

It seems to have been all about boys here at A Poultry Place recently — drakes and roosters to be exact.

During the past two months A Poultry Place has managed to accommodate more than the usual number of male animals after a few modifications to one of the existing night sheds. In total nine roosters and eight drakes have joined the family and even more exciting all are either partially or fully integrated with existing bachelors flocks of roosters or drakes already in residence.

Integrating male poultry is always an interesting challenge and requires lots of patience and time because you have to be on hand to manage the inevitable squabbling, which occurs for the first few days.

The drakes arrived with three female ducks after I agreed to look after them for a few weeks while their human carer sorted out better accommodation for them. A fox attack had killed six others from the flock and the human carer was concerned they were not secure enough. Having an empty shed I offered them temporary shelter, aware in the back of my mind that “temporary” may be permanent and accepting that.



The three females quickly deserted and joined the larger resident duck flock. The drakes were happy on their own and after a few weeks I thought I'd see if they would accept Fred, Barney and Blackie, three of the longer-term drake residents into their flock. They had got to know the three through a common wire fence and the fence sparring had stopped so I took it down to see what would happen. Blackie was raring to go, so much so that I feared he was on a mission to attack the newcomers but my fears were allayed when he showed no aggression whatsoever. A few months ago he lost his best mate Alex, whom he shared his night quarters with and apparently just craved some company. Fred and Barney were a little more circumspect and would return to their own night shed for the first few nights before going in with the newcomers one evening. Now each evening all 11 happily retire together into their shed for a safe night's rest.

The roosters were a little more of a challenge, which was no surprise. Roosters really are very magnificent creatures who do get a rough deal and have a poor reputation amongst the general public for being “too noisy” or “too aggressive” — I'm sure it doesn't surprise to hear that it's a view I don't share.

Three of the newcomers were bantams, who after a week's gradual introduction to the main flock of chickens were accepted by the other bantam roosters without any difficulty. The other roosters were all larger birds, who tend to be more aggressive towards each other. I can't always accept the larger boys because of lack of suitable accommodation but having made some recent changes to things here in the wake of recent storms I had a suitable area which in the course of a weekend I could transform into a safe haven where a small flock of larger roosters could live. My idea was that once I got the newcomers living peacefully together I would then introduce Rueben, Huw and Edward — three larger roosters already in residence. Rueben, Huw and Edward have spent the past few months wondering around in



the duck paddock during the day without bothering each other so I knew they would easily accept sharing accommodation.

For the first few weeks they all lived in the introduction area, which is an old donated bird aviary which is divided into two with a long outdoor run. Here animals can get to know each other visually before actually mixing together. After a few weeks I opened a dividing partition and so far all are fairly accepting of one another. This weekend I will introduce them to a young rooster who arrived a few days ago and all going well after another week or two I will relocate them to their new permanent accommodation.

Apart from rooster joy there has also been rooster sadness. In the week just passed I lost an old boy who had been living with me for nine years. He had come to me when he was only a few months old so I had know him almost all his life. His death came a few days after Angelo, a broiler rooster who had been living here since July 2008. It was a very sad scene when I came home from work and found Angelo dead from what I suspect was a heart attack, which is what usually kills broilers. He has the record of being the longest surviving broiler I have ever cared for — having lived here for 22 months. He died just short of what would have been his second birthday, but had lived 21 months longer than most broilers do.

As most of you are no doubt aware broiler chickens endure a hideous existence, living for approximately five weeks before being killed and processed for human consumption. “Advances” in agriculture through selective breeding means that a broiler will reach slaughter weight, approximately three kilograms, in that time. Growing at three times its natural rate means the broiler is so developmentally disabled that it can hardly move as it’s infant sized legs struggle to support its adult weight body.

Recently, Steggles, one of the largest producers of chicken meat in the country, have begun airing a TV commercial that portrays the chickens produced for meat living happy lives in a safe and caring environment. In the commercial there are scenes of chickens in clean, unpolluted sheds with sunlight streaming in through windows. A worker assures viewers “there’s no cages in our sheds”. Nothing could be further from the truth, investigations by animal advocates over the years have continually shown the appalling conditions broilers are kept in, and of course cages are used in egg production not in chicken meat production, so the claim about cages is misleading in the least.

Animal Liberation Victoria has lodged a complaint about the ad to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission urging them to take action against Steggles for their blatant attempt to mislead the public. They are asking for your support to lodge a complaint too. You can participate in this simple action to help broilers by submitting your complaint at [www.alv.org.au/storyarchive/0831stegglescruelty/steggles.php](http://www.alv.org.au/storyarchive/0831stegglescruelty/steggles.php). ●



**PS:** Patches, the mother cat, and her three kittens who have been in residence for the past 10 weeks have made some major progress and will all happily sleep on the bed with me. Two of the kittens in particular are very tame and friendly and ready to be rehomed. If you are able to provide a good, safe home for a young desexed cat or two, or know of anyone who is willing to please let me know.

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