Strange hen discoveries

Twelve researched stories, each tied to a source.

The hen is easy to take for granted. Look a little closer, and the official record is much stranger. These are not legends. Where a caption or a family account is the warrant, this sheet says so.

1. An empty shed, counted as zero

If a poultry shed is empty on 1 June, the official England release asks the respondent to specify "0 animals" and tick that the shed is temporarily empty, between crops, for cleaning. Source: Livestock populations in England at 1 June 2026.

2. 73% and 72%, two different totals

Hens and pullets laying eggs for eating account for 73% of the breeding and laying fowl. Table chickens account for 72% of all poultry. They are two official percentages of two different totals. Source: the same England release.

3. A maternity ward for hens, 1938

A Harris & Ewing photograph in the Library of Congress, dated 9 August 1938, is captioned as "the first temperature controlled maternity ward for hens," at a governmental experimental farm in Washington, D.C. This sheet dates that wording to the caption, not to a modern paper. Source: Library of Congress.

4. Egg rationing lasted until 1953

The British Egg Industry Council's official history says a wartime shortage of animal feed reduced the number of hens, forcing egg rationing to remain in place until 1953. Source: BEIC, Our History.

5. The Little Lion, dropped, then returned

The official history says the Little Lion was a British Egg Marketing Board trademark, that the Government removed the requirement to stamp eggs in 1968, and that the Lion was dropped in 1971. The Lion Quality mark, including a best-before date, was reintroduced onto shells of Lion eggs in 2000. Source: BEIC, Our History.

6. "Go to Work on an Egg"

The same official history says the slogan was introduced and featured on television advertisements with comedian Tony Hancock, and that advertising and other Board activities saw egg consumption increase by about 14 per cent between 1957 and 1970. Source: BEIC, Our History.

7. A paraffin incubator, about 1930

The Science Museum Group holds a Hearson Junior 600 egg incubator, about 1930: water circulation, paraffin heated; and a Hebditch incubator of about the same date, convection circulated, also paraffin heated. Source: Science Museum Group, objects 1985-2300 and 1985-2301.

8. Red-tinted lenses, in a 1963 press collage

A Daily Herald collage in the Science Museum Group records a veterinary surgeon, Dr William Blount, describing red-tinted contact lenses to reduce fighting and increase egg production. This sheet leaves it as a press object, not as a proved modern standard. Source: Science Museum Group.

9. Ultra violet light, and a cage ban

A Defra press release of 6 December 2011 said an EU ban on battery cages would come into effect on 1 January 2012, and that the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency would use ultra violet light to identify eggs not laid in the new cages. Source: Defra, 6 December 2011.

10. The cockerel that lived without a head

On 10 September 1945, in Fruita, Colorado, a bird later called Mike lived on after being beheaded. A BBC feature of 10 September 2015 tells the family account and uses a Life magazine photograph. He is said to have lived 18 months, and to have died in Phoenix in the spring of 1947. Source: BBC News Magazine.

11. The Chicken of Tomorrow

A USDA National Agricultural Library collection describes the National Chicken-of-Tomorrow Program, 1945–51, whose thrust was to encourage meat-type poultry breeders to develop a better, more efficient broiler. Source: USDA NAL, Robert Morris Smith Papers.

12. A tin of Poultry Spice

The Science Museum Group holds a tin of Poultry Spice "for increasing egg supply and keeping chickens healthy," supplied by Trevithick of Kidderminster, 1920–1940. The promise is in the object's name, not treated here as a proved result. Source: Science Museum Group, object 1989-252.

ReallyByte — Fun. Educational. Useless. typographic sheet, no photographs. Read the stories at hens.farmyard.im. Checked 17 November 2026.