

# A Day in the life of a Commercial (Poultry) Veterinarian

Dr. Nigel Elliott

*“A farmer once told me one of the greatest luxuries of his life was to wake up early only to go back to sleep again.”*

— Dr. James Herriot Author, ‘All Creatures Great and Small’

My mornings were never the same again - not a bad thing depending on where your office is; the cool hilly surroundings of the countryside worked well for me. In the distance, as I approach the poultry farms, I hear the roosters and the harmonizing clucking hens. Armed with the necessities for poultry work; coveralls, head wear, boots, swabs, sampling bottles, post mortem kit and, yes, don't forget the flask of hot coffee-tea, I get ready to take on the work of the day.



The work is flock/population medicine. You observe not just one bird but the whole flock to determine their health. How they move, sound, look and even smell to determine signs of illness before physical contact. A history of the flock's behaviour is also good to know before hand to further assist in your resolve. Poultry farmers are encouraged to keep good health records of their flocks. Proper housing, management and biosecurity of poultry facilities are essential to the birds' well-being. The 5 freedoms of welfare are also pertinent in the poultry industry as we are caring for birds that enter the food chain for many:

1. Freedom from hunger or thirst by providing adequate food and clean water.
2. Freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

4. Freedom to express normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.



5. Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

Diagnosing illness in populations ranging from 10,000 to over 30,000 birds is no easy task. Prompt, accurate diagnoses and decisions have to be made and treatments prescribed and implemented. The population soon recovers and I have another happy client (and birds).

The day is over, I leave the chicken farms for another day, not tarred and feathered, but knowing that I have endeavoured to fulfill my role like my other colleagues in **Sustainable Development to Improve Livelihoods, Food Safety and Security.**

**Dr. Nigel Elliott**  
**Poultry Veterinarian**