

5. They overwhelm sanctuaries that are already full

Every rescue and sanctuary in the country is already working beyond capacity for roosters in particular. When a hatching project ends and a panicked parent starts ringing around, the calls come to us. We rarely have space. We have to say no, and the birds who needed somewhere to land do not always find it. All of this suffering comes from an activity that was presented as an educational experience.

Better alternatives

There are many ways to teach children about the chicken life cycle without creating lives that nobody has a home for. Here are a few we recommend:

- **Use a model egg kit.** Modern Teaching Aids sells a **Chicken Life Cycle Set of 21 Eggs** that opens to show day-by-day embryo development, with no incubator and no living animal required. It is reusable, affordable, and it teaches the science just as well.
- **Visit a farm sanctuary.** Many sanctuaries offer educational visits where children can meet rescued hens, roosters and ducks as individuals. The lesson this leaves behind is infinitely more powerful than a machine.
- **Watch hatching on screen.** A short search for 'chick hatching' returns many beautifully filmed videos. Children see exactly what they would see in the classroom, without creating a baby bird who needs a home next month.
- **Go bird watching.** Wild birds are the best teachers of the life cycle. A pair of binoculars and a walk in the local bush shows children that birds have their own lives, nests and families already, and that our job is to leave them to it.
- **Grow a plant project instead.** A seed-growing project teaches the life cycle just as beautifully, with real practical food-growing skills attached. Children learn how a living thing begins, what it needs to thrive, and where food actually comes from, without creating a baby animal who will need somewhere to go at the end of term.

If your project has already begun

Please make sure it is the last one, and focus on finding every chick a safe, lifelong home. Do not send the birds back to the hatching project company, as they are almost always killed regardless of what the company claims. Anyone taking a chick home needs to understand that roughly half of all chicks hatched are male, that roosters cannot be kept in most suburban areas, and that chickens can live 8 to 12 years with vet bills along the way.

A note from us

We know teachers and carers who run hatching projects are not trying to be unkind. They are trying to bring wonder into a classroom. We are asking, on behalf of the roosters nobody planned for and the mother hens nobody mentioned, for that wonder to be found somewhere else. There are so many better ways.