

FEATURES THAT RAISE THE INDEX OF SUSPICION OF ORGANIZED COCKFIGHTING

Cockfighting season usually runs from late November through the beginning of July as birds are not fought during molting, which occurs between late July and mid-November.

Veterinarians may encounter organized cockfighting in one of two ways:

1. Rooster(s) presenting for medical care with medical history findings or physical exam findings suspicious of organized cockfighting that prompts a good faith report to law enforcement.
2. Request from an investigating agency to participate in a scene investigation and/or to render an opinion regarding alterations and/or injuries present on a live or deceased rooster(s) suspected to be involved in organized cockfighting.

Basic Terminology

- **Cock:** male chicken, which has completed its first molt, typically 2 years of age or older
- **Hen:** female chicken
- **Rooster:** male chicken
- **Stag:** young male chicken, which has not yet completed its first molt, typically 18 months of age or younger

Birds associated with organized cockfighting may fall into one of two categories:

1. Breeding
 2. Conditioning/Fighting
- A fighting operation may include only one or any combination of these categories
 - The medical findings (i.e., sex, age, injuries) will vary based on the type of operation

Styles of Cockfighting

- **Knives:** roosters are fought with only one knife, typically attached to the left leg
 - Long knives (may be referred to as Filipino slashers)
 - Short knives (may be referred to as Mexican slashers)
- **Gaffs:** roosters are fought with a pair of gaffs, one on each leg
 - Metal gaff (curved metal blade)
 - Acrylic gaff (about the size of a slightly curved golf tee)
- **Naked heeled:** roosters fought with their natural spurs, which may be sharpened

Scene Investigation

- **Housing**
 - Sexually mature male birds maintained in isolation from other sexually mature male birds
 - May be tethered or housed in an individual enclosure
 - May be housed with hen(s) for breeding purposes
- **More roosters than hens in the population**
- **Paraphernalia associated with organized cockfighting**
 - Pharmaceuticals and nutritional supplements
 - Training and fighting- Sparing muffs, fighting pit (may be disassembled), knives, gaffs, etc.

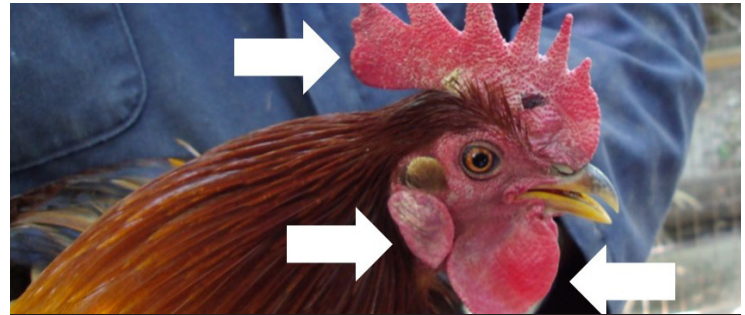


Image 1 – Comb, wattles and earlobes intact



Image 2 – Comb, wattles and earlobes removed



Image 3 – Natural spur



Image 4 – Spur cut down to approx. 1 cm in length



Image 5 – One spur cut down to approx. 1 cm in length (top)

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Signalment

- Hybrid strains related to Old English Game, in addition to Oriental Game fowl, such as the American Game are the predominant breed of fighting birds in the U.S.
- Only roosters that have reached sexual maturity are fought
- Roosters will typically begin training/conditioning around 1 year of age or older
- Cocks are typically 4-6 lbs. and well-conditioned (BCS 2-3/3)

Physical Exam Findings

- Removal of all or a portion of the comb, wattles, and ear lobes
- One or both spurs cut down to approximately 1 cm in length (to attach a knife or gaff) or natural spurs may be sharpened
- Dermal Injuries in Roosters that have been fought
 - Primarily located on the head
 - Injured tissue can be edematous and contused, especially peri-orbitally
 - Wounds can also be present on the lateral and ventral aspects of the body, and the legs
 - » Wounds are due to either blunt trauma or sharp trauma
 - » Blunt force injury can be caused by a bird's beak, as it pecks and pulls. Such injuries have been reported to create "hour-glass-like" lesion
 - » Abrasions, also a blunt force injury, can be caused by the bird's claws, natural spurs or acrylic gaff
 - » Sharp force injuries, such as stab or incised wounds can be caused by gaffs or knives
 - Occasionally, if a bird survives a fight, healing wounds or scarring may be observed. This is dependent on the style of fighting, as the use of steel gaffs or knives increases the lethality of the fight
- Bird aggressive and human aggressive behavior
- Permanent or temporary identification (may be used in isolation or in combination):
 - Leg band- Metal band or plastic band placed around one leg of various colors. May contain identifying information, such as a name, identification number, address or phone number. Bird may have more than one leg band present
 - Wing band- Metal band placed through the craniomedial skin of the wing (featherless area). Bands can be various colors and may contain identifying information on one or both sides. Bird may have one or two wing bands present
 - Toe punch- Typically around 5mm in diameter circular skin defect in the interdigital webbing between two toes. One or both feet may be affected, and one or two punches may be present on a single foot. Typically, there is a record of what the toe punches indicate, similar to ear notching in pigs
 - Removal of interdigital webbing- Similar to toe punches, the interdigital skin may also be removed. One or both feet may be affected, and one or two interdigital webbings may be present on a single foot.
 - Tattoo- May occasionally observe a tattoo, typically placed the craniomedial skin of the wing (featherless area), on either the lateral or medial aspect of the wing

Diagnostic Findings

- Anabolic steroids (cocks in training or recently fought)
 - Consider testing if suspected to have been recently fought or being prepared to fight
- Birds maintained for fighting purposes are often infected with a variety of respiratory diseases, some of which may be reportable, including but not limited to:
 - Mycoplasmosis
 - Infectious laryngotracheitis
 - Infectious bronchitis virus
 - Pox virus
- Testing for these and other disease processes, such as Pullorum and Avian Influenza, should be considered and discussed with the State Veterinarian

These are features that may raise your index of suspicion. No one item is indicative of involvement in organized cockfighting, but a closer look into a situation maybe warranted when these findings appear repeatedly or in combination.

References

- Christiansen S, Dantzler F, Goodwin J, et al. The Final Round, A Law Enforcement Primer for the Investigation of Cockfighting and Dogfighting: The Humane Society of the United States.
- Touroo R, Reisman R. Animal Fighting. Veterinary Forensic Pathology, Volume 2: Springer, 2018;97-119.