Birds of a feather...

After King Charles rehomed the one millionth hen from the British Hen Welfare Trust – or BHWT – we discovered just how much we've become a nation of chicken lovers

Hopping aboard

All aboard the eggs-press

Reaching into the chicken coop, I selected an egg before taking it to the kitchen, cracking it and whisking it into my cake batter.

Five years earlier, my husband Mike and I had bought a fixer-upper house and, as I loved baking and making my own pasta, we had decided to get some chickens.

We got a chicken coop before reaching out to the BHWT and rehoming four hens.

Mike was a train enthusiast, so we named them Annie, Claribel, Mavis and Henrietta after Thomas the Tank Engine characters.

They were ex-commercial hens and they were missing a few feathers but in our eyes they were perfect.

Mike had a model railway set he wanted to install in the garden and at around two foot high, it was the perfect size for our hens.

'We've got to let them make it their home,' I said.

Mike set up the tracks with one of the hens helping out by pecking them down once they were in place.

Then we trained the chickens to lay their eggs in the station.

They'd hop into the Pullman dining carriage at feeding time before taking a little ride around the garden before bed.

Since then, our hens have become the talk of the town and the neighbours love to come and watch them ride the eggs-press line!

Giving these animals a second chance has been as much a win for us as it has for them.

Watching their personalities come out as they settle in is the best part.

Some like to eat grapes, others prefer sweetcorn and one always jumps on to my shoulder before promptly falling asleep.

We both volunteer with the BHWT now, picking up hens to be rehomed, and it's amazing to see other people like us, giving them a loving home.

From Megan Slatter, 33, of Ascot, Berks

Megan and Mike with one of their hens

Lizzie and Ky's wedding

An egg-straordinary day!

Admiring the glossy feathers of my friend Sarah's once scraggly hens, I made a decision. She'd adopted some former battery hens and after a month of TLC, they were thriving.

So I told my partner Ky, 'I want some of our own.'

So we adopted three and called them Alice, Eve and Fhenton.

Then we took in Clara and Attila-The-Hen before deciding to become carers for poorly hens for the BHWT.

We'd take in hens who weren't quite ready for rehoming and get them back to health so they could be taken on by somebody else.

But we grew so attached, we never wanted to give them back, so our flock kept growing!

We had to upsize our home so we'd have more space and converted a section of the double garage into a hen hospital.

A few years later, Ky popped the question and I knew that I had to involve the hens in our special day.

'Blossom and Clucky can be ring bearers,' I said.

On the big day, I grinned as the best man Mark was asked for the rings.

He patted his pockets in mock dismay before the song *Here Come the Girls* began to play.

Our friend Jane burst through the doors, pushing a carriage carrying Blossom and Clucky who were each wearing a little knitted jacket with a pocket holding a ring.

But the chicken theme didn't end there.

For our wedding breakfast, we had seven tables each named after our first seven girls.

Place cards were decorated with a hen-themed border and a friend designed a logo using mine and Ky's initials which formed the face of a hen.

I'd read that in the Victorian times live hens would be displayed in glass boxes during dinner parties, so a friend drew some hens which we placed into a glass jar as centrepieces.

Of course, our wedding cake was made using eggs from our girls and when it was group photo time, we handed out red latex gloves for family and friends to blow up and hold on their heads like chicken combs!

It was the most egg-straordinary day!

Now, I visit schools to talk about hen welfare. It's awful to think that some of our hens would have been destroyed without the help of BHWT.

Hens are really easy to care for and just need a bit of love and attention to enjoy their free range retirement.

So far we've rescued over 80 hens and don't plan on stopping any time soon!

From Lizzie Gatherer, 42, of Aldershot, Hants

Lizzie

Angela with Hetty and Letty

Hen therapy

As I pulled into the driveway of what would be my new home, I spotted a figure hurrying over to me.

I'd moved in with my brother and his family after being diagnosed with PTSD, which resulted in me being medically retired from the Army.

Now, I'd bought my own place that needed renovations but the property came with an unexpected quirk – Henrietta the hen.

The seller had asked if I minded taking her on, as she was an older hen who had lived her whole life in the grounds of the cottage.

Despite having no experience caring for hens, I said yes.

While builders and contractors worked, I spent my days with Henrietta and she became a great companion.

I'd spend hours sitting quietly and watching her explore the garden.

Looking after her gave me an incredible sense of wellbeing and the calming effect she had on my mental health was extraordinary.

Sadly, Henrietta became unwell and had to be put down, leaving me heartbroken.

I missed the company of a loving animal but I was too poorly to have the responsibility of a dog or cat, so set about searching for some chicks.

Since caring for Henrietta I'd learnt about the BHWT and the fantastic work they do rehoming commercial laying hens.

But I knew these girls could come with health problems and couldn't face another heartbreak so soon after Henrietta.

I bought two seven-week-old hens, Hetty and Letty, from a local breeder and opted to support BHWT through monthly donations and joining their lottery.

It took the girls a couple of weeks to get used to their new home but it wasn't long before their funny and friendly personalities began to shine through.

During the night Hetty and Letty stayed in their chicken coop but during the day they followed me into my sunroom.

They'd come and sit with me and fall asleep on a little beanbag beside my chair.

I'm still undergoing treatment for PTSD and some days are so difficult but my hens give me a reason to keep going.

Getting outside and caring for them has been a critical part of my ongoing recovery.

Henrietta was my saviour during my darkest days and now I would never be without my hennies.

In the future, I would love to rehome rescue hens and I'd urge everyone to give a home to these amazing animals.

From Angela Warner, 55, of Oulton, Cumbria

By Matt Barbour and Charlotte Parris-Nelson. Picture: Ideal Imaging by Alistair