

1961

EC61-1419 Should I Dub my Flock?

John Skinner

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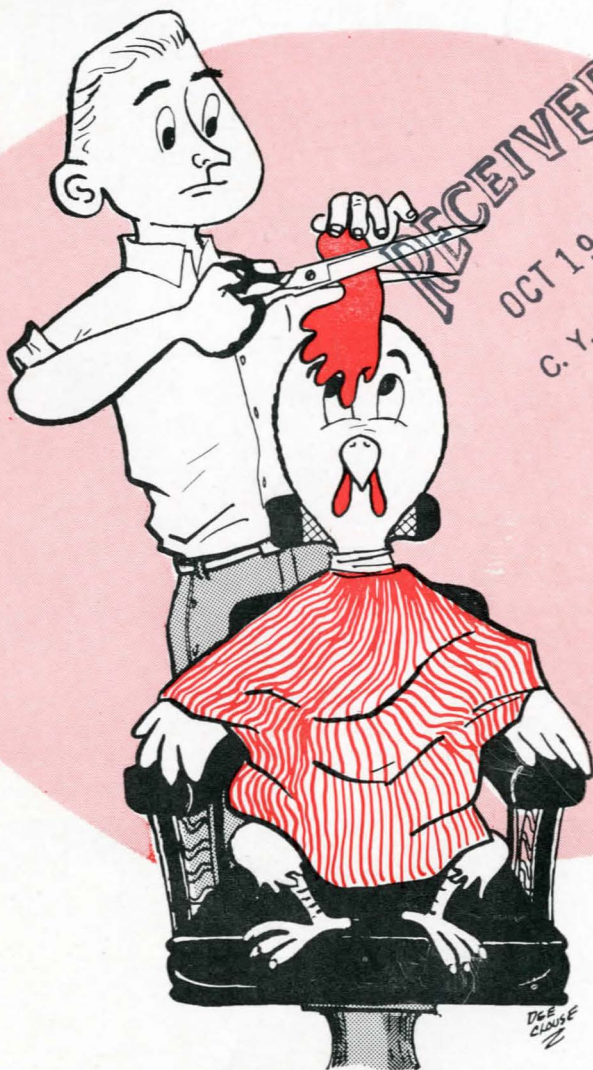
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SHOULD I DUB MY FLOCK?



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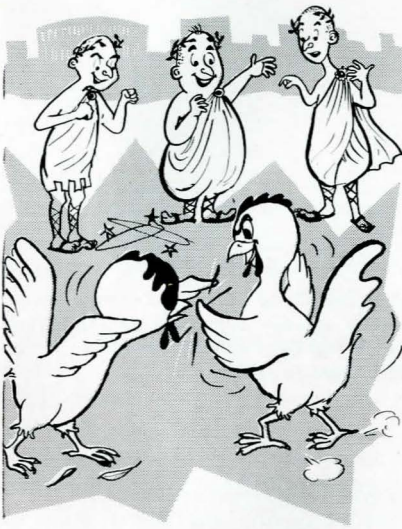
SHOULD I DUB MY FLOCK

By John L. Skinner
Extension Poultryman

Dubbing, to the poultry industry, means the removal of all or part of the fleshy appendages that grow from the head of the domestic chicken. In some cases, this consists of removing only a portion of the comb. In other cases, it consists of removing nearly all of the comb plus the wattles and ear lobes.

The time to do it, the suffering of the bird, and reasons for performing the operation, and its subsequent effects upon performance, health and sociological orders within the flock, will be discussed in this circular.

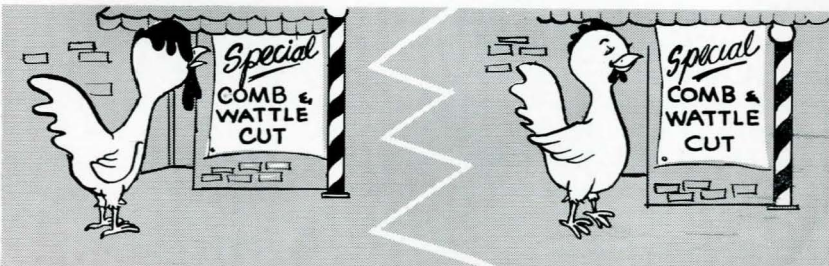
History of Dubbing



Man's first reason for dubbing was to try to increase the fighting cock's chances of victory. The large comb and wattles of the domestic male chicken make this part of his anatomy very easy to injure, with subsequent loss of blood. They also slow the movement of the bird's head and at times appear to make the bird uncomfortable in its movements.

The early cock fighters removed the comb and wattles as close to the surface of the head as possible. Thus, the bird's opponent would have a smaller, more quickly moving target to grab and a smaller surface to injure.

Today, the reasons for dubbing commercial poultry are considerably different. Nevertheless, the bird has the same structures today and the advantages of removing a portion of the comb and wattles are quite similar.

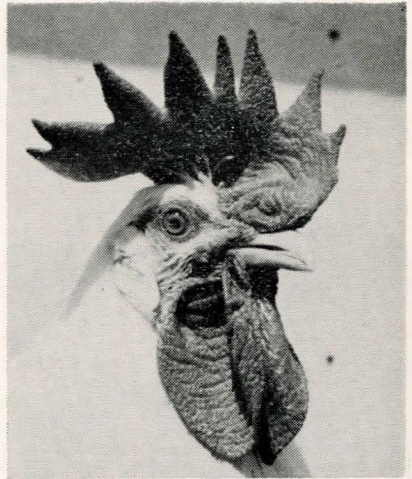


Why Dub?

Many of our egg-laying strains of birds have combs and wattles so large as to seriously interfere with their eating and drinking from automatic equipment. The "head furnishings" may restrict vision and cause a cowardly attitude or hesitancy to eat and drink normally. The large, delicate areas with blood running very close to the surface also are an injury hazard for the bird.



Adult White Leghorn hen. Her comb makes her almost entirely blind from the right side. (This kind of comb development makes dubbing desirable.)



A 14-week-old White Leghorn male (comb already beginning to lop.) This comb will be a definite hindrance to the bird later in life.

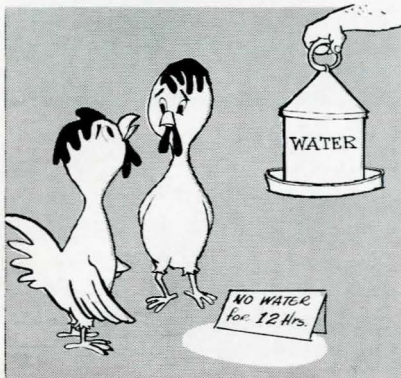
However, the comb and wattles are not entirely useless. During periods of very high temperature the blood running near the surface of these organs tends to act as a cooling mechanism for the bird. Blood running near the surface of the skin in these fleshy areas is also easily reached by the rays of the sun, which results in the synthesis or activation of Vitamin D.

When To Dub?

When can dubbing be done? Dubbing may be done at any time. The usual practice for laying hens is to dub them at day-old with a pair of manicure scissors and remove only the comb. Removing a portion of the wattles from day-old baby chicks is a very tedious operation and usually has only limited success. The removal of the comb of a day-old chick will not produce any excess bleeding and no special treatment is required. The comb of a chick dubbed at day-old will grow to between $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 inch in height and appear as a fleshy ridge on top of the head.

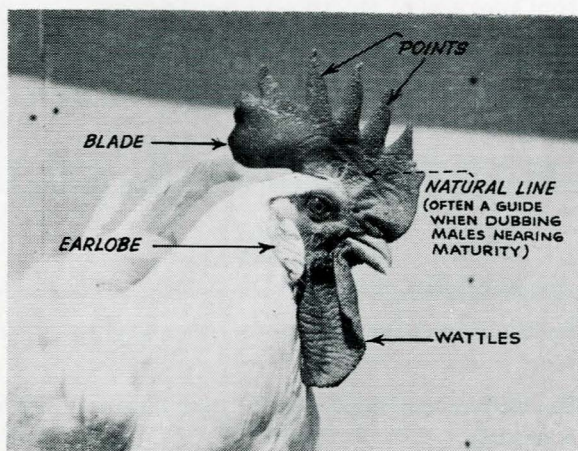
Pullets and males may be dubbed at one day of age or at any time thereafter. Usually, the next most logical time for dubbing is when the birds are moved from the brooding quarters, at around eight weeks of age. At this time, some bleeding can be expected. The operation should not be done at the same time as other practices that may together produce an undue amount of stress on the bird. The bleeding will usually stop within 30 minutes. No special treatment is required.

Feeding Vitamin K for five to seven days prior to dubbing may be desirable, although not usually necessary. Vitamin K helps rapid clotting of the blood. Also, it is desirable to withhold all water from the birds for a minimum of 12 hours before dubbing. This too, will reduce bleeding. Care must be used in hot weather, however, to prevent birds from becoming cannibalistic or excessively nervous as the result of being without water.



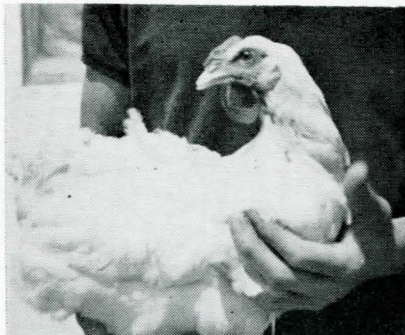
Removing water from birds at roosting time will usually accomplish the dehydration in time to move and dub them the following morning. In the case of males being dubbed at eight weeks of age or older, it may be necessary to remove the water as much as 24 hours before dubbing. Eight-week-old males usually have considerable comb and wattle development and, as a result, are subject to profuse bleeding.

Remove the comb and a portion of the wattles from males. The wattles of males are more easily injured, because of their size, than are the wattles of females.



Tools needed for dubbing are very simple. For the day-old chick a pair of curved manicure scissors is satisfactory. As the birds grow larger, a heavier pair of scissors will be needed. Bone shears with serated cutting edges are the best tool for dubbing males eight weeks of age or older. Tin snips or heavy metal cutting shears also may be used. In the case of the eight-week-old female, a heavy pair of surgical scissors is best.

The chicken shows very little pain or discomfort as the result of being dubbed.



The completed job gives a neat appearance.

Dubbing is desirable. Research at several of the state experiment stations indicates that production from dubbed birds is equal to, and in many cases superior to, the production of undubbed birds. This is true of nearly every trial, regardless of the age at which the birds were dubbed.

The simplest way to handle the dubbing operation is to have it done by the hatcheryman before the chicks are delivered. The cost is usually about 1¢ per chick and there is no loss of time or inconvenience to the grower.

Dubbing later in life involves more labor in handling the birds and giving them sufficient attention to prevent cannibalism.

In the case of males, it is desirable to dub at some time other than day-old, so that portions of the wattles can be removed. The comb of males, however, may be removed at day-old and the wattles later.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Dubbing Laying Hens

ADVANTAGES

Reduces the possibility of injury.

Permits better vision and tends to decrease flightiness, unnecessary scares, etc.

Allows the bird to eat more easily from mechanical feeders (and drink from waterers).

Reduces the possibility that slight injuries may cause blood to be wiped on the surface of white birds and thereby promote cannibalism.

Places all hens on a more nearly equal social basis.

Presents a more uniform flock appearance.

Eliminates the danger of frozen combs in extremely cold weather.

Reduces the area exposed to heat loss in cold weather and should slightly lessen the amount of feed required to maintain normal body temperatures in winter.

May increase egg production.

DISADVANTAGES

Creates an additional stress on the bird at the time of the operation. (This stress is very minimal at day-old).

Reduces slightly the bird's ability to lower its own body temperature by circulation of blood through the exposed areas of the skin.

May eliminate the amount of mixing that can be done as the result of culling one pen or one house of birds. (Undubbed birds should not be placed in a dubbed society, nor should dubbed be placed in an undubbed society. The social order within a flock demands that all birds be either dubbed or undubbed.)

Advantages and Disadvantages of Dubbing Breeding Males

ADVANTAGES

Allows males to eat and drink more easily from mechanical feeders and waterers.

Eliminates, to some extent, the possibility of injury from fighting among males.

Reduces the possibility of infection of injured wattles and comb.

Eliminates the possibility of the comb and wattles freezing during cold weather.

Improves fertility because males spend less time recovering from superficial head injuries.

DISADVANTAGES

Eliminates the possibility of observing comb shapes, defects or disqualifications where these may be considerations in the breeding program.

May require that males be maintained separately from females while recovering from the dubbing operation.

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Dean E. F. Frolik
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