](/wiki/Religious_worship). The term "Persian bird" for the [cock](/wiki/Rooster) appears to have been given by the Greeks after Persian contact "because of his great importance and his religious use among the Persians".[[51]](#cite_note-51) In [Indonesia](/wiki/Indonesia) the chicken has great significance during the [Hindu](/wiki/Hinduism) [cremation](/wiki/Cremation) ceremony. A chicken is considered a channel for [evil spirits](/wiki/Evil_spirit) which may be present during the ceremony. A chicken is tethered by the [leg](/wiki/Leg) and kept present at the ceremony for its duration to ensure that any evil spirits present go into the chicken and not the family members. The chicken is then taken home and returns to its normal life.

In [ancient Greece](/wiki/Ancient_Greece), the chicken was not normally used for sacrifices, perhaps because it was still considered an exotic animal. Because of its valor, the cock is found as an attribute of [Ares](/wiki/Ares), [Heracles](/wiki/Heracles), and [Athena](/wiki/Athena). The alleged last words of [Socrates](/wiki/Socrates) as he died from [hemlock](/wiki/Conium) poisoning, as recounted by [Plato](/wiki/Plato), were "[Crito](/wiki/Crito_of_Alopece), I owe a cock to [Asclepius](/wiki/Asclepius); will you remember to pay the debt?", signifying that death was a cure for the illness of life.

The Greeks believed that even [lions](/wiki/Lion) were afraid of roosters. Several of [Aesop's Fables](/wiki/Aesop's_Fables) reference this belief.

In the [New Testament](/wiki/New_Testament), [Jesus](/wiki/Jesus) prophesied the betrayal by [Peter](/wiki/Saint_Peter): "Jesus answered, 'I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.'"[[52]](#cite_note-52) It happened,[[53]](#cite_note-53) and Peter cried bitterly. This made the [rooster](/wiki/Rooster) a symbol for both vigilance and betrayal.

Earlier, Jesus compares himself to a mother hen when talking about [Jerusalem](/wiki/Jerusalem): "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."[[54]](#cite_note-54) In the sixth century, [Pope Gregory I](/wiki/Pope_Gregory_I) declared the rooster the emblem of Christianity[[55]](#cite_note-55) and another Papal enactment of the ninth century by [Pope Nicholas I](/wiki/Pope_Nicholas_I)[[50]](#cite_note-50) ordered the figure of the rooster to be placed on every church steeple.[[56]](#cite_note-56) In many [Central European](/wiki/Central_Europe) [folk tales](/wiki/Folklore), the [devil](/wiki/Devil) is believed to flee at the first crowing of a rooster.

In traditional [Jewish](/wiki/Orthodox_Judaism) practice, a kosher animal is swung around the head and then slaughtered on the afternoon before [Yom Kippur](/wiki/Yom_Kippur), the Day of Atonement, in a ritual called [kapparos](/wiki/Kapparos); it is now common practice to cradle the bird and move it around the head. A chicken or fish is typically used because it is commonly available (and small enough to hold). The sacrifice of the animal is to receive atonement, for the animal symbolically takes on all the person's sins in kapparos. The meat is then donated to the poor. A [woman](/wiki/Woman) brings a hen for the ceremony, while a [man](/wiki/Man) brings a rooster. Although not a sacrifice in the biblical sense, the death of the animal reminds the penitent sinner that his or her life is in [God's](/wiki/God) hands.

The [Talmud](/wiki/Talmud) speaks of learning "courtesy toward one's mate" from the [rooster](/wiki/Rooster).[[57]](#cite_note-57) This might refer to the fact that when a rooster finds something good to eat, he calls his hens to eat first. The [Talmud](/wiki/Talmud) likewise provides us with the statement "Had the Torah not been given to us, we would have learned modesty from cats, honest toil from ants, chastity from doves and gallantry from [cocks](/wiki/Rooster),"[[58]](#cite_note-58)[[59]](#cite_note-59) which may be further understood as to that of the gallantry of cocks being taken in the context of a [religious](/wiki/Religious) instilling vessel of "a girt one of the loins" ([Young's Literal Translation](/wiki/Young's_Literal_Translation)) that which is "stately in his stride" and "move with stately bearing" in the [Book of Proverbs](/wiki/Book_of_Proverbs) 30:29-31 as referenced by [Michael V. Fox](/wiki/Michael_V._Fox) in his *Proverbs* 10-31 where Saʻadiah ben Yosef Gaon ([Saadia Gaon](/wiki/Saadia_Gaon)) identifies the definitive trait of "A cock girded about the loins" in [Proverbs](/wiki/Book_of_Proverbs) 30:31 ([Douay–Rheims Bible](/wiki/Douay–Rheims_Bible)) as "the honesty of their behavior and their success",[[60]](#cite_note-60) identifying a spiritual purpose of a [religious](/wiki/Religious) vessel within that [religious](/wiki/Religious) instilling schema of purpose and use.

The chicken is one of the [Zodiac](/wiki/Zodiac) symbols of the [Chinese calendar](/wiki/Chinese_calendar). In [Chinese folk religion](/wiki/Chinese_folk_religion), a cooked chicken as a religious offering is usually limited to ancestor veneration and worship of village deities. [Vegetarian](/wiki/Vegetarian) deities such as the [Buddha](/wiki/Gautama_Buddha) are not recipients of such offerings. Under some observations, an offering of chicken is presented with "serious" prayer (while roasted [pork](/wiki/Pork) is offered during a joyous celebration). In [Confucian](/wiki/Confucian) Chinese [weddings](/wiki/Wedding), a chicken can be used as a substitute for one who is seriously ill or not available (e.g., sudden death) to attend the ceremony. A red [silk](/wiki/Silk) scarf is placed on the chicken's head and a close relative of the absent bride/groom holds the chicken so the ceremony may proceed. However, this practice is rare today.

A [cockatrice](/wiki/Cockatrice) was supposed to have been born from an egg laid by a rooster, as well as killed by a rooster's call.

## In history[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

[thumb|right|250px|The](/wiki/File:Red_junglefowl_hm.jpg) [red junglefowl](/wiki/Red_junglefowl) An early domestication of chickens in [Southeast Asia](/wiki/Southeast_Asia) is probable, since the word for domestic chicken (*\*manuk*) is part of the reconstructed [Proto-Austronesian language](/wiki/Proto-Austronesian_language) (see [Austronesian languages](/wiki/Austronesian_languages)). Chickens, together with dogs and [pigs](/wiki/Pig), were the domestic animals of the [Lapita](/wiki/Lapita) culture,[[61]](#cite_note-61) the first [Neolithic](/wiki/Neolithic) culture of [Oceania](/wiki/Oceania).[[62]](#cite_note-62) The first pictures of chickens in Europe are found on [Corinthian](/wiki/Corinth,_Greece) [pottery](/wiki/Pottery) of the 7th century BC.[[63]](#cite_note-63)[[64]](#cite_note-64) The poet [Cratinus](/wiki/Cratinus) (mid-5th century BC, according to the later Greek author [Athenaeus](/wiki/Athenaeus)) calls the chicken "the [Persian](/wiki/Iran) alarm". In [Aristophanes's](/wiki/Aristophanes) comedy [*The Birds*](/wiki/The_Birds_(play)) (414 BC) a chicken is called "the [Median](/wiki/Medes) bird", which points to an introduction from the East. Pictures of chickens are found on Greek [red figure](/wiki/Red-figure_pottery) and [black-figure pottery](/wiki/Black-figure_pottery).

In ancient Greece, chickens were still rare and were a rather prestigious food for [symposia](/wiki/Symposium).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) [Delos](/wiki/Delos) seems to have been a center of chicken breeding (Columella, *De Re Rustica* 8.3.4).

The [Romans](/wiki/Ancient_Rome) used chickens for oracles, both when flying ("ex avibus", [Augury](/wiki/Augury)) and when feeding ("auspicium ex tripudiis", [Alectryomancy](/wiki/Alectryomancy)). The hen ("gallina") gave a favourable omen ("auspicium ratum"), when appearing from the left (Cic.,de Div. ii.26), like the crow and the owl.

For the oracle "ex tripudiis" according to [Cicero](/wiki/Cicero) (Cic. de Div. ii.34), any bird could be used in [auspice](/wiki/Auspice), and shows at one point that any bird could perform the *tripudium*[[65]](#cite_note-65) but normally only chickens ("pulli") were consulted. The chickens were cared for by the pullarius, who opened their cage and fed them pulses or a special kind of soft cake when an augury was needed. If the chickens stayed in their cage, made noises ("occinerent"), beat their wings or flew away, the omen was bad; if they ate greedily, the omen was good.[[66]](#cite_note-66) In 249 BC, the Roman general [Publius Claudius Pulcher](/wiki/Publius_Claudius_Pulcher_(consul_249_BC)) had his "sacred chickens" "[[67]](#cite_note-67) thrown overboard when they refused to feed before the [battle of Drepana](/wiki/Battle_of_Drepana), saying "If they won't eat, perhaps they will drink." He promptly lost the battle against the [Carthaginians](/wiki/Carthaginian) and 93 Roman ships were sunk. Back in Rome, he was tried for impiety and heavily fined.[[68]](#cite_note-68) In 162 BC, the Lex Faunia forbade fattening hens to conserve grain rations.[[69]](#cite_note-69)[[70]](#cite_note-70) To get around this, the Romans castrated roosters ([capon](/wiki/Capon)), which resulted in a doubling of size[[71]](#cite_note-71) despite the law that was passed in Rome that forbade the consumption of fattened chickens. It was renewed a number of times, but does not seem to have been successful. Fattening chickens with bread soaked in milk was thought to give especially delicious results. The Roman gourmet [Apicius](/wiki/Apicius) offers 17 recipes for chicken, mainly boiled chicken with a sauce. All parts of the animal are used: the [recipes](/wiki/Recipe) include the [stomach](/wiki/Stomach), liver, [testicles](/wiki/Testicle) and even the [pygostyle](/wiki/Pygostyle) (the fatty "tail" of the chicken where the tail feathers attach).

The Roman author [Columella](/wiki/Columella) gives advice on chicken breeding in his eighth book of his treatise, *De Re Rustica* (On [Agriculture](/wiki/Agriculture)). He identified Tanagrian, Rhodic, Chalkidic and Median (commonly misidentified as Melian) breeds, which have an impressive appearance, a quarrelsome nature and were used for [cockfighting](/wiki/Cockfighting) by the Greeks (*De Re Rustica* 8.3.4). For farming, native (Roman) chickens are to be preferred, or a cross between native hens and Greek cocks (*De Re Rustica* 8.2.13). Dwarf chickens are nice to watch because of their size but have no other advantages.

According to Columella (*De Re Rustica* 8.2.7), the ideal flock consists of 200 birds, which can be supervised by one person if someone is watching for stray animals. White chickens should be avoided as they are not very fertile and are easily caught by eagles or goshawks. One cock should be kept for five hens. In the case of Rhodian and Median cocks that are very heavy and therefore not much inclined to sex, only three hens are kept per cock. The hens of heavy fowls are not much inclined to brood; therefore their eggs are best hatched by normal hens. A hen can hatch no more than 15-23 eggs, depending on the time of year, and supervise no more than 30 hatchlings. Eggs that are long and pointed give more male, rounded eggs mainly female hatchlings (*De Re Rustica* 8.5.11).

Columella also states that chicken coops should face southeast and lie adjacent to the kitchen, as smoke is beneficial for the animals and "poultry never thrive so well as in warmth and smoke" (*De Re Rustica* 8.3.1).[[72]](#cite_note-72) Coops should consist of three rooms and possess a hearth. Dry dust or ash should be provided for dust-baths.

According to Columella (*De Re Rustica* 8.4.1), chickens should be fed on barley groats, small chick-peas, millet and wheat bran, if they are cheap. Wheat itself should be avoided as it is harmful to the birds. Boiled ryegrass (*Lolium* sp.) and the leaves and seeds of alfalfa (*Medicago sativa* L.) can be used as well. Grape marc can be used, but only when the hens stop laying eggs, that is, about the middle of November; otherwise eggs are small and few. When feeding grape marc, it should be supplemented with some bran. Hens start to lay eggs after the [winter solstice](/wiki/Winter_solstice), in warm places around the first of January, in colder areas in the middle of February. Parboiled barley increases their fertility; this should be mixed with alfalfa leaves and seeds, or vetches or millet if alfalfa is not at hand. Free-ranging chickens should receive two cups of barley daily.

Columella[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) advises farmers to slaughter hens that are older than three years, because they no longer produce sufficient eggs.

According to Aldrovandi: Capons were produced by burning "the hind part of the bowels, or loins or spurs"[[73]](#cite_note-73) with a hot iron. The wound was treated with potter's chalk.

For the use of poultry and eggs in the kitchens of ancient Rome see [Roman eating and drinking](/wiki/Roman_eating_and_drinking).

Chickens were spread by [Polynesian](/wiki/Polynesia) seafarers and reached [Easter Island](/wiki/Easter_Island) in the 12th century AD, where they were the only domestic animal, with the possible exception of the [Polynesian rat](/wiki/Polynesian_rat) (*Rattus exulans*). They were housed in extremely solid [chicken coops](/wiki/Chicken_coop) built from stone, which was first reported as such to Linton Palmer in 1868, who also "expressed his doubts about this".[[74]](#cite_note-74)

## As food[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The [meat](/wiki/Meat) of the chicken, also called "chicken", is a type of [poultry meat](/wiki/Breast_meat). Because of its relatively low cost, chicken is one of the most used meats in the world. Nearly all parts of the bird can be used for food, and the meat can be cooked in many different ways. Popular chicken dishes include roasted chicken, [fried chicken](/wiki/Fried_chicken), [chicken soup](/wiki/Chicken_soup), [Buffalo wings](/wiki/Buffalo_wings), [tandoori chicken](/wiki/Tandoori_chicken), [butter chicken](/wiki/Butter_chicken), and [chicken rice](/wiki/Hainanese_chicken_rice). Chicken is also a staple of many [fast food](/wiki/Fast_food) restaurants.

### Eggs[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) In 2000, there were 50.4 million tons of eggs produced in the world (*Executive guide to world poultry trends,* 2001)[[75]](#cite_note-75) and an estimated 53.4 million tons of table eggs were produced during 2002.[[76]](#cite_note-76) In 2009, an estimated 62.1 million metric tons of eggs were produced worldwide from a total laying flock of approximately 6.4 billion hens.[[77]](#cite_note-77) Chicken eggs are widely used in many types of dishes, both sweet and savory, including many [baked goods](/wiki/Baking). Eggs can be scrambled, fried, hard-boiled, soft-boiled, [pickled](/wiki/Pickling), and poached. The [albumen](/wiki/Albumen), or egg white, contains protein but little or no [fat](/wiki/Fat), and can be used in cooking separately from the yolk. Egg whites may be aerated or whipped to a light, fluffy consistency and are often used in desserts such as [meringues](/wiki/Meringue) and [mousse](/wiki/Mousse). Ground egg shells are sometimes used as a [food additive](/wiki/Food_additive) to deliver [calcium](/wiki/Calcium). Hens do not need a male to produce eggs, only to fertilize them. A flock containing only females will still produce eggs; however, the eggs will all be infertile.

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

* [Abnormal behaviour of birds in captivity](/wiki/Abnormal_behaviour_of_birds_in_captivity)
* [Battery Hen Welfare Trust](/wiki/Battery_Hen_Welfare_Trust), a UK charity for laying hens
* [Chicken eyeglasses](/wiki/Chicken_eyeglasses)
* [Chicken fat](/wiki/Chicken_fat)
* [Chicken hypnotism](/wiki/Chicken_hypnotism)
* [Chicken or the egg](/wiki/Chicken_or_the_egg)
* [Chicken manure](/wiki/Chicken_manure)
* [Chook raffle](/wiki/Chook_raffle) – a type of raffle where the prize is a chicken.
* [Early feeding](/wiki/Early_feeding)
* [Feral chicken](/wiki/Feral_chicken)
* [Gamebird hybrids](/wiki/Gamebird_hybrids) – hybrids between chickens, peafowl, guineafowl and pheasants
* [List of chicken breeds](/wiki/List_of_chicken_breeds)
* [Rubber chicken](/wiki/Rubber_chicken)
* [Symbolic chickens](/wiki/Symbolic_chickens)
* [Tastes like chicken](/wiki/Tastes_like_chicken)
* [Unihemispheric slow-wave sleep](/wiki/Unihemispheric_slow-wave_sleep)
* "[Why did the chicken cross the road?](/wiki/Why_did_the_chicken_cross_the_road?)"

## References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

## Further reading[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite journal](/wiki/Template:Cite_journal)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)

## External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

[Template:Wikispecies](/wiki/Template:Wikispecies) [Template:Wikiquote](/wiki/Template:Wikiquote) [Template:Wikibooks](/wiki/Template:Wikibooks)

* [Template:Wiktionary-inline](/wiki/Template:Wiktionary-inline)
* [Template:Commons and category-inline](/wiki/Template:Commons_and_category-inline)
* [Template:Dmoz](/wiki/Template:Dmoz)
* [Template:Britannica](/wiki/Template:Britannica)

[Template:Chicken](/wiki/Template:Chicken) [Template:Poultry](/wiki/Template:Poultry)

[Template:Authority control](/wiki/Template:Authority_control)

[Category:Chicken](/wiki/Category:Chicken) [Category:Animals described in 1758](/wiki/Category:Animals_described_in_1758) [Category:Articles containing video clips](/wiki/Category:Articles_containing_video_clips) [Category:Junglefowls](/wiki/Category:Junglefowls) [Category:Poultry](/wiki/Category:Poultry) [Category:Magnetoreceptive animals](/wiki/Category:Magnetoreceptive_animals) [Category:Birds by common name](/wiki/Category:Birds_by_common_name)