

## What about re homing ex-battery birds?

When thinking of taking on some new birds, many smallholders consider giving a home, and a new lease of life, to some ex-battery hens. But when is an ex-bat not an ex-bat? The introduction of the battery cage ban in January 2012 was heralded as an end to hens in cages throughout Europe. However, it also created a misconception that all laying hens in the UK are now either free range or barn birds. The higher welfare cages that replaced the barren battery system are known as colony, or enriched, cages. This system allows hens greater space to move within a large cage that typically holds around 80 hens. Scratch mats and perches are usually provided, as are small nesting areas. Although their living standards have improved, in general, commercial laying hens are sent to slaughter at around 78 weeks of age, when their working life draws to a close. Luckily some of these birds find themselves being taken on by the British Hen Welfare Trust, a charity which re-homes commercial laying hens destined for slaughter and re-homes them, predominantly as family pets. This pioneering initiative means tens of thousands of hens are given the chance to enjoy a free range retirement each year. Over 92% of the hens the BHWT find homes for come from the caged sector, although occasionally they take barn hens and free range hens. The BHWT will always advise which system the birds you are adopting have come from.

## Top tips for re homing ex bats

Re-homing ex-commercial birds (ex-bats) can be immensely rewarding because not only do you save the lives of the hens you adopt, which would otherwise have gone to slaughter, but you will be rewarded with deliciously fresh and tasty eggs!

Here are some tips from the British Hen Welfare Trust on caring for your ex-bats:

**1 Treats:** Ex-bat hens are very adept at getting what they want! However, treats should be fed in moderation as hens can suffer from obesity.

**2 Other pets:** Hens are happy to live alongside most other pets and often forge unlikely friendships. However, introductions should be closely monitored. A sharp peck will ensure most pets have a healthy respect for their feathered friends.

**3 Health:** A simple weekly examination of your chickens, easily done with a cuddle, will help you recognise what is normal and what is a potential health issue. We have guidelines to help with this.

**4 Eggs:** Generally ex-bats carry on laying, but it is not guaranteed – after all, they are looking for a free range retirement.

**5 Have fun:** Keeping ex-bats is a wonderfully rewarding experience, so enjoy the pleasure and enrichment we know they will bring to your life!



These re-homed exbats are enjoying their new free range life in the sunshine



It's easy to check your birds' heads while giving them a comforting cuddle



Eglu Classic Purple coop and run, from £31499, Omlet

The design of the FeelGoodUK chicken coop, £8899, from Amazon, makes it ideal for a small garden



The Eglu Classic chicken coop has easy to access egg ports



The Pets Imperial Marlborough, large chicken coop, £19497, from Amazon, comes with a run and can house 10 birds



Boughton chicken coop, from £29999, Omlet