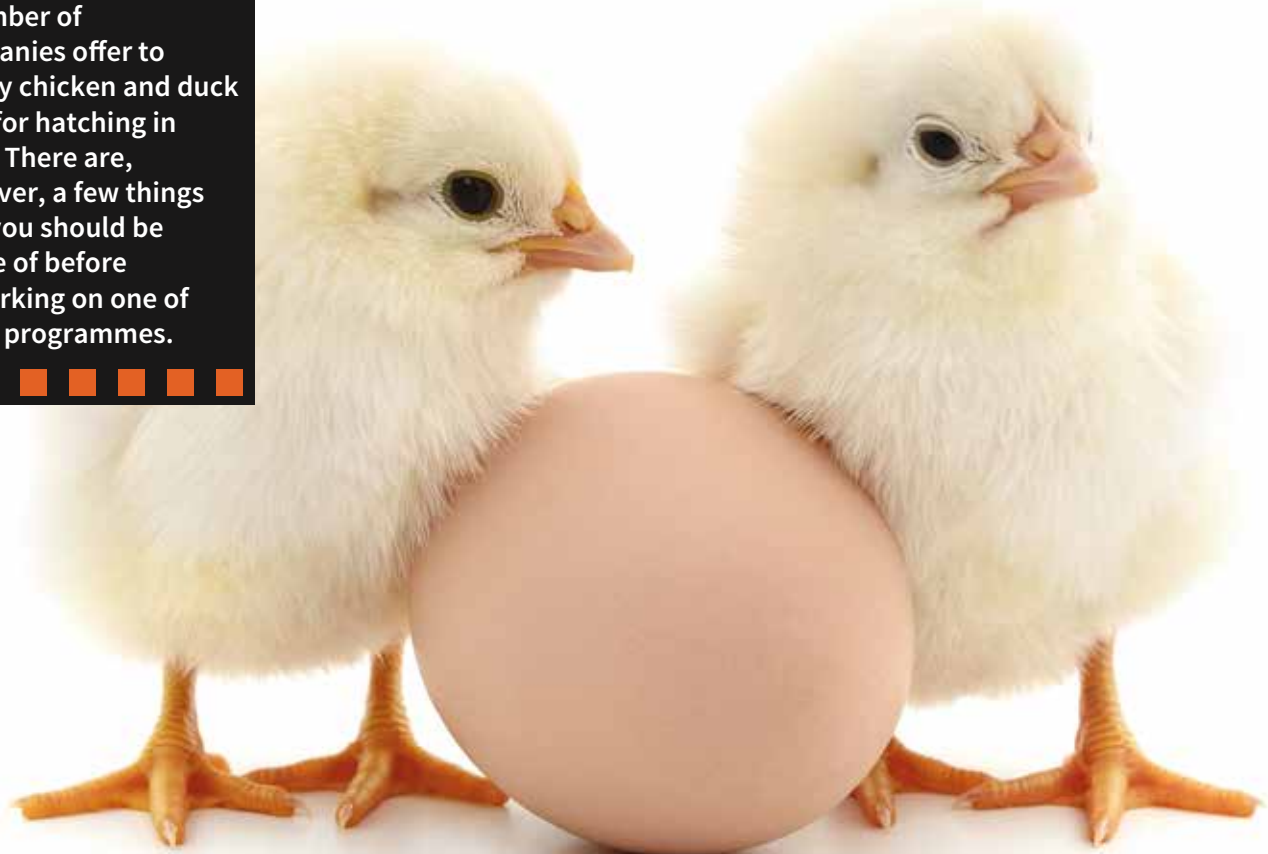


What's Wrong With Hatching Projects?

Essential information if you are considering doing a chick-hatching project with your students

A number of companies offer to supply chicken and duck eggs for hatching in class. There are, however, a few things that you should be aware of before embarking on one of these programmes.



The birds' fate

A key consideration is what is going to happen to the chicks or ducklings who hatch from the eggs.

The companies who market this service claim to offer to rehome the offspring at the end of the projects. However, teachers who are concerned about the fate of the returned birds, particularly the cockerels, often look to rehome them with animal sanctuaries.

This is causing a problem for animal rescue centres all over the country. Many are regularly approached to offer homes for unwanted birds. For them it is a real challenge, overstressing already limited resources.

Hatching projects encourage the view that animals are disposable objects instead of requiring a lifetime of care and commitment. They encourage children to want to bring more baby animals into the world such as litters of puppies and kittens, who may not be wanted when they grow up.

The birds' welfare

A second concern is the welfare of the birds following hatching.

Health problems can arise and schools do not always have the knowledge or resources to deal with them. Niall Lester who manages New Hope Animal Rescue in London said that they had been asked to take in six ducklings by a school –

and two of the ducks had twisted legs. He had to put one of the birds down who could have been saved if the problem had been dealt with earlier.

It is very difficult to provide optimal conditions in a classroom incubator and, as a result, chicks may be sickly, dehydrated and poorly developed when they hatch. Chick organs often stick to the sides of the shell as a result of the eggs not being turned properly in the mechanical incubator. By contrast, a mother hen turns each of her eggs, individually, as often as 30 times a day, using her body, her feet and her beak to move each egg, in order to maintain the proper temperature, moisture, ventilation, humidity and positioning of each embryo on which she is sitting.



Choose alternatives to chick-hatching projects

From an animal welfare point of view, as well as an education perspective, the best option is not to do a hatching project.

We urge teachers to use learning activities that do not impact on the health and welfare of living animals and that put unnecessary pressure on already busy animal sanctuaries.

One alternative is to study the life cycle of insects such as bees and make 'bee hotels' using recycled materials.

There is no shortage of amazing films showing the life cycles of all sorts of wild animal species from butterflies to whales.

Comments from animal sanctuaries:

'Hatching projects in primary schools have become a major problem ... we get so many calls to take in chicks and ducklings that have been reared in a classroom.'

Neil Winn-Williams, **Foal Farm Animal Rescue Centre**, Kent

'Every year without fail we receive numerous requests from schools for us to take in either chicks or ducklings.'

Steven Marsh, **Fresh Fields Animal Rescue**, Liverpool

'Over the last couple of years, we have had increasing numbers of calls from people whose children are at a school where one of these projects has been taking place. The calls are always to ask if we can take in cockerels.'

Anya, **Hillside Animal Sanctuary**, Norfolk

'Last year and this year I have noticed a huge increase in people contacting us about unwanted cockerels from school hatching programmes.'

Helen Cooper, founder of **Big Red Rooster Cockerel Rescue**, Swindon

'Overall the situation is dire.'

Martin from **Tower Hill Stables**, Asheldham

'We are asked on a fairly regular basis to take in ducks and other poultry following hatching projects in schools ... I would say that we are asked on average about eight times a year.'

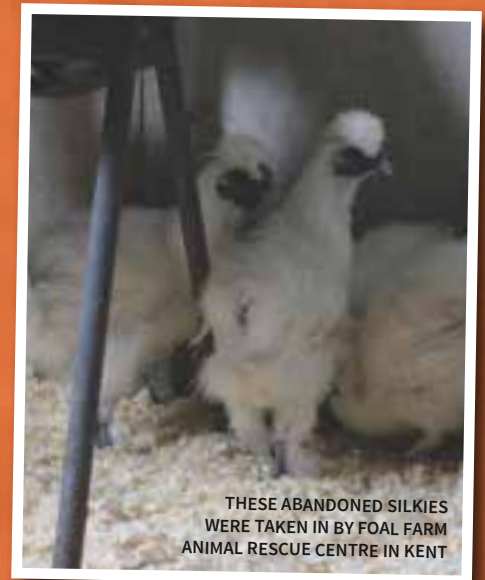
Janet Taylor, **Farm Animal Sanctuary**, Worcestershire

Policy statements from animal welfare organisations:

RSPCA: *'The RSPCA opposes breeding programmes in schools. This concern includes the use of incubators and artificial environments for animals. It is difficult to guarantee the welfare of breeding animals under school conditions and the RSPCA believes that such programmes of study do not promote responsible attitudes to animal care and husbandry.'*



British Hen Welfare Trust: *'The British Hen Welfare Trust receives at least 3 calls a day asking for help to re-home unwanted cockerels, both through school and home hatching projects. Any educational benefits gained are now increasingly outweighed by the growing number of unwanted males, and we would like to see this practice replaced with a more ethical way of learning.'*



THESE ABANDONED SILKIES WERE TAKEN IN BY FOAL FARM ANIMAL RESCUE CENTRE IN KENT

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