



Living with quolls: how to keep your hens and birds safe from predation

Quoll proof your poultry pen or bird aviary

You've moved to the country to do the self-supporting lifestyle and a thriving chook population is high on your agenda of self-sustaining food items. Then one night, along comes the spotted-tailed quoll that ranges over your farm and suddenly the dream turns into a disaster! There are ways for humans and wildlife to co-exist and living with quolls is not only possible but highly rewarding. It requires a little more work to establish pens that are quoll proof, but you can have your chooks and enjoy the tenacious quoll at the same time.

Quolls are carnivorous marsupials that hunt at night for birds, small mammals, and reptiles. Quolls can range up to 4 or 5 kilometres while looking for prey and do not discern between wildlife and domestic hens. Both are equally tasty and nutritious meals. For a juvenile quoll learning to hunt for itself for the first time in its short life, fast food outlets around farms are abundant: unprotected chooks, open compost containing meat scraps, or dog food left unattended at night all provide quick and easy meals. Consequently, quolls have often been, and still are, killed when raiding domestic poultry. This may be one of the major threats to their survival.

By protecting your poultry from quolls, you are also protecting them from other poultry predators, such as foxes, snakes, raptors, cats and dogs. The possible designs for quoll proof chook runs are endless but there are a couple of basic features that need to be included to ensure your poultry pen really is quoll-proof.

Tips for poultry and bird owners



Quolls are expert climbers so a roof over your chook house is essential: one that has no gaps for quolls to squeeze through.



Bury mesh at least 15cm in the ground to prevent enthusiastic quolls from digging under the walls of the pen. Placing sheets of roofing iron around all four walls of the pen and burying them to the same depth will also prevent quolls from



digging under the fence. For a more permanent structure, cement foundations around the entire hen house – including under the gate – will stop all wildlife from entering the pen.



Normal chook wire is too weak to keep spotted tailed quolls out. They will happily chew through it. If you want to be absolutely sure of keeping them out, or live in areas invaded by other small predators, use spot-welded mesh which is stronger and is available locally in small sizes starting at 12.7 mm².



Make sure poultry stay in-doors at night, and that your poultry pen is secured at night.

Below is an example of a hen house provided by the Quoll Seekers Network of Queensland. It is a good basic design to which must be added stronger mesh and solid below-ground foundations. The Quoll seekers network can be accessed via its web address <http://quollseekers.wildlife.org.au/>



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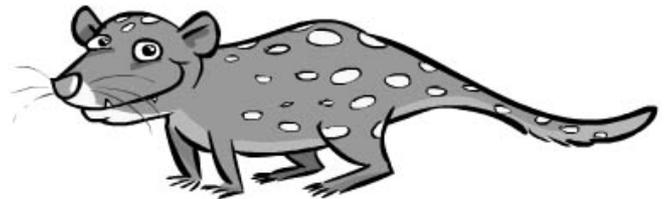


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Mobile hens: an alternative

If you prefer your hens to be mobile for feeding during the day, a South Australian home grown company makes mobile hen hutches that are now sold with 2.5cm square galvanized mesh (*pictured below*). Extra heavy duty mesh can be purchased as “fox proof” mesh for an extra \$35 per hutch. Their website is www.royalrooster.com.au and their freecall number is 1800 817 745.

Remember that your hens will still need a quoll proof shed to be housed in at night.



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