

Overstocked Cocks

Bachelor roosters need a home.

Life can be hard for young cocks. They're only valued for breeding and eating. But for the most part they're just a nuisance — getting in fights, bothering chicks and causing a ruckus. (Get your mind outta the gutter. We're talking about roosters!)

As with cows, goats and marijuana, chickens suffer from gender discrimination. The females are simply more valuable than the males. Some roosters survive long enough to become fryers, but poultry hatcheries often kill rooster chicks unless they can sell them for peanuts. Those who make it out alive often end up where they're not wanted.

Lane County resident Claudia Bark knows all about it. She's taken in six young roosters that were dumped on the road near her farm west of Eugene, but now they're bothering her hens and they've got to go.

"These guys are teenagers," Bark says woefully. "They're terrible at crowing, and they're bad lovers — totally inexperienced. They make a lot of noise, they're messy and

they don't give anything back. My hens are really mad at me."

Bark blames a local farm store for supplying many of the roosters that are later abandoned. Coastal Farm Supply on West 6th Avenue gives away free chicks every March, right before Easter. Coastal gets the chicks — all males — from Shank's Hatchery in Portland for about 20 cents a squawk. They're cheap because they're surplus; Shank's donates the rooster chicks it can't sell to the Portland Zoo and a local raptor rehabilitation center, where they make a tasty snack for carnivores.

Coastal employee Kristin White says that the store posts a notice that all its free chicks are roosters, but it doesn't mention the law. Within Eugene city limits, roosters are *galli non grati*, banned by the city code.

Lane County Animal Control program manager Mike Wellington says that most city folk who end up with roosters just don't know better. But when neighbors complain about the early-morning cock-a-doodling, Animal Control pays a visit. Wellington says

that most people are cooperative about getting rid of their roosters, but where's an unwanted cock to go?

Sometimes people eat their roosters, but the breeding types that Coastal gives away are scrawnier and slower-growing than game chickens. Some people simply ditch unwanted roosters on rural roads. Diana Huntington, a facilitator for the local Overpopulation Crisis Coalition, says that animal abandonment is illegal, but people do it all the time, dumping rabbits, cats, dogs, and even goats where they think no one will see. Roosters are often found wandering in the wetlands, where they are prey to raccoons and feral cats.

When Animal Control confiscates a rooster, staff members try to adopt it out to a country home. But getting rid of roosters is a tough task, Wellington says, and it has a dark side. Some people use roosters for cockfighting, which is a criminal offense. Wellington lists the paraphernalia: "Gaffs, which are razors for the legs; sparring balls, exercise cords, tools and drugs; steroids, stuff to stop bleeding." But cockfighting investigations just aren't a priority, Wellington says, and resources at Animal Control are already stretched thin.

Wayne Geiger, founder and president of the Lighthouse Farm Sanctuary in Salem, is also trying to help. His sanctuary provides safe harbor for abused and neglected farm animals, but he already has 17 unwanted roosters and can't take any more. "The problem is, roosters aren't needed," he says. "The ultimate humane solution is to go vegan and not use eggs."

But Americans demand dairy, so the question remains: What to do with unwanted fowl? Most hatchery-born chickens are bred to breed — that is, to produce more egg-laying hens. But it only takes one rooster to screw a hen house, so most feathered boys are out of luck.

Bark, for her part, was ready to give her six foster roosters to a neighbor to eat, but a friend persuaded her to stay the execution pending the publication of this article. Besides, the boys are getting better with the ladies. "They've been practicing their crows a lot, and since they've been with girls they're more savvy," Bark says.

Any rural chicken breeders out there in need of some strapping young roosters? Call Claudia Bark at 345-3806.

For more information about local abused and neglected farm animals, visit www.lighthousefarmsanctuary.org



Name: **Rex**
Age: **4 months**
Breed: **Plymouth Barred Rock**
Likes: **Philosophy**



Name: **Smee**
Age: **4 months**
Breed: **Plymouth Barred Rock**
Likes: **Mead**



Name: **Gandalf**
Age: **4 months**
Breed: **Buff Orpington**
Likes: **Chicks**



Name: **Mo**
Age: **4 months**
Breed: **Buff Orpington**
Likes: **Doodling**



Name: **Chip**
Age: **4 months**
Breed: **Production Red**
Likes: **Cheetos**



Name: **Thrasher**
Age: **4 months**
Breed: **Production Red**
Likes: **Punk music**

Terror in the South Hills

Three days in a Sanipac prison

A midnight scream echoed across the south Eugene hills. The kind of desperate high-pitched sound that conjures up images of eagles and weasels in combat, or a cat getting its tail sucked into a vacuum cleaner, or a Pomeranian under foot. It was in fact the sound of a small hen being mauled by two hungry raccoons.

Banty was an independent bird. It's why we got her, why she became an urban chick. She had been abused on the farm, bottom of the pecking order, raped by roosters twice her size. She survived by flying over the fence and sleeping in trees, laying little eggs in the woods.

She had a better life with us in our backyard. No roosters, plenty of food, water and fresh straw, a small flock of friendly hens to keep her company. But her wandering ways persisted, and she was not always around when we locked up the hen house in the evening.

Going back to sleep after that scream was not an option. I grabbed a flashlight — didn't bother with pants — and ran out back. It occurred to me later that men charging into combat with wild animals should always wear pants. I chased away the raccoons and found Banty's mangled, bloody body surrounded by feathers.

"You won't have her for dinner tonight," I said to the

retreating predators as they climbed the chainlink fence. I carried the feathered remains to the garbage can, figuring I'd bury her later, somewhere the raccoons wouldn't dig her up.

I put off the unpleasant task a few days and Sunday arrived, time to wheel the Sanipac can down to the street. I expected that awful smell of rotting flesh when I opened the lid, but all that came wafting out were the usual aromas of unrecyclables. I peered in. At the bottom of the can I saw her little red head, poking up through the trash, and it moved.

"You're not dead," was all I could say to her, shocked and amazed that she had somehow survived not only a brutal attack, but also three days in a hot plastic Sanipac prison.

I carried her to water and she drank and drank. Her legs didn't work, but they seemed intact. Her wings were OK. Bones were showing on the back of her neck and she looked like she'd been run over by a lawn mower. A hour later she was pecking at corn and staggering around weakly. A few days in quaran-



tine and she happily rejoined the flock. We watched to make sure the other hens didn't peck her tender wounds.

Chickens will tell you remarkable things if you take the time, listen very carefully and fill in the gaps between clucks.

"Horrible monsters with bad breath and big teeth tried to rip my head off," she says. "Worst than getting raped by roosters three times my size." (She tends to exaggerate.)

"I remember being dragged by the neck, then waking up in pain in a dark place, bad smells, very hot, very thirsty. Thought this is must be where chickens go after they die."

She hasn't flown the coop since, but she has a different look in her eye when she sees me.

"Life for us chickens is hard and short," she tells me. "People steal our precious eggs no matter how many we lay. They take our beautiful bodies and make us into sandwiches and salads. They abuse us. They throw us away like garbage when they are done with us."

Chickens don't do sarcasm very well, but I got the point. I apologized profusely. She gets cat food and comfrey leaves now for special treats, and we will grow old together. —Ted Taylor