

Masson, Jeffrey Mousaieff. *The Pig who Sang to the Moon – The Emotional World of Farm Animals*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2003. Copyright.
 Extract from Chapter Two: 'Does the Chicken Need a Reason?'

into the facilities at night and liberate the animals from their cages. What is interesting is that they invariably report that within days the freed hens take to roosting in trees. They have retained an ancestral memory of what has given them pleasure (not to mention safety) over millions of years of evolution in much the same way that we seek out shade on a hot sunny day.

"Nonsense," a critic might argue, the birds do not enjoy roosting in trees, or bathing in the dust; it is merely instinct at work." I wonder how we would respond if someone told us that we only loved our children because of some built-in mechanism or impulse to do so? We might well have such an inborn urge, but surely this only makes it easier for us to understand what we have in common with a hen. Moreover, the emotions we feel while obeying that instinct are still real, and surely it is those emotions that matter, not the source of them, and those emotions appear to be shared between humans and other animals, including the domestic hen. Lying in the sun, drinking water, sitting quietly in peace and contentment, the hen's feelings during these times are perhaps purer than they are with us, since they are unlikely to be contaminated by worries about the future.

When I was in Australia I visited Patty Mark at her home in Melbourne, where she rescues battery hens. The yard was filled with them. Mark's fearlessness is legendary: she will go to any lengths to protect birds who are being abused on poultry farms: for her it is a matter of moral duty. I have seen videos of Mark and her associates making their way to a vast shed containing almost a hundred thousand miserable chickens, starved of sunlight, fresh air, green grass,

our backs are turned. Then one will manage to jump in and hide amongst the hay. If the engine is running, we do not hear the triumphant singing and on occasions she will get away with it and not be discovered until the hay is being unloaded way up in the fields. Once I discovered one and lifted her into the front of the vehicle in case she fell out of the back and she stood on the seat and looked round her like a queen on an official drive-about.

It is strange to think that a chicken is a *bird*. This is because, with few exceptions (penguins and ostriches, for example), we tend to think of birds as flying creatures. People do not think of chickens as having the ability to fly. Chickens rarely fly. Having seen its wild ancestors, the Burmese fowl, also called the northern red jungle fowl, all over India and Bali, I can confirm that these birds fly, and quite well. Their evolutionary cousin, the eider duck, is one of the fastest flying of all birds. Not even swifts or swallows can outpace an eider, who might reach 60 mph in level flight, and has been described as "arguably the world's fastest bird."⁹¹

We tend to think of chickens living in the backyards of farms, enjoying the quiet life and the sunshine in the midst of their families, and out of gratitude, dropping eggs from time to time for human use. Alas, that is not how 99 percent of chickens live at all. They are incarcerated in small cages—each typically housing five hens in a space measuring eighteen inches by twenty inches and stacked three or five tiers high. The sloping wire floors cause severe damage to their feet and claws. There is no sunshine, the artificial light is kept dim, and the birds live in what can only be described as a form of hell. Some people are so incensed by this cruel practice that they slip

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and blue sky. These intrepid chicken-saviors find their way inside and rescue some of the hens who are near death. She is justly proud of what she did, even if she had to go to jail as a consequence. It was said that she had stolen other people's "property," though she believes, and I agree with her, that the day will come when this word will never again be used in conjunction with a living being.

When I met Mark, it was a beautiful sunny day, and as I stretched out on the grass, with my then three-year-old son Ilan next to me, several hens approached to investigate. One in particular sat down next to Ilan and settled into what looked very much like sun-bathing. When Mark showed me a video clip of this same hen in her former life, I found it hard to believe that an animal who had suffered so severely could have survived and shown such delight in close physical contact with the same class of beings who had been her tormentors. Mark and others who live with chickens claim on good grounds that chickens recognize certain people and have good memories for who has been kind to them and who has not. It would seem these hens showed a remarkable ability to forgive, or perhaps they were just able to discriminate.

We have attempted to crush the spirit of the domestic chicken, hoping the hen will not obey an instinct to roost in a tree. When she is in a cage with ten other birds, unable even to spread her wings, of course she cannot give expression to this instinct. But we have not succeeded in crushing her spirit. This we see the minute she manages to escape from her prison. In general, whenever chickens are allowed to revert to feral life, they reveal behavior that had not been seen or expected in the domestic chicken. What we have failed to see is therefore not because it does not exist but because the conditions we have created are so artificial that, instead of chickens, we are seeing in effect

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some kind of deranged bird, a sort of distorted version of the real chicken. Of course, as Karen Davis reminds me, they are no more artificial than are humans released from prison camps. They are living beings, infinitely more complex and interesting than any machine ever created, and unlike any machine now or probably ever, they *suffer*.

When the late professor David Wood-Gush and his colleagues released chickens on an uninhabited island off the coast of Scotland in the spring of 1975, they were surprised at what they found. While previous research on domestic chickens indicated that they are highly territorial birds, Wood-Gush found that "while the hens foraged no evidence was seen of any territoriality." Not only that, but the hens were perfectly at ease when the chicks of another hen entered their territory and became, however fleetingly, members of the family: "They often passed so close that their broods temporarily intermingled."⁸² In a laboratory, a chick follows the hen, and there is nothing to be gleaned from this. But Wood-Gush was able to conclude "that the chick in the wild has a more positive relationship with the hen than one would expect from experiments on the following-reflex, as it is called, under laboratory conditions." And with aggression, too, the expectations from artificial conditions were reversed: The amount of antagonistic behavior seen in the adults in the non-breeding season was very small.⁸³

A woman from New Zealand who lives with chickens, a civil servant by the name of Helen McNaught, became intrigued by my questions about their emotional lives, and sent me an interesting analysis:

The first of our roosters was a handsome bantam with an insatiable sexual appetite that earned him the name of Randy.