



UNL POULTRY NEWS

Upcoming Activities:

Nebraska Poultry Association
Show and Meet—November 20-
21st, Lancaster Event Center

IPPE and ISF, Atlanta, GA., Jan
24-17th, 2022.

Newsletter Editor

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The turkey is a native of North America that traveled from Mexico to Spain in the 16th century to be bred and developed into the Spanish Black turkey in Spain and Black turkey in England. Then the turkey traveled back with colonists to North American in the 17th century. Today the Spanish and Norfolk Black turkey breed is a Heritage breed on the Livestock Conservancy Heritage list.

Eventually in the 20th century, intense breeding of domestic turkeys progressed into various breeds popular

with turkey ranchers that included the Bronze Turkey (which was selected for heavier weights and wider breasts) and the eventual White turkey that is so popular today for commercial turkey production.

The American Poultry Association recognizes several breeds of turkeys to include Bronze, Narrangansett, White Holland, Black, Slate, Bourbon Red, Beltsville Small White and Royal Palm. These breeds are commonly seen at local and State 4-H poultry shows and open shows. This past August, a nice small white was shown at the Nebraska State fair, and a large mature Spanish Black has frequently been shown at the Lancaster County fair for many years. Large Toms (male turkeys) are very territorial and protective in backyard flocks. Much of the time they become a pet rather than a Thanksgiving meal. Some turkey producers are specializing in “Heirloom Breeds”, such as the current Bronze, White and Black turkeys, that have been selected for hardiness and good reproduction with efficient body weight gain.

Nebraska State Fair 4-H Poultry Winners:

Best of Show—Rose Woepell , Holt County

Champion Egg Exhibit—Nolan Koranda, Seward County

Turkey Champion—Kyptan Scheideler, Valley County

Waterfowl Champion—Zach Pittman, Lancaster County



Blackhead Disease of Poultry

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Blackhead is an infectious disease that can infect all poultry species. The term “blackhead” is a misnomer, and the disease is more commonly (and more accurately) termed histomoniasis because the disease is caused by the protozoan parasite. *Histomonas meleagridis* has a complex life cycle that involves the cecal worm (*Heterakis gallinarium*) which become infected with the protozoan organism while residing in the bird’s ceca and the cecal worm then sheds the *Histomonas meleagridis* organism in its eggs. The cecal worm’s eggs are deposited in the ceca of the intestinal tract and are passed out of the bird through its droppings and thereby contaminating the environment and spreading the disease. Although chickens are susceptible to blackhead disease and become infected, they typically do not suffer severe disease and many times do not become ill and therefore are an important carrier and spreader of the disease. Turkeys and peafowl are extremely susceptible to the disease and often times it is fatal. However, turkeys are not infected by the cecal worm *Heterakis gallinarium*.

Clinical signs of blackhead disease in turkeys and peafowl include depression, droopy wings, yellow droppings, head held downward or under wing. Birds typically go off feed and become emaciated. Characteristic necropsy lesions of severe histomoniasis include cores or plugs in the intestinal ceca and circular “cauliflower” appearing lesions of the liver. A diagnosis can usually be made based on the history, clinical signs of the disease and necropsy lesions.

Several decades ago, when turkeys were moved from range / pasture rearing to confinement housing and drugs were available to treat blackhead, the disease was seldom a problem. However, these drugs are no longer available and although blackhead is not common in commercial poultry production, it does occur and when it does, it is very problematic. Blackhead is more common in small flocks particularly when turkeys and peafowl are reared with other avian species, usually chickens. Unfortunately, there is no treatment for blackhead and managing the disease is not a very fruitful option. The best course of action is prevention.

The first course of action to prevent blackhead disease is: **do NOT rear chickens and turkeys (or peafowl) together**. As stated above, the blackhead protozoan organism infects the cecal worm of chickens and is spread into the environment through droppings. The droppings go into the soil and the cecal worm eggs (containing the blackhead organism) can be ingested by birds (i.e., turkeys reared together with chickens) and/or earth-worms. Infected earthworms can become another source of infection. The second course of action is to worm your birds (especially chickens) frequently to control the cecal worms. These two management practices will significantly decrease your chances of getting blackhead disease in your turkeys or peafowl.

Fortunately, the blackhead organism (*Histomonas meleagridis*) does not infect humans or other mammals and is specific to the avian species. Eggs from infected birds are safe and are not considered a risk for spreading the disease. Birds that recover from blackhead and regain their health are safe to handle and eat.

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Top Turkey Producing States

1. Minnesota
2. North Carolina
3. Arkansas
4. Indiana

