



36 40 Ways to Have a More Secure Coop

By Christopher de Vidal



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Introduction

You love your birds, but they need constant protection from foxes, snakes, birds, and other nasties. Our family has lost chickens to dogs, snakes, and hawks, and it's always a tragedy. We don't want to lose any more, and I don't want you to lose any at all, so I've written this book filled with proven ways to have a more secure coop.

One of the best ways to protect your birds is with an automatic coop door opener. But other door openers don't allow you to check on the status while you're away. [SecureCoop](#) is the only automatic coop door system that is reliable, easy-to-use and allows remote monitoring of your coop so you know your chickens are safe, in or out of their coop, even when you can't be there yourself.

Give me your feedback! I love criticisms, can handle complaints, and I want to hear additional ideas. If your idea makes it into a future edition of this book, I'll send you a gift 😊 [Contact me](#).

Did someone share this book with you? I'd love to hear about your flock or your future plans for birds. Tell me what you've learned. [Get in touch](#).

Watching the flock,

Christopher de Vidal and family

Help! I've just had an attack!

First: Are you sure you had an attack? If eggs are missing, know that sometimes hens stop laying due to stress, feed changes, time of year, water, or health. If a bird is missing, it might be that she's gone broody and escaped to go hatch a flock.

Even so, this is a good opportunity to check your defenses. Are there weak points to shore up now? Dive into the [On the Defense](#) chapter of this book.

If you are certain that you have indeed been attacked, refer to [this guide](#) to better understand the kind of predator which might have been to blame. Then read about that predator on Google and [talk with other poultry keepers](#).

Clean up quickly. Patch holes quickly. Predators learn where there's easy access to food and will come back night after night.

On the Defense

Know thy enemy

Before you plan your defenses, you should know what you are up against. Defenses against dogs are of course going to be different than defenses against bears and against mice. Ask your neighbors and local county extension what is common. You might consider installing trail cameras or outdoor security cameras to watch.

We recommend [Arlo Pro 2 wire-free battery-powered outdoor security cameras](#) with the [optional camouflage cover](#).



Arlo Pro 2 Outdoor Wire-Free Cameras with Camouflage Cover

These predators are a common concern almost everywhere:

- Raccoons
- Rodents
- Coyotes
- Foxes
- Hawks
- Dogs
- Owls
- Snakes
- Opossums

According to a vote of more than 1,000 chicken keepers, [the worst predator is a raccoon, followed by dogs, hawks, foxes, and weasels](#).

Understand the predator's patterns

If for example a fox attacked at dawn, let them out a little later. Spring and fall are the times of migrations, and with many predators on the move they'll be looking for a snack. Springtime is when predators reproduce, so they'll be hunting more aggressively for themselves *and* their young. Knowledge of their patterns will give you an unfair advantage, anticipating their attack.

Know the laws

You might get in trouble by either killing or (surprise!) *not* killing predators, depending on your local laws. Once your research is complete about what is in your area, find out what you are permitted to do and not do.

Be vigilant

You might build a “Chicken Fort Knox,” but predators are numerous and relentless. They have all night to find cracks in your armor. Keeping constant watch through window, camera, motion sensor, or neighbor is required. If any predator is successful be quick to counter, as once they learn where food is you can count on them regularly coming back for more.

But know that missing eggs/chickens are not necessarily the result of predation

It might be that your girls are taking a break, or it might be that one of them has gone broody and escaped to hatch a flock.

Don't assume your own dog or cat will leave your birds alone

Owner's cats and dogs have been known to kill for food or fun, and this behavior can spontaneously arise. Keep your birds separate.

Train your flock to come in at night

It is natural behavior for poultry to seek roost at sunset, so work with this natural tendency to invite them into the safety of your coop. [Read about coop training here.](#)

Use an automatic coop door opener

All it takes is one time forgetting to close the door and you can lose your entire flock!

Of course I recommend [SecureCoop](#) for this job 😊 But other competitors are decent choices, provided you don't mind not having phone notifications when (not if) there are issues. [ChickenGuard](#) is a good alternative. Future versions of SecureCoop will be able to monitor openers such as ChickenGuard, so if you buy a ChickenGuard today you can later add SecureCoop monitoring to get notifications.

Ensure the pop hole door self-locks after closure

Whatever door opener you use, be certain that smart animals such as racoons cannot lift or open the door. If your door lifts vertically, placing a furring strip across the bottom resists their ability to pry a fingernail under the lifting door.

You might also try [this unique design](#):



YouTube: *DIY Automatic Locking Chicken Coop Door*

Don't rely on chicken wire as your primary defense

It may have the word "chicken" in it, but it is outdated. Its best use is to keep poultry *in*, but it too often fails at keeping predators *out*. Some predators such as raccoons or hawks can easily reach through. Snakes and rodents can slip through the large openings. Larger predators can rip through it quickly. Here's more about [when to use, and when not use chicken wire](#).



Use 1/2-inch 19-gauge galvanized hardware cloth over every opening. It's more expensive, but it really works. Think carefully about any small opening you see, because some predators *will* surprise you! 1/2-inch cloth has the strength to outwit larger predators and the small size to prevent most smaller predators. Here's cloth we recommend: [YARDGARD 308199B](#)

NOTE: Amazon has a higher-rated hardware cloth by Amagabeli, but the reviews are fake as verified by [FakeSpot.com](#). YARDGARD passes the test.

Also, layer 1/4-inch 23-gauge cloth

Rodents are small and determined, so layer up. [Watch these mice](#) squeeze through tiny 5/8-inch holes!

Why use both 1/2-inch and 1/4-inch cloth? Because it uses a thinner gauge wire, and can more easily be broken by larger predators. If layered, the two together is a winning combination.

Here's cloth we recommend: [YARDGARD 308247B](#)



Build strong roofs, floors, and walls

A coop is only as good as its weakest link. Give your coop and run a solid foundation of posts in concrete if possible. Watch for splashing water from rooflines which may rot foundations. Walls and roofs made of even heavy gauge aluminum can be ripped open by bears. Raccoons have been known to peel siding off. Work hard to keep your flock safe. You can bet predators will be working hard to get in.

Protect windows

Stronger predators (even some on two legs) might pry or break glass windows. Hardware cloth can be secured to either the inside or the outside of windows, but if you secure them on the outside it makes the windows harder to clean. Secure the cloth with [furring strips](#).

Test your doors

Give them a good kick and pull. *Really* try them. Predators will be trying them, so it's better you find out now than after a tragedy.

Roof your run

Our family has lost plenty of our birds to hawks. Even foxes can come in from above, as you can see in [this video](#). Rodents and snakes can and will come from above, so use small mesh up top as well. Cover the top of your coop and run with strong hardware cloth or even panels to keep out the rain, which also resists the run getting mucky.

Bonus: A sturdy roof with an [automatic door closer](#) and [trained birds](#) means you do not always have to be home before sunset.

If you're not going to use hardware cloth, at least consider [bird netting](#).

Use 1x2 wood furring strips to attach hardware cloth to the frame

Screws and staples become weak points. When they rust and if/when they slip out, they become places to peck, get snagged on clothes, and most importantly they weaken your defenses. Sandwich the cloth to the frame using 1x2 wood strips. As a bonus, this also covers the sharp edge of the mesh 😊

Bury the cloth or flare it out

Predators come from above and below. Bury the cloth or flare it outward to resist diggers. Flaring it/skirting it outward is much less work, but it is also less effective. We recommend burying at least 18 inches down or extending the skirt two feet outward. If flaring outward, cover skirt with more than

three inches of dirt or rock. If burying, laying paving stones around the perimeter can improve resistance to digging.

NOTE: If flaring outward with skirting, don't use paving slabs. These can defeat the purpose of the apron. Animals might dig under the edge of the paver and then be under the apron.

Regularly inspect for holes

Keep a regular eye out for any new access points. We recommend at least glancing it over every day, and giving a detailed look weekly. You could set an alarm on your phone to remind you to check; if you're using iPhone, say "Hey Siri, remind me every Saturday at 10am to check the coop and run for holes." On Android, say "Okay Google..."

Raise your coop at least one foot off the ground

This discourages snakes, rats, skunks, etc. from making nests underneath. The coop floor boards must fit closely together, and regularly inspect for holes. This has a bonus of resisting rotting from drain off from the roof.

Use electric netting for the run

If you're not roofing your run, electric netting is a good deterrent against some predators such as coyotes and dogs. [Premier1 has many options to choose from](#). Read their [fence design recommendations](#).



PoultryNet® Plus 12/48/3 Electric Netting

Use electric wire around the coop and run

Not just for cattle! For permanent walls electric wire is a great barrier. The first wire should go at three inches for diggers, then run one six inches above that (nine inches above the ground), then one nine inches above that (18 inches above the ground), and finally one across the top of the wall.

The circumference of a coop and run is not very large, so [this two mile model](#) would be inexpensive and should be sufficient for all but the largest predators such as bears, which thankfully are rare. Something to remember when shopping: Unless your run has no roof, you are seeking to control predators, not poultry. The birds are not expected to come in contact with this wire, unless there is no roof and they roost at the top of the wall.



Patriot PE2 Electric Fence Energizer

Trim vegetation around electric wire and fencing

Grass, vines, and bushes are the enemies of the good conductivity an electric fence requires. Keep it trim. If you use [electric netting](#), take extra care when mowing as that's the most common reason they get destroyed.

Test your electric fence

Test your fence monthly to ensure it is functioning. [This is a simple, inexpensive, reliable tester.](#)



Dare Products 460 185604 Electric Fence Tester

Install motion activated lights

Predators prefer to work under cover of darkness. Keep the light shinin'. While there are quite a few solar outdoor lights to choose from, most have fake reviews per FakeSpot.com. [These lights](#) have good, verified reviews; however, their waterproof rating is not strong. Install under cover.



Link2Home 350 Lumen Outdoor Solar Powered Motion Sensor LED Safety/Security Flood Light

Put feed away and clean up at night

Feed left out invites rodents, so keep it clean at night. A treadle feeder such as [this well-regarded unit](#) not only removes mousey temptations, it can also save you money on feed.



Grandpa's Feeders Automatic Chicken Feeder

Collect eggs every day

Uncollected eggs will tempt snakes and rodents. Also, some chickens learn to eat eggs that are not collected, and this is a very difficult habit to break. Always collect your eggs.

Plant bushes inside the run

The birds will love the shade, protection, and leaves for snacking. But leave the perimeter outside the run as open as possible. Raccoons are less likely to try to get into the run if they have to remain out in the open when working.

Plant mint just outside the coop and also lay it within

Mint repels rodents, smells great, and is easy to grow. Plant some outside the coop, and regularly chop tall pieces (keep it low for [visibility](#)), lay the pieces around the coop floor.

Remove bushes and trees outside the run which prevent visibility

Predators prefer to work under cover. Raccoons for example would rather not do their work while being fully exposed. So, when possible cut down tall bushes, grass, trees, and other overgrowth within 75 feet of your coop in all directions. Furthermore, do all that you can to increase visibility between the coop and the windows of your house, so you can see and be seen.

Provide cover inside the run

Poultry don't like being exposed in the open. If your run has no roof, definitely think of adding boxes or branches for the birds to skitter under when a hawk or owl approaches. Barrels cut in half and overturned, propped up, make a great shelter.

Limbs and sticks mounded in a teepee are simple and effective:



Found at the-chicken-chick.com

HenSaver aprons with predator eyes

This unique hen apparel not only protects a hen's back when mating, it also has optional anti-predator "eyes". [Check it out.](#)



Hawks will be creeped out. Roosters might find it stylish.

Bring in a male bird

A male bird will sacrifice his life protecting the flock and as a bonus, you get another generation of birds for free 😊 If you're concerned about crowing, consider the [No-Crow Rooster Collar](#). (With [bowtie!](#)) It's not foolproof, but it will work with some roosters.



Handsome AND quiet

Use a two-step lock that a human can open from inside and out

Racoons are smart enough to figure out locks that any toddler can figure out, so for example a regular carabiner, while good, can still be defeated. Consider locking your latch using a two-step lock such as [these locking carabiners](#).



Boleone 5 pcs Aluminum D-Ring Locking Carabiner

Alternatively, some chicken keepers lock their latches with [padlocks such as this](#) which can also resist the two-legged varmint. Abus has an excellent reputation and these locks don't cost much more than the cheapies.



ABUS 75/50 All Weather Chrome Plated Brass Padlock

NOTE: Whatever lock you use, it is important to be able to open your latch from within if you get locked in accidentally, so **please keep this in mind!** Run a wire from the latch to inside, to allow opening from

the inside. Just ensure that a coon cannot also pull this wire. When locked also with a carabiner or padlock this makes an excellent one-two combination.

Place the latch high

Don't give short critters an opportunity to reach the latch. If you must place latch low, ensure it is a [solid lock](#).

Remember the nesting boxes

If your nesting boxes have outside hatches, use [strong locks](#) on them as well. [Test these doors for strength](#).

Use predator deterrents

These are not foolproof. They are not magic. They don't always work. But they work often enough, and are inexpensive enough, and you know they won't hurt. Security experts have a concept of "security in layers" and this is just another layer of security.

- [Bird-X Irri-Tape](#)
- [Bird-X Scare-Eye](#)
- [Bird Repellent Discs](#)
- [Strobe/ultrasonic motion-activated deterrent](#)
- [Solar strobe lights with alarm](#) (Deters two-legged beasts as well.)
- [Nite Guard](#) (Solar-powered blinking red light intended to mimic a larger predator's eyes.)
- [Owl scarecrows](#)
- [Snake scarecrows made from old garden hoses](#)
- Old CDs on string. Hawks in particular hate Nickelback and Justin Bieber and these CDs are cheap at a thrift store 🎧
- Talk radio on a portable radio. Not music, it must be human voices. Be sure to poll your flock for their political preference.



Vary your predator deterrents

Variety helps. Rotate your deterrents so that smart predators won't grow accustomed to them. Change them monthly; Both their locations and their type. If you use an owl this month, put out CDs next month. Put away the Nite Guard lights for a season then bring them back later. Put a timer on the radio so it's not always playing.

Livestock guardian animals

These dog breeds have been recognized as excellent poultry protectors:

- Great Pyrenees
- Maremma Sheepdog
- Akbash
- Kuvasz
- Pyrenean Mastiff
- Komondor
- Polish Tatra Sheepdog
- Anatolian Shepherd
- Kangal
- Tibetan Mastiff

Read more: [10 Best Guard Dogs for Livestock & Poultry Protection](#)

See also: [How to Choose a Livestock Guard Dog](#)



Great Pyrenees are famous flock fighters, but their thick fur makes them better suited for cooler climates

In addition, these can make unusual but helpful protective companions:

- Donkeys
- Llamas
- Guinea hens
- Geese
- Ostrich

- Emus

[Read more here](#) and [here](#).



Geese and chickens can happily coexist. A single goose will bond with the flock, and while a flock of geese will not necessarily bond with chickens, they will deter predators on their own.

Give your livestock guardians room to patrol

Whatever animal you choose, give them access to the outside of the run at all times, and lock up the coop at night to prevent them from chasing squawking birds all night long.

Traps and poisons

First, [know the laws](#)! Else you may end up in a human-sized trap a.k.a. jail. For some predators in some places it's illegal to kill them. For some predators in some places it's legal to *trap* them, but not *relocate* them. Hey I don't make the rules.

Poisons for rodents should be protected if there are children and pets using a double key bait station such as [this unit by Redtop](#).

For live traps, [Havahart traps](#) are well-regarded in the industry, and only cost a bit more than the cheapest junk. Invest once and use for many seasons. Like all manufacturers though they do have their stinkers, so read each product's reviews.



Havahart 1079

Learn from Other Poultry Keepers

The [BackYard Chickens forum](#) is an excellent place to learn and ask questions. [Look me up there.](#)

Please Reach Out to Us!

Do you have any complaints about this advice? Any criticisms? Any new ideas? [Share them with us](#) and if your ideas make it into a future edition of this book, we'll give you a free gift 😊

<https://SecureCoop.com/contact/>

Did someone share this book with you? I'd love to hear about your flock or your future plans for birds. Tell me what you've learned. [Get in touch.](#)

Thank you!