

CO600 Smallholding Poultry Research

Moorhouse residence transcript

29-09-2018

All: [After general introductions and polite exchanges, the poultry related questions begin]

Joanna: Hi Suzie, Sarah and Tim thank you very much for taking the time out of your day to answer some of our questions about looking after chickens.

Susie: No worries, we're happy to help! Feel free to video what you want. Do you want to go into the run?

Damon: If you don't mind, that would be absolutely fantastic.

Susie: It's a project for uni, is it?

Damon: Yes, we're currently in the research stage and we are tasked with interviewing people who own chickens, which is why we've popped around to your lovely place today.

Susie: So what are you both actually studying then, if you're doing a project on chickens?

Joanna: You won't believe it, but we're actually studying Computer Science!

Susie: Oh, so like Sally's Dan?

Damon: Yeah, same course, same university. Just not at Masters level. Yet!

All: [Laughing]

All: [Walking to chicken run]

Susie: So, this whole bit is electrified, including that bit electrified up there, so they've got two runs. And I have to walk in at night and obviously shut them in at night, but they live in those two buildings there.

[Suzie disconnects the electric fence battery]

Joanna: Ahh, would you mind if we actually have a look at the chicken house itself?

Susie: No, go in, go in, go! The electric's off- bzzzttt!

All: [Laughing]

[Susie opens the fence]

All: [Walking into chicken run]

Damon: Thank you very much!

Susie: Mind that you don't break a limb.

Damon: Oh wow, these are really lovely chickens.

Sarah: Oh, these? These are just generic chickens.

Joanna: They look really happy though!

Damon: You've got ducks as well, that's great. Our supervisor was actually after ducks himself, but unfortunately couldn't keep them on the allotment.

Tim: That's a shame, they lay better eggs than the chickens!

Joanna: Do the ducks need to have a pond?

Sarah: They don't have to have a pond, so we give them a small container with some water. When it's hot, we sometimes give them a make-shift paddling pool!

Damon: So can you give us sort of a daily run through of how you look after your poultry?

Susie: So in the morning, I wake up, and after having breakfast and tea, I open this chicken house here. This isn't always at the same time though, and it depends if we have any events going on.

Joanna: Oh, what events do you do?

Susie: Mainly horse events, usually dressage competitions.

These can delay the chickens a bit. If they're not let out, and we know the grounds keeper is coming by, we ask them to let them out though.

They usually roam about during the day in the electric fence area, and we usually have to shut them up at night. This is especially annoying when the weather is miserable.

Damon: Ah, okay. So with the electric fence, I'm guessing you're able to keep the foxes out then?

Susie: Yeah, so as long as we remember to actually power it that is.

Tim: We haven't changed the battery in three months so it's quite weak. Give it a try!

[Damon touches the electric fence and feels a small current]

Tim: Haha, told you! I'll have to chuck those batteries on charge later in the week.

Susie: The crows are the darned biggest problem we face.

They come and take the eggs in the house when the barn door's open. So, what I do is I actually shut the house up and open this up (small chicken door instead of full sized door).

I shut them in at night here and they go into the other building. The ducks are laying here right now so that's really convenient.

Joanna: So how many ducks do you actually have about?

Susie: Two ducks. No, three ducks actually. They're all out here.

Joanna: Oh gosh, these eggs are huge!

Susie: That's why I have to shut the door and leave the hatch open because the crows go and nick the good ones!

Damon: Oh no, that's terrible.

Susie: Yeah, and they all go at night in here.

Damon: So what breeds of chickens do you have on the farm?

Susie: I used to have ones that lay blue eggs, and a lot of fancy ones, but I have just the old Warrens now. They just lay very well. They lay so well but they're molting at the moment. And we have a grey one at the moment.

Joanna: With this current setup, am I correct in assuming that you have had issues with foxes in the past?

Susie: Precisely that, this is why they live like this and not live in the fields. Every day I open the door and let them go down the field and one day they just picked them off. I lost all my ducks, I lost everything. I've lost hundreds.

Joanna: I'm sorry to hear that, but it looks like they're really comfortable here, and they've got a lot of space to roam about!

All: [Walking to chicken house]

Susie: So what I do is shut the door here, they go in here at night, and they have the other house next door. And I lock this door around here. And in the winter, I put mesh up here. But then they all to go bed. Their field is nicer than my garden!

All: [Laughing]

[Susie leaves to entertain other guests]

Joanna: So, can you tell me about your ducks?

Sarah: So, they're not great swimmers but they have a little pond they can get in if they want.

Joanna: How do you shut them up at night? Do they come in naturally?

Sarah: They just go in with the chickens at dusk, or when we herd them in if we've got plans. They're all in a big group together. Quite convenient actually and they seem to get on well.

Sometimes though, when we want to go out and we have issues shutting them up at four o'clock. They're like, eeh, it's still light, I don't wanna go to bed. So, we have to chase them and get them in. But normally, as it sort of dusks, they're happy to put themselves to bed, we just lock the door.

Damon: I'm surprised at what Susie said about the crows as we haven't heard of anyone experiencing this before, so how do they actually do it?

Sarah: Well, you can watch them from the horse stable. They fly in and if you put food out, they will all line up here on the fence. The chickens are quite protective, so they'll chase them. I mean, obviously once they're out on the grass though, the crows will fly in and try and get the eggs. It's a massive nuisance really.

Damon: Oh wow, they're quite ingenious then!

Sarah: Yeah, incredible to watch really. You wouldn't have known they were so smart!

Joanna: So, do you hatch chicks as well or?

Sarah: No, though we have in the past. But invariably, we ended up having cockerels, more so than hens.

With the cost of chickens as well, there's just not much point. We've had a few chickens that died of old age as well, but we just replace them from breeders we know in the area.

Joanna: Whereabouts do you get these chickens from if you don't mind me asking?

Sarah: We've been to a place in Horley, but we've also got some friends who got some from a place in Biggin Hill. We just usually ask around when we're in need.

Damon: Ah, I think that's where Sally and Steve got some chickens from recently as well.

Sarah: Yeah, I've heard they have quite the selection.

Joanna: Do you have internet reach here?

Sarah: Haha, we're lucky to even get it in the office!

Tim: We do get signal from our neighbour's Wi-Fi. Would you be able to hack it for us?

All: [Laughing]

Damon: So I can see on my phone that I get mobile data out here. Do you guys get signal out here as well?

Tim: What's a smart phone?

[Tim pulls out an iPhone]

All: [Laughing]

Tim: But yeah, we do get good mobile signal out here. One of the perks of being close to Gatwick!

Joanna: Do you only have one cockerel then?

Sarah: At the moment, yeah. But we've had two or three and they all get on fine. They have their own little patches.

Joanna: I guess if they've got a lot of space and they've all grown up with each other, they get along fine.

Sarah: Yeah, we've had no issues but quite a few of our friends have. It got so bad once, that some had to be put down, otherwise they'll just kill each other.

Damon: That's a shame, I'm sorry to hear that.

Sarah: Oh, don't apologise. It's just natural for them after all.

[Susie returns]

Susie: Would anyone like a drink?

Damon: A coffee would be lovely.

All: [Walk back to main house and get drinks]

All: [Walk back to stable next to chicken enclosure]

Susie: So the minute you let them down the field they're gone, this is why this bit is electrified down to there. It's because the fox just comes. I've had him in the school, I've had him come out the chicken house with one in his mouth.

Sarah: And they can climb through the netting like that.

Susie: Yeah, the only issue is that they can get in this way, but luckily, the last time we got him in the school, we put the dogs on him and he jumped out the bottom. But this is electrified, all of this is.

It's terrible really because I'd love to have them in the fields. It was so lovely having them running around the place. And the ducks, as they were walking down the fields, they would be sitting on the hedge, and the fox will just pick them out and pick them out.

Damon: I'm really sorry to hear that. So why do you own chickens and ducks?

Susie: They're just really nice pets. They're nice and friendly and lovely to have around. The eggs are also an added bonus, and well, we own a farm and it is nice for guests as well.

Joanna: Awesome. Thank you for your time today and for letting us see your chickens and ducks. They're so adorable and friendly!

Damon: Thank you very much!

Susie: It's no issue at all! If you need anymore information, feel free to drop in anytime.

All: [Informal goodbyes]