

## CHICKEN PREDATORS

Nothing is more upsetting and disheartening than discovering missing, dead, or dying birds. Before you can adequately protect against a predator, you need to determine what it is....

**Bobcat...** Usually attacks free-range birds. Likes to “play” with its prey. Often leaves a pile of feathers at kill site, and a trail of feathers as it carries off the bird. Known to hunt any time of the day, but commonly observed at dawn, dusk, and early evening. Bobcat kills are often easy to identify because they leave claw marks on the shoulders, necks, and backs of the chicken. They usually start feeding on around the ribs and shoulders. Prey may be dragged around and covered with dirt and twigs.

**Cat (domestic)...** Usually eats only 1 or 2 baby poultry. Usually a tomcat. May leave wings and legs. Will kill nightly. Set a live Trap near the entrances with oil base tuna.

**Coyote...** Easy to spot; not very shrewd. Takes whole bird but feathers remain. Fairly easy to trap. Must use large enough live trap designed for coyote.

**Dog...** Multiple maimed and dead birds laying all over the place and missing birds. Wires, fences, and doors torn down. Will kill as many as it can catch for fun and play and will not stop until too tired. Usually carries one bird away, may hide it and eat it later. Non-feral dogs kill for sport. Generally once a dog gets a taste for the chase and maiming you can't cure them from doing it again.

**Fisher...** A problem on the East Coast. Will store extra food, returning later to eat it.

**Fox...** Will remove whole birds; feathers remain. Usually hunts at night, but will hunt during day (morning and evening). Will travel half a mile or more with the kill. Will wait and stalk for hours for the perfect time for kill. Poultry legs often found at fox den entries. Doesn't usually enter a poultry house; prefers free-ranging birds. Difficult to see and trap.

**Hawk...** Bothers ranged poultry or birds in open pens. Hunts during the day. Swoops down and takes whole bird. You may or may not hear birds squawk when attacked; death is sometimes instantaneous. Doesn't usually bother large turkeys or grown geese.

**Mink...** Usually takes smaller birds. Discharges an acrid musk that can be smelled for hours. Leaves neatly piled remnants. Some heads eaten.

**Owl...** Usually takes the head off grown birds and eats at chest area for the blood to pool for consumption. Small birds taken whole. Hunts day or night, and can enter through 1 square foot openings. Will attempt to fly through panes of glass upon spotting poultry. Will take roosting guineas from trees. Headless carcass found in the area. Does not usually bother grown turkeys or geese, but will attack offspring. Owls and other raptors are protected by Federal law; they cannot be trapped or killed without risk of heavy fines.

**Opossum...** Eats soft insides at kill site. Likes eggs. Picks away at bones. Mostly scavenges at night but can kill chickens like a raccoon.

**Raccoon...** Takes small birds whole. Adult chickens, guineas, ducks, geese, and turkeys usually eaten where killed. Eats breast meat only. Usually takes head off, but not always. Adept at squeezing through openings, using paws to remove birds from cages, and reaching through fencing to grab birds. They have figure like paws that can open latches and doors. They will even kill for fun and will come back nightly. Loves eggs. Bits of fur may be found at entry point. Sometimes travels in family packs. Very strong; you need good traps to hold them. Bait with oil based tuna.

**Rats...** Leaves bruises and bits on the legs of larger birds. Baby birds can be dragged into rat tunnels. Look for tunnels going under building walls and rat droppings near feed pans. Will sometimes eat with the birds. Will travel from building to building to feed. Eats eggs as quickly as they are laid. Pulls feathers off roosting birds and eats for protein. Most active at night. Will eat heads off birds.

**Skunk...** Prefers to eat the soft insides at kill site. Will often remove the head to drink the blood. Will steal eggs from underneath a broody hen. Eggs are usually opened on one end, with the other end crushed inward. Normally will not climb fences to get to poultry. May leave a faint skunk odor. Easy to trap.

**Snakes...** Most snakes kill their prey by swallowing it alive or constricting them to death before they devour them. Chicken wire is not a deterrent. Although they prefer rodents, it is also for them to swallow whole chicken eggs, sometimes several in a row. Signs include missing or broken eggs, and missing or dead birds (if too large to swallow after it is killed). You can put in wooden fake eggs in the nest and let them eat them (generally it will kill the snake).

**Turtle...** Usually attacks waterfowl in open water by snapping onto their legs and dragging them to the bottom or a nest. Large ducks that have been attacked may show bruising. Goes after ducklings and goslings the most. First sign of trouble may only be missing waterfowl, or adult birds defending offspring by fighting them in the water.

**Weasel...** Birds have bites on the neck and/or bluish discoloration of the skin around the head and under the wings. May attack only one or many. Sometimes runs in family packs. Occasionally leaves a faint skunk odor. Can enter a one-inch square opening. Hard to trap.

**Wolf...** As a rule, chickens are too small to be of interest.