



## **Game Bird & Poultry Health Fact Sheet**

### **Mycoplasma or “Bulgy Eye”**

#### **What is it?**

Mycoplasma is a very common bacterial infection. There are many different strains of Mycoplasma, but in this fact sheet we will focus on *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (Mg) which is one of the most common types of Mycoplasma in game birds, poultry and pigeons.

Mg can be a very nasty disease in birds. Not all birds show signs of the disease but can carry it. This makes it difficult to control.

We often see Mg causing a sinusitis in game birds which makes the eye swell. Hence it is colloquially known as Bulgy eye. See pictures below. Other clinical signs of Mg are shown below.

The disease gets worse in all birds in times of stress and this is when we see clinical signs. These periods of stress can include;

1. handling, for example biting or catching,
2. when the immune system is suppressed by other infections and/or parasites,
3. During the laying season.

It can easily pass between birds through discharges, sharing open drinking water and it can be passed from the laying bird through to the egg. The latter means of spread makes the disease persist in flocks for long periods if it remains unchecked.

Humans handling birds can also transmit it from bird to bird or pen to pen or farm to farm via their hands and clothing. Equipment is another method of spread e.g. buckets/drinkers etc.

#### **Symptoms / Clinical Signs**

- Swollen eyelids and sinuses (gives the name Bulgy Eye)
- Coughing and Sneezing. Birds may be seen shaking their heads and have difficulty breathing
- Eye & nasal discharge (there is sometimes a sweet smell in hen the house or rearing shed according to some farmers)
- Gaspings
- Reduced egg production and poor fertility and chick viability
- Loss of appetite
- Poor growth rates of poults
- Birds may be found off their legs

### **Quill Productions Veterinary Services**

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### **Diagnosis**

An accurate diagnosis is essential. Not all swollen eyes are caused by Mg. plus Bulgy eye is often found in conjunction with other diseases such as ART or Coronavirus. This may affect the way the flock is managed or treated.

Diagnosis must be performed by a vet when examining sick birds or by post mortem. Swabs and blood samples can be taken to confirm the presence of the disease and the strain.

### **Treatment**

Treatment programmes will be advised by a vet. The mainstay of treatment is using antibiotics which alleviate symptoms in all but the worst affected. However, even after treatment, the bird can remain a carrier of the disease which potentially can lead to spread to others so culling birds with clinical signs is very necessary. The carriers can become infective again at times of high stress.

### **Prevention**

- Buying birds in from a mycoplasma tested flock (but this is still not a 100% guarantee).
- Select breeding birds carefully and preferably over winter your own disease free breeding stock.
- Keep stress levels at a minimum to prevent strain on the immune system. If stress is unavoidable (e.g. catching up, transportation, a change in home or food) then additional supplementation using a multi-vitamin (such as Quill Vit Extra) or an immune boosting tonic will help (such as Quill Boost for game birds and pigeons, Nutrimix for hens, turkeys and quail).
- Use a quality cleaner and disinfectant for houses and equipment between flocks of birds.
- If introducing new birds to the flock, quarantine for 2-3 weeks.
- If visiting several different flocks of birds or rearing sheds in one day, use a hand sanitiser, change clothing and disinfect boots between each location. If a shed or flock is known to have mycoplasma, use separate overalls when tending to them.

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- Use a special water acidifier (such as Quill Boost Tonic for game birds and pigeons and Nutrimix for poultry in the drinking water) to strengthen the immune system and reduce disease levels in the water.
- Use nipple drinkers (closed water drinkers) to stop cross infection through contaminated water. Water sanitizers can also aid in reducing the spread of Mycoplasma in the water.
- Ensure that birds aren't overcrowded and that there is good ventilation.
- Vaccinations are available, however, due to there being many different strains of Mycoplasma, it can be difficult to do so. If you wish to use vaccinations, it is essential to speak to a vet.
- Swabs and blood testing can be used to confirm the presence of the disease and the strain present.
- Prevent contact with wild birds – wild birds can carry the disease and infect your birds. Providing netting over your pens and hiding the drinkers and feeders under covers will help to reduce wild birds entering and coming into contact with your birds.

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