



HAL
open science

Plumage colour and feather pecking in laying hens, a chicken perspective?

Ashleigh Bright

► **To cite this version:**

Ashleigh Bright. Plumage colour and feather pecking in laying hens, a chicken perspective?. *British Poultry Science*, 2007, 48 (03), pp.253-263. 10.1080/00071660701370483 . hal-00545315

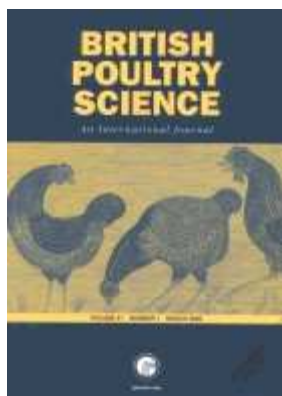
HAL Id: hal-00545315

<https://hal.science/hal-00545315v1>

Submitted on 10 Dec 2010

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Plumage colour and feather pecking in laying hens, a chicken perspective?

Journal:	<i>British Poultry Science</i>
Manuscript ID:	CBPS-2006-120.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Date Submitted by the Author:	30-Nov-2006
Complete List of Authors:	Bright, Ashleigh; University of Oxford, Zoology
Keywords:	Feather pecking, Behaviour, Lighting, Welfare, Laying hens



1
2
3 1 **Plumage colour and feather pecking in laying hens, a chicken perspective?**
4
5
6 2

7
8 3 BRIGHT, A.
9

10 4
11
12 5 *University of Oxford, Animal Behaviour Research Group, Department of Zoology,*
13
14 6 *Oxford, England*
15
16
17
18 7
19
20 8
21
22 9
23
24 10
25
26
27 11
28

29 12 **Short title: PLUMAGE COLOUR AND FEATHER PECKING**
30
31
32 13
33
34 14
35
36 15
37
38 16
39
40 17
41
42 18
43
44
45

46 19 Correspondence to Dr A. Bright, University of Oxford, Animal Behaviour Research
47

48 20 Group, Department of Zoology, South Parks Road, Oxford OX13PS, UK
49

50 21 Tel: +44 (0)1865 271224
51

52 22 Email: ashleigh.bright@zoo.ox.ac.uk
53
54
55 23
56
57
58
59
60

1 **Abstract.** 1. This study investigated whether feather damage due to feather pecking and
2 bird behaviour were influenced by plumage colour in Oakham Blue laying hens (black,
3 white, grey colour variants). The reflectance properties of feathers and spectral
4 composition of light environments experienced by the hens were also examined.
5 2. Nine hundred and seventy nine birds were inspected and scored for feather damage;
6 10.5 h of video recordings were examined to record feather pecking and bird behaviour.
7 Feathers and light environments were measured using a USB-2000 spectrometer and DH-
8 2000-CAL-DTH lamp.
9 3. Oakham Blue birds with white plumage had less feather damage due to feather
10 pecking than black or grey birds. There was more severe feather pecking in the mornings
11 than in the afternoon. White birds feather pecked severely more than black or grey birds,
12 although there were no other behavioural differences between plumage colours.
13 4. White feathers reflected at a higher intensity than black or grey feathers. However,
14 black and grey feather spectra were relatively flat and the contribution of UV
15 wavelengths to plumage reflection was proportionally greater than that for white feathers.
16 5. Light intensity inside a poultry house was $100 \times$ (UW/cm²/nm) less than on the range
17 and there was low or no UV reflectance. Under the dim, artificial lights inside a poultry
18 house, Oakham Blue hens with black and grey feathers may be less visible to
19 conspecifics than white birds because their plumage reflects at a lower intensity.
20 Furthermore, the lack of available UV light inside versus outside and the higher
21 contribution of UV reflectance to black and grey plumage, may make black and grey
22 birds appear more different inside the house than white birds. It is possible that this

1 novel/unusual appearance may make black or grey Oakham Blue hens more susceptible
2 to feather pecking.

INTRODUCTION

3 Feather pecking is a type of abnormal behaviour in poultry that consists of pecking at,
4 and or, pulling out the feathers of conspecifics (Savory, 1995). Feather pecking may
5 result in poor quality plumage, patches of feather loss and damage to the skin. Feather
6 pecking is a welfare problem because pulling out feathers causes pain (Gentle and
7 Hunter, 1990), and damaged birds may be cannibalised (Allen and Perry, 1975). Feather
8 pecking is also an economic problem; it can lead to lowered egg production (Johnsen *et*
9 *al.*, 1998; El-Lethey *et al.*, 2000), and higher food consumption because birds with little
10 feather cover have poor thermoregulation and consequently greater energy demands than
11 unaffected birds (Leeson and Morrison, 1978; Tauson and Svensson, 1980; Tullett *et al.*,
12 1980; Peguri and Coon, 1993). Understanding the causal basis of feather pecking is a
13 major priority for the egg-producing industry (Jones *et al.*, 2004; Rodenburg *et al.*, 2004).

14 Feather pecking is usually regarded as redirected foraging (Blokhuys,
15 1989; Blokhuys and van der Haar, 1989), or dust-bathing behaviour (Vestergaard *et al.*,
16 1993; Vestergaard and Lisborg, 1993). The redirection of pecking towards other birds is
17 influenced by many management, environment, genetic and behavioural factors (Hughes
18 and Duncan, 1972; Huber-Eicher and Audige, 1999; Green *et al.*, 2000; Nicol *et al.*,
19 2003; Sedlackova *et al.*, 2004). It is generally accepted that the development of feather
20 pecking within a flock represents a multifactorial process (Jensen *et al.*, 2005).

1 Commercial laying producers frequently comment that white birds are
2 better feathered than brown or black birds (personal communications). In experimental
3 studies also, birds with white plumage frequently have less plumage damage due to
4 feather pecking than pigmented birds (Ambrosen and Petersen, 1997; Savory *et al.*,
5 1999; Kjaer and Sørensen, 2002). The effects of plumage colour on variation in plumage
6 damage due to feather pecking, has been difficult to quantify because different coloured
7 birds are usually from a different strain and/or flock. Recently, Keeling *et al.*, (2004)
8 found that in an F2 White leghorn and Red jungle fowl cross, victims of feather pecking
9 were partly pre-disposed when the colour of their plumage was due to the expression of a
10 wild recessive allele at a gene that controls plumage melanisation; pigmented birds ran a
11 higher risk of being feather pecked and were more vulnerable to feather pecking when
12 they were relatively more common than non-pigmented birds. However, the propensity to
13 peck feathers was independent of the assailant's plumage genotype (cited in Keeling *et*
14 *al.*, 2004)) and in a subsequent study on the same cross Jensen *et al.*, (2005), found few
15 behavioural differences between feather pecking victims and non-victims.

16 The first aim of this study was to investigate plumage colouration effects
17 on plumage damage due to feather pecking in three commercial flocks of Oakham Blue
18 laying hens. The second aim was to determine whether the propensity to feather pecking
19 or the behaviour of feather pecked victims and assailants varied with plumage
20 colouration. Oakham Blue hens lay characteristic blue/green eggs, and there are three
21 plumage colour morphs (white, black and grey). Because the birds within a single flock
22 are of the same age and breed, and experience the same management and husbandry

1 practices, **it was** possible to separate the effects of colour and
2 strain/management/husbandry on feather pecking.

3 Vision is a dominant sense in domestic fowl, and they use plumage
4 colour and pattern to gain information about conspecifics (see reviews in Espmark *et al.*,
5 2000). Changes to plumage appearance (for example, due to light environment or visual
6 background (Savory and Mann, 1999)) or ratio of differently coloured birds in a flock
7 (Keeling *et al.*, 2004) may also inhibit or stimulate feather pecking. Galliformes are
8 behaviourally sensitive to UV radiation (Prescott and Wathes, 1999*b*; Jones *et al.*, 2001),
9 and feathers of both traditional and modern breeds of domestic fowl reflect UVA light
10 with an efficiency similar to that at longer wavelengths (Prescott and Wathes, 1999*a*).
11 The artificial light provided in commercial poultry houses is usually at a low intensity
12 and without UV radiation (Prescott and Wathes, 1999*a*). The ability of domestic fowl to
13 use their visual system to its full extent may be handicapped in this artificial light
14 environment. For example, hens may find it difficult to discriminate between familiar and
15 unfamiliar flock mates at low light intensities (D'Eath and Stone, 1999). Furthermore,
16 limited UV and low light intensities might present the birds with a foraging environment
17 they perceive to be inappropriate and cause them to redirect pecking to the feathers of
18 their flock mates. This might be particularly important for free-range flocks which move
19 between artificial and natural light environments. Thus, the third and final aim of this
20 study was to investigate the spectral properties of white, black and grey Oakham Blue
21 feathers, and the spectral properties of the typical light environments experienced by the
22 Oakham Blue hens.

23

METHODS

Animals and housing

Three commercial free-range flocks of Oakham Blue laying hens were studied. The first flock (A, 4 200 hens) was at FAI farms Wytham, Oxfordshire, UK. The birds were housed in 4 mobile arks (126.84 m² each), with daily access to 1 ha of wood chip on which to range (09.00 h – dusk). During the day, birds were free to move between houses. Commercial grade layer mash was provided *ad libitum* in pan feeders (4.6 cm per hen) and water by nipple drinkers (146 per house). Lighting was supplied by natural light and Sollatek Lumina 12 V compact fluorescent bulbs (Tafelberg Marina Ltd) on a 15L:9D cycle (07.00 – 22.00 h). The houses also had skylights, which provided natural light. The nest boxes were open from 04.00 – 16.00 h each day.

The second (B, 2 590 hens), and third flocks (C, 3 000 hens) were at Dean's Foods Ltd, Walesby, Lincolnshire, UK. The birds were housed in static barns (~60% slat ~30% litter (chopped straw): 349.27 m²), with daily access to 6 ha of grass, and gravel on which to range (09.30 h– dusk). Commercial grade layer mash was provided *ad libitum* in flat chain feeders (10 cm per hen) and water by bell drinkers (30 per house). Lighting was supplied by tungsten bulbs (60 W, various brands) on a 14L:10D cycle (06.30 – 20.30 h). The nest boxes were open from 04.30 – 19.30 h each day.

Feather score

Three hundred and fifteen birds from flock A (73 weeks old), 400 birds from flock B (25 weeks old) and 264 birds from flock C (68 weeks) were inspected for feather damage. A coordinate grid map of the houses and the range area and random numbers were used to

1 select birds for inspection. If there was more than one bird at a coordinate location the
2 observer used a clear sheet of A4 acetate with 5 cm² marked squares. The observer stood
3 a few metres back and held up the acetate grid so that it covered most of the section, and
4 selected the bird closest to the square indicated by a pre-determined random number. For
5 all birds, the body was divided (Bilčík and Keeling, 1999) into 5 different regions: neck,
6 back, rump, tail and wing. The neck, back and rump were scored on a 0 (best) to 4
7 (worst) scale adapted from Allen and Perry, (1975) (see Bright *et al.*, 2006). Slightly
8 different criteria were used for scoring flight feathers (tail and wing primaries), because
9 of the different types of feathers and damage. I did not attempt to score the underside of
10 the neck or the breast as feather damage from these regions may be attributed to abrasion
11 from the feeders and unrelated to damage from other birds (Bilčík and Keeling, 1999),
12 see also Bright *et al.*, (2006) for more information on feather scoring method. Bird colour
13 was classified as 'white', 'black' or 'grey'.

14 **Feather pecking behaviour**

15 For flock A, a camera (wide angle CCTV, B. Bundenburg Oxfordshire, UK) and video
16 recorder (Sanyo TLS-4024P, Sanyo Electric Co., Ltd, Japan) with 12V battery (Yuasa
17 battery Ltd, Swindon, UK) were set up in one of the 4 houses when the birds were
18 between 69 and 72 weeks of age (three recordings from House 2, one recording from
19 House 1). Video recordings (1-3 h) of the birds were collected in the mornings (05.00-
20 12.00 h) or afternoon (13.00-20.00 h). A total of 5 h video was collected (from inside the
21 houses only). For flock B, a camera and video recorder was set up at a random location
22 along the eastern wall of the barn when the birds were 17, 25, 29 and 39 weeks of age.
23 Video recordings (0.45-2 h) of the birds were collected in the morning (10.00-12.00 h) or

1 in the afternoon (13.00-16.00 h). A total of 5.5 h of video tape was collected. No video
2 recordings of flock C were collected.

3 From the video recordings, the number of severe and gentle pecks given by birds
4 to conspecifics was determined. This was later converted to pecks/10 min/30 birds
5 because approximately 30 birds within a video frame could be reliably watched for
6 pecking at any one time. Bird colour was classified as 'white', 'black' or 'grey'.

7 Using the same videos, the behaviour and plumage colour of 'feather peckers' and
8 feather peck 'receivers' at the time of a pecking incident (severe or gentle) was recorded.
9 Only bouts of pecking between different pairs of birds were used.

10 **Statistical analysis**

11 The statistical software used was Minitab for Windows, Release 14 (MINITAB[®] Inc)
12 General linear model (GLM) procedures were used to test for the effects of flock (A, B,
13 C) and plumage colour (white, black, grey) on total, rump, tail and wing feather score (N
14 = 979). To meet the assumptions of parametric tests, the total feather score data set was
15 square-root transformed, the rump, tail and wing feather score data sets were log₁₀
16 transformed. Flock was entered as a random factor and first in the model followed by
17 plumage colour (nested in flock). Thus, effects due to flock were taken into account
18 before calculating the *F*-ratio and associated *P* value for plumage colour.
19 Model fit was checked by visual examination of residual plots and the adjusted *R*² values.
20 *F*-ratios and associated values were calculated using sequential sums of squares (Grafen
21 and Hails, 2002). Because of a high frequency of 'zero' plumage damage scores for the
22 neck and back body regions, data could not be transformed to meet the assumptions of
23 normality and homogeneity of variance. Non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis *H* tests were

1 therefore carried out to test for effects of flock and plumage colour on neck and back
2 scores. Multiple comparison tests *sensu* Siegel and Castellan, (1988) were used when *H*
3 tests were significant at $\alpha < 0.05$.

4 GLM procedures were used to test for effects of week, flock (A, B), time of day
5 (morning, afternoon), plumage colour (white, black, grey) and week by flock effects on
6 the number of severe and gentle feather pecks/10 mins/30 birds. (N = 21). To meet the
7 assumptions of parametric tests, the severe and gentle feather pecking data sets were \log_{10}
8 transformed. In the GLM model, week was declared as a covariate, flock was entered as a
9 random factor, time of day and plumage colour were nested within flock. Thus, effects
10 due to flock and age (week) on feather score were taken into account before calculating
11 the *F*-ratio and associated *P* value for time of day and plumage colour.

12 Chi-square analysis was carried out to test whether feather peckers and receivers
13 performed different behaviours (N= 538) and whether feather peckers and receivers of
14 different plumage colours performed different behaviours (N = 252).

15 **Plumage reflectance**

16 Feathers of white, black and grey birds from the neck, back, rump, tail and wing were
17 collected from birds of flock B. Between 6 and 11 feathers for each region were collected
18 depending on feather cover of the individual birds captured. Feathers were cut from the
19 appropriate region and placed into labelled envelopes and returned to the lab for later
20 measurement. The reflectance spectrum from each individual feather was measured using
21 a USB 2000 spectrometer with an R200-7 probe and DH2000 Balance Deuterium
22 Tungsten Halogen light source (Ocean Optics Inc, Florida, USA). Measurements were
23 taken at a 90° angle to, and 5 mm from the feather using a probe holder. A white

1 reference (WS-1 Diffuse Reflection Standard, Ocean Optics Inc, Florida, USA) and dark
2 measurement were taken before each sample. Spectra were averaged from 5 scans with a
3 smoothing scale of 3 (OOIrrad-C Software, Ocean Optics Inc, Florida, USA).

4 **Light measurements**

5 Light measurements of random locations at flock A (using a co-ordinate grid map and
6 random numbers) on the range, under trees, in verandas and the houses were taken in the
7 morning (10.00 – 12.00 h) and afternoon (14.00 – 16.00 h) with < 50% and \geq 50% cloud
8 cover with a USB 2000 spectrometer (UV2/OFLV-4 detector and L2 lens, Ocean Optics
9 Inc. Florida USA) and a cosine-corrected sensor (CC-3-UV, Ocean Optics Inc. Florida
10 USA), custom-calibrated with a DH-2000-CAL deuterium tungsten halogen lamp (Ocean
11 Optics Inc. Florida USA). Measurements were taken at a point approx 30 cm above the
12 ground (chicken height) by pointing a 600 μ m fibre end (QP600 2-UV-BX) perpendicular
13 to the sun or, nearest light source (houses only). Dark references were taken for each
14 measurement. Spectra were averaged from 5 scans, with smoothing scale of three and an
15 appropriate integration time (Ocean Optics Inc, 2005). All measurements were taken in
16 2005 between April 6 and May 17 on 7 separate days.

18 **RESULTS**

19 **Feather scores**

20 Flock had no significant effects on total, rump, tail or wing feather damage scores ($F_{2, 6.03}$
21 > 4.25, $P > 0.05$ for all).

1 There were significant plumage colour effects on total feather damage score ($F_{6, 970} = 26.27; P < 0.001$). Birds with white plumage had lower total feather scores (lower
2 scores, less damage) than black or grey birds in all three flocks (Figure 1a).

3 There was a significant difference between flocks for neck and back feather
4 scores ($H_2 = 152.90, P < 0.001; H_2 = 88.87, P < 0.001$ respectively), and for plumage
5 colour ($H_2 = 13.92, P < 0.001; H_2 = 27.80, P < 0.001$). White birds had lower neck and
6 back feather scores than birds with black plumage (Figure 1b and c).

7 There were significant plumage colour effects on rump ($F_{6, 970} = 47.99, P <$
8 0.001), tail ($F_{6, 970} = 19.08, P < 0.001$), and wing ($F_{6, 970} = 12.04, P < 0.001$) feather
9 damage scores. White birds had less plumage damage than black or grey birds (Figure
10 1d-1f).

11 **Feather pecking behaviour**

12 There were significant, flock, time of day, plumage colour and week by flock effects on
13 the number of severe feather pecks/10 mins/30 birds (Table 1). Flock A feather pecked
14 severely at a higher rate than Flock B (Figure 2a and b), there was more severe feather
15 pecking in the morning (Figure 2a) and white birds feather pecked severely more than
16 black or grey birds (Figure 2b). There was a negative relationship between severe feather
17 pecking and week for Flock A ($50.82 - 0.717 \times \text{week}$) and a positive relationship between
18 severe feather pecking and week for Flock B ($-2.66 + 3.279 \times \text{week}$). There was no effect
19 of week, flock, time of day, plumage colour or week by flock on the number of gentle
20 feather pecks/10mins/30birds (Table 1).

21 There was a difference between behaviour of feather peckers and receivers ($\chi^2 =$
22 $115.13, df = 7, P = < 0.001$). Receivers were more likely to be dust bathing, feeding or
23

1 sitting when being feather pecked. Feather peckers were more likely to be standing or
2 walking when feather pecking (Figure 3). There was no difference between the proportion
3 of black white or grey receivers of feather pecking and the plumage colour of their
4 feather peckers ($\chi^2 = 1.57$, $df = 4$, $P = 0.815$). There was no difference between the
5 behaviour of black, white or grey receivers ($\chi^2 = 16.94$, $df = 14$, $P = 0.259$) or, the
6 behaviour of black white or grey feather peckers ($\chi^2 = 20.35$, $df = 14$, $P = 0.119$).

7 **Plumage reflectance**

8 Reflectance spectra for white, black and grey feathers were averaged for each body
9 region. The reflectance from all three plumage colours showed similar patterns,
10 irrespective of body region (Figure 4a-e). White feathers showed ~20% reflectance in the
11 UV at 300 nm, increasing steadily to ~80% reflectance at 450 nm then levelling off
12 (Figure 4a-e). Black feathers had low reflectance and showed very little variation across
13 the bird visible spectrum (~300-700 nm). Grey feathers showed ~30% reflectance in the
14 UV at 300 nm, increasingly sharply to ~40% at 350 nm then levelling off. Because the
15 black and grey feather spectra were relatively flat, the contribution of UV wavelengths to
16 plumage reflection, was proportionally greater than that for white feathers (Figure 4a-e).

17 **Light spectra**

18 On the range, light intensity was higher with < 50% cloud cover than \geq 50% cloud cover,
19 and there was a pronounced peak in light intensity at ~450 nm. There was little difference
20 between morning and afternoon spectra (Figure 5a). Under trees, light intensity was also
21 higher with < 50% cloud cover than \geq 50% cloud cover, there was a pronounced peak at
22 ~450 nm and dip at ~550nm (Figure 5b). However, light intensity in the morning at <
23 50% cloud cover was lower than light intensity in the afternoon at < 50% (Figure 5b). In

1 verandas, light intensity was higher in the afternoon at < 50% cloud cover than in the
2 morning at < 50%, morning \geq 50% and afternoon \geq 50% cloud cover (Figure 5c). This
3 was probably due to positioning of the houses, which catch the afternoon sun.

4 The light intensity inside the house is less than on the range or under trees but
5 comparable to that in veranda with \geq 50% cloud cover (Figure 5d). The light spectra from
6 inside the house had low or no reflectance between 300-400 nm (UVA), while the range,
7 under trees and veranda spectra show varying amounts (Figure 5d). Finally, the house
8 spectra peaks and troughs in different regions of the spectrum to that of natural light
9 (Figure 5d). The shape of this house light spectra is typical of fluorescent light sources
10 (Prescott and Wathes, 1999a).

11 DISCUSSION

12 This study investigated plumage colouration effects on plumage damage due to feather
13 pecking in three commercial flocks of Oakham Blue laying hens. Plumage colour effects
14 on feather pecking have previously been demonstrated (Ambrosen and Petersen, 1997;
15 Savory and Mann, 1999; Kjaer and Sørensen, 2002), although these may have been
16 confounded by bird strain. Here, significant effects of plumage colour on plumage
17 damage due to feather pecking were found within a single strain of bird: birds with white
18 plumage had lower feather scores (less plumage damage due to feather pecking) than
19 black or grey birds in all three flocks (Figure 1a-f). There were also significant flock
20 effects: variation in flock age, management and husbandry practices are known to
21 influence feather pecking (Hughes and Duncan, 1972; Green *et al.*, 2000; Bestman and
22 Wagenaar, 2003; Nicol *et al.*, 2003).

1 Why might black or grey birds suffer more plumage damage due to feather
2 pecking than white birds? It has recently been proposed (Keeling *et al.*, 2004), that the
3 genes which determine plumage pigmentation in chickens may predispose birds to
4 becoming victims of feather pecking. In Oakham Blue laying hens, genes determining
5 plumage colour may also be important in predisposing birds to becoming feather pecking
6 victims. There are also likely to be behavioural and environmental interactions/factors
7 that stimulate or inhibit feather pecking.

8 **Plumage colour and behaviour**

9 In mammals, coat colour is related to level of activity, reaction intensity and
10 environmental awareness (Hemmer, 1990). Selection of certain coat colours can produce
11 a behavioural change with a corresponding change in the stress system (Hemmer, 1990).
12 In chickens, the alpha melanocyte stimulating hormone (MSH) controls pigment
13 regulation and is directly related to energy homeostasis (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2003). It is
14 feasible that plumage colour and behaviour are associated in laying hens as in mammals
15 (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2003)). In this study, there was more severe feather pecking in the
16 morning than in the afternoon (Table 1, Figure 2a). Diurnal variation in feather pecking
17 behaviour has previously been established in laying hens (Kjaer, 2000). White birds
18 produced more severe feather pecks than black or grey birds (Table 1, Figure 2b) (there
19 was no significant difference between plumage colours for gentle feather pecks (Table
20 1)). Severe feather pecking is generally considered to cause the majority of feather
21 pecking damage (Vestergaard *et al.*, 1993; Bilčík and Keeling, 1999). However, there
22 was no difference between the proportions of white, black or grey receivers of feather
23 pecks and the plumage colour of their feather peckers or, evidence that the behaviour of

1 feather peckers and receivers varied with plumage colouration. White birds might have
2 delivered more severe feather pecks, but they did not specifically target, or behave
3 differently to, pigmented birds. A wide array of behavioural and developmental traits are
4 genetically linked to feather pecking behaviour, (Keeling *et al.*, 2004; Jensen *et al.*,
5 2005). It is possible that there are behavioural/developmental differences between
6 Oakham Blue white and pigmented birds that were not detected in this study.

7 In contrast, there was a behavioural difference between feather peckers and
8 receivers (regardless of plumage colour) during pecking incidents: Feather peckers were
9 more likely to be standing or walking, while receivers were more likely to be dust
10 bathing, feeding or sitting (Figure 4). Behavioural differences between feather and non-
11 feather-pecking birds have been demonstrated in other studies of single strain laying hens
12 (Jensen *et al.*, 2005; Nätt *et al.*, 2006) and may be indicative of personality type/coping
13 strategy (van Hierden *et al.*, 2002; Korte, *et al.*, 1997; 1999).

14 **Plumage colour and environment**

15 Fowl are visually-dominant animals with a visual system that is well adapted to collecting
16 spectral information; they have 4 cone visual pigments with wavelengths of maximum
17 sensitivities at 408 nm (Ödeen and Håstad, 2003), 455 nm, 507 nm and 569 nm
18 (Bowmaker *et al.*, 1997). Recent studies on sexual selection (Bennett *et al.*, 1996;
19 Andersson and Amundsen, 1997; Hunt *et al.*, 1997), and foraging behaviour in birds
20 (Viitala *et al.*, 1995; Church *et al.*, 1998) have emphasised the need to interpret signals on
21 the basis of the visual system perceiving them. Human eyes do not have oil droplets and
22 only three classes of cone visual pigments, and are likely to perceive colours in different
23 ways from birds. It is important to interpret feather reflectance and light composition data

1 from a 'chicken perspective'. Under the dim, artificial lights inside a poultry house, birds
2 with black and grey feathers may be less visible to conspecifics than white birds because
3 their plumage reflects at a lower intensity (Figure 5a-e). Furthermore, the lack of
4 available UV light inside versus outside and the higher contribution of UV reflectance to
5 black and grey plumage, than to white plumage, may make black and grey birds appear
6 more different inside the house than white birds. It is possible that this novel/unusual
7 appearance may make black or grey Oakham Blue hens more susceptible to feather
8 pecking. For example, in turkeys (*Meleagris gallopavo*), which have similar cone visual
9 pigment sensitivities as chickens (Hart *et al.*, 1999), the age at which UV-visible
10 markings were first observed on the wings and tail corresponded closely with the age at
11 which injuries to these sites were first caused by pecking (Sherwin and Devereux, 1999).
12 Behavioural (Jones *et al.*, 2001) and physiological (Rosiak and Zawilska, 2005)
13 sensitivity to UV wavelengths has been demonstrated in chickens. However, little is
14 known about how UV reflectance from feathers affects recognition/communication in
15 laying hens, or whether the absence of UV wavelengths during rearing affects perception
16 of UV signals in adulthood. Experimental studies are necessary to establish just how
17 important factors such as UV reflectance and reflectance intensity are, in stimulating and
18 inhibiting feather pecking in comparison to other factors such as dust particles/ litter
19 substrate being more visible on darker birds and encouraging pecking (Savory *et al.*,
20 1999). Given the importance of vision and plumage/integument cues for communication
21 in fowl, and the light environment on behaviour, further investigation into plumage
22 colour and visual environment on feather pecking is warranted.

23

1
2
3 1 In conclusion, Oakham Blue laying hens with white plumage had
4
5 2 significantly less plumage damage due to feather pecking than black or grey birds. White
6
7 3 birds severe feather pecked severely more than black or grey birds, but there were no
8
9 4 other behavioural differences between black, white and grey birds observed in this study.
10
11 5 The reflectance intensity and spectra shape of black, white and grey feathers varied over
12
13 6 the bird visible range (~300nm-700nm). Furthermore, there were marked differences
14
15 7 between the artificial light provided inside a commercial poultry house and the natural
16
17 8 light available outside on the range. This variation in plumage reflectance and ambient
18
19 9 light environment may affect bird recognition/perception of conspecifics and influence
20
21 10 feather pecking behaviour.
22
23
24
25
26

27 11 The development of feather pecking is multifactorial in nature and there
28
29 12 are likely to be genetic and environmental interactions that influence the occurrence of
30
31 13 outbreaks in a flock. Vision is the dominant sense in fowl, researchers and commercial
32
33 14 producers should be aware of the way in which chickens perceive their environment if we
34
35 15 are to better understand the behaviour and improve the welfare of commercially-housed
36
37 16 flocks.
38
39
40

41 **Acknowledgements**

42
43 18 Thanks to Food Animal Initiative and Deans Foods Ltd for access to birds. A. Parker
44
45 19 provided spectrometer equipment. Deans Foods Ltd and The Worshipful Company of
46
47 20 Poulter's Charitable Trust provided financial assistance. A. Bright was supported by a
48
49 21 TAD Scholarship from the New Zealand Government. M. S. Dawkins and T. A. Jones
50
51 22 and an anonymous reviewer commented on earlier drafts of this manuscript.
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1 References

- 2 ALLEN, J. & PERRY, G. (1975). Feather pecking and cannibalism in a caged layer
3 flock. *British Poultry Science*, **16**: 441-451.
- 4 AMBROSEN, T. & PETERSEN, V. (1997). The influence of protein level in the diet on
5 cannibalism and quality of plumage in layers. *Poultry Science*, **76**: 559-563.
- 6 ANDERSSON, S. & AMUNDSEN, T. (1997). Ultraviolet colour vision and
7 ornamentation in bluethroats. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London Series*
8 *B*, **264**: 1587-1594.
- 9 BENNETT, A.T.D., CUTHILL, I.C., PARTRIDGE, J.C. & MAIER, E. J. (1996).
10 Ultraviolet vision and mate choice in zebra finches. *Nature*, **380**: 433-435.
- 11 BESTMAN, M. & WAGENAAR, J. (2003). Farm level factors associated with feather
12 pecking in organic laying hens. *Livestock Production Science*, **80**: 133-140.
- 13 BILČÍK, B. & KEELING, L. (1999). Changes in feather condition in relation to feather
14 pecking and aggressive behaviour in laying hens. *British Poultry Science*, **40**:
15 444-451.
- 16 BLOKHUIS, H. (1989). The effect of a sudden change in floor type on pecking
17 behaviour in chicks. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, **22**: 65-73.
- 18 BLOKHUIS, H. & VAN DER HAAR, J. (1989). Effects of floor type during rearing and
19 beak trimming on ground pecking and feather pecking in laying hens. *Applied*
20 *Animal Behaviour Science*, **22**: 359-369.
- 21 BOWMAKER, J., HEATH, L. & HUNT, D. (1997). Visual pigments and oil droplets
22 from six classes of photoreceptor in the retinas of birds. *Vision Research*, **37**: 2183-
23 2194.

- 1
2
3 1 BRIGHT, A., JONES, T. A. and DAWKINS, M. S. (2006). A non-intrusive method
4
5 of assessing plumage condition in commercial flocks of laying hens. *Animal*
6
7
8 *Welfare* **15**: 113-118.
9
- 10 4 CHURCH, S.C., BENNETT, A.T.D., CUTHILL, I.C. & PARTRIDGE, J.C. (1998).
11
12 Ultraviolet cues affect the foraging behaviour of blue tits. *Proceedings of the*
13
14 *Royal Society of London Series B*, **265**: 1509-1514.
15
16
- 17 7 D'EATH, R.B. & STONE, R. (1999). Chickens use visual cues in social discrimination:
18
19 an experiment with coloured lighting. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, **62**:
20
21 233-242.
22
23
- 24 10 EL-LETHEY, H., AERNI, V., JUNG, T. & WECHSLER, B. (2000). Stress and feather
25
26 pecking in laying hens in relation to housing conditions. *British Poultry Science*,
27
28 **41**: 22-28.
29
30
- 31 13 ESPMARK, Y., AMUNDSEN, T. & ROSENQVIST, G., Eds. (2000). *Animal Signals:*
32
33 *Signalling and signal design in animal communication*, (Trondheim, Tapir
34
35 Academic Press).
36
37
- 38 16 GENTLE, M. & HUNTER, L.N. (1990). Physiological and behavioural responses
39
40 associated with feather removal in *Gallus gallus* var *domesticus*. *Research in*
41
42 *Veterinary Science*, **50**: 95-101.
43
44
- 45 19 GRAFEN, A. & HAILS, R. (2002). *Modern statistics for the life sciences*, (Oxford,
46
47 Oxford University Press).
48
49
- 50 21 GREEN, L., LEWIS, K., KIMPTON, A. & NICOL, C. (2000). Cross-sectional study of
51
52 the prevalence of feather pecking in laying hens in alternative systems and its
53
54 associations with management and disease. *The Veterinary Record*, **147**: 233-238.
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1 HART, N.S., PARTRIDGE, J.C. & CUTHILL, I.C. (1999). Visual pigments, cone oil
2 droplets, ocular media and predicted spectral sensitivity in the domestic turkey
3 (*Meleagris gallopavo*). *Vision Research*, **39**: 3321-3328.
- 4 HEMMER, H. (1990). *Domestication - the decline of environmental appreciation*.
5 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- 6 HUBER-EICHER, B. & AUDIGE, L. (1999). Analysis of risk factors for the occurrence
7 of feather pecking in laying hen growers. *British Poultry Science*, **40**: 599-604.
- 8 HUGHES, B. & DUNCAN, I. (1972). The influence of strain and environmental factors
9 upon feather pecking and cannibalism in fowls. *British Poultry Science*, **13**: 525-
10 547.
- 11 HUNT, S., CUTHILL, I.C., SWADDLE, J.P. & BENNETT, A.T.D. (1997). Ultraviolet
12 vision and band-colour preferences in female zebra finches, *Taeniopygia guttata*.
13 *Animal Behaviour*, **54**: 1383-1392.
- 14 JENSEN, P., KEELING, L., SCHÜKTZ, K.E., ANDERSSON, L., MORMEDE, P.,
15 BRANDSTROM, H., FORKMAN, B., KERJE, S., FREDRIKSSON, R.,
16 OHLSSON, C., LARSSON, S., MALLMIN, H. & KINDMARK, A. (2005).
17 Feather pecking in chickens is genetically related to behavioural and
18 developmental traits. *Physiology and Behavior*, **86**: 52-60.
- 19 JOHNSEN, P.F., VESTERGAARD, K.S. & NØRGAARD-NIELSEN, G. (1998).
20 Influence of early rearing conditions on the development of feather pecking and
21 cannibalism in domestic fowl. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, **60**: 25-41.

- 1
2
3 1 JONES, E., PRESCOTT, N., COOK, P., WHITE, R. & WATHES, C. (2001). Ultraviolet
4
5 2 light and mating behaviour in domestic broiler breeders. *British Poultry Science*,
6
7 3 **42**: 23-32.
8
9
10 4 JONES, R., BLOKHUIS, H., DE JONG, I., KEELING, L., MCADIE, T. &
11
12 5 PREISINGER, R. (2004). Feather pecking in poultry: the application of science in
13
14 6 a search for practical solutions. *Animal Welfare*, **13**: S215-S219.
15
16
17 7 KEELING, L., ANDERSSON, L., SCHÜKTZ, K.E., KERJE, S., FREDRIKSSON, R.,
18
19 8 CARLBORG, Ö. & CORNWALLIS, C.K. (2004). Feather pecking and victim
20
21 9 pigmentation. *Nature*, **431**: 645-646.
22
23
24 10 KEELING, L. & JENSEN, P. (1995). Do feather pecking and cannibalistic hens have
25
26 11 different personalities? *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, **44**: 257-281.
27
28
29 12 KJAER, J. (2000). Diurnal rhythm of feather pecking behaviour and condition of
30
31 13 integument in four strains of loose housed laying hens. *Applied Animal Behaviour*
32
33 14 *Science*, **65**: 331-347.
34
35
36 15 KJAER, J. & SØRENSEN, P. (2002). Feather pecking and cannibalism in free-range
37
38 16 laying hens as affected by genotype, dietary level of methionine + cystine, light
39
40 17 intensity during rearing and age at first access to the range area. *Applied Animal*
41
42 18 *Behaviour Science*, **76**: 21-39.
43
44
45 19 KORTE, S.M., BEUVING, G., RUESINK, W. & BLOKHUIS, H. (1997). Plasma
46
47 20 catecholamine and corticosterone levels during manual restraint in chicks from a
48
49 21 high and low feather pecking line of laying hens. *Physiology and Behaviour*, **62**:
50
51 22 437-441.
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

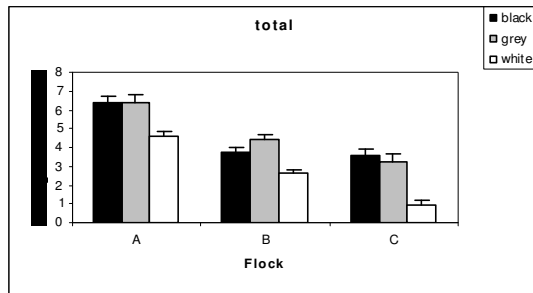
- 1 KORTE, S.M., RUESINK, W. & BLOKHUIS, H. (1999). Heart rate variability during
2 manual restraint in chicks from high- and low-feather pecking lines of laying hens
3 *Physiology and Behaviour*, **65**: 649-652.
- 4 LEESON, S. & MORRISON, W. (1978). Effect of feather cover on feed efficiency in
5 laying birds. *Poultry Science* **57**: 1094-1096.
- 6 NÄTT, D. R., KERJE, S., ANDERSSON, L. & JENSEN, P. (2006). Plumage colour and
7 feather pecking - behavioural differences associated with PMEL17 genotypes in
8 chicken (*Gallus gallus*). Proceedings of the 40th International Congress of the
9 ISAE, Bristol, pp 245.
- 10 NICOL, C., POTZSCH, C., LEWIS, K. & GREEN, L. (2003). Matched concurrent case-
11 control study of risk factors for feather pecking in hens on free-range commercial
12 farms in the UK. *British Poultry Science*, **44**: 515-523.
- 13 OCEAN OPTICS INC. (2005). *OOIrrad-C installation and operation manual*.
- 14 ÖDEEN, A. & HÅSTAD, O. (2003). Complex distribution of avian color vision systems
15 revealed by sequencing the SWS1 opsin from total DNA. *Molecular Biology and*
16 *Evolution*, **20**: 855-861.
- 17 PEGURI, A. & COON, C. (1993). Effect of feather coverage and temperature on layer
18 performance. *Poultry Science*, **72**: 1318-1329.
- 19 PRESCOTT, N. & WATHES, C. (1999a). Reflective properties of domestic fowl (*Gallus*
20 *g. domesticus*), the fabric of their housing and the characteristics of the light
21 environment in environmentally controlled poultry houses. *British Poultry*
22 *Science*, **40**: 185-193.

- 1
2
3 1 PRESCOTT, N. & WATHES, C. (1999b). Spectral sensitivity of the domestic fowl
4
5 2 (*Gallus g. domesticus*). *British Poultry Science*, **40**: 332-339.
6
7
8 3 RODENBURG, T., VAN HIERDEN, Y.M., BUITENHUIS, A., RIEDSTRA, B.,
9
10 4 KOENE, P., KORTE, S.M., VAN DER POEL, J., GROOTHUIS, T. &
11
12 5 BLOKHUIS, H. (2004). Feather pecking in laying hens: new insights and
13
14 6 directions for research? *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, **86**: 291-298.
15
16
17 7 ROSIAK, J. & ZAWILSKA, J.B. (2005). Near-ultraviolet light perceived by the retina
18
19 8 generates the signal suppressing melatonin synthesis in the chick pineal gland - an
20
21 9 involvement of NMDA glutamate receptors. *Neuroscience Letters*, **379**: 214-217.
22
23
24 10 SAVORY, C. (1995). Feather pecking and cannibalism. *World's Poultry Science*, **51**:
25
26 11 215-219.
27
28
29 12 SAVORY, C. & MANN, J. (1999). Feather pecking in groups of growing bantams in
30
31 13 relation to floor litter substrate and plumage colour. *British Poultry Science*, **40**:
32
33 14 565-572.
34
35
36 15 SAVORY, C., MANN, J. & MACLEOD, M. (1999). Incidence of pecking damage in
37
38 16 growing bantams in relation to food form, group size, stocking density, dietary
39
40 17 tryptophan concentration and protein source. *British Poultry Science*, **40**: 579-
41
42 18 584.
43
44
45 19 SEDLACKOVA, M., BILČÍK, B. & KOSTAL, L. (2004). Feather pecking in laying
46
47 20 hens: environmental and endogenous factors. *Acta Veterinaria Brno*, **73**: 521-531.
48
49
50 21 SHERWIN, C. & DEVEREUX, C. (1999). Preliminary investigations of ultraviolet-
51
52 22 induced markings on domestic turkey chicks and a possible role in injurious
53
54 23 pecking. *British Poultry Science*, **40**: 429-433.
55
56
57
58
59
60

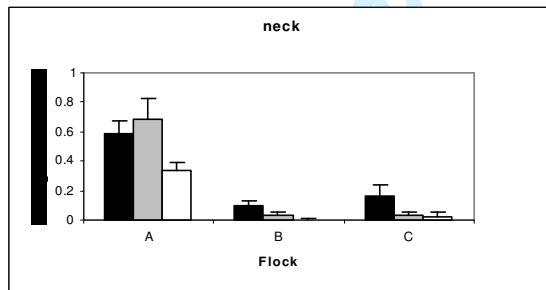
- 1 SIEGEL, S. & CASTELLAN, N. (1988). *Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioural*
2 *Sciences*, (New York; London McGraw-Hill Inc).
- 3 TAKEUCHI, S., TAKAHASHI, S., OKIMOTO, R., SCHIOTH, H. & BOSWELL, T.
4 (2003). Avian melanocortin system: alpha-MSH may act as an autocrine/paracrine
5 system. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, **994**: 366-372.
- 6 TAUSON, R. & SVENSSON, S.A. (1980). Influence of plumage condition on the hen's
7 feed requirement. *Swedish Journal of Agricultural Research*, **10**: 35-39.
- 8 TULLETT, S., MACLEOD, M. & JEWITT, T. (1980). The effects of partial defeathering
9 on energy metabolism in the laying fowl. *British Poultry Science*, **21**: 241-245.
- 10 VAN HIERDEN, Y.M., KORTE, S.M., RUESINK, W., VAN REENEN, C.G., ENGEL,
11 B., KORTE-BOUWS, A., KOOLHAAS, J.M. & BLOKHUIS, H. (2002).
12 Adrenocortical reactivity and central serotonin and dopamine turnover in young
13 chicks from a high and low feather-pecking line of laying hens. *Physiology and*
14 *Behaviour*, **75**: 653-659.
- 15 VESTERGAARD, K.S., KRUIJT, J.P. & HOGAN, J.A. (1993). Feather pecking and
16 chronic fear in groups of red junglefowl: their relations to dustbathing, rearing
17 environment and social status. *Animal Behaviour*, **45**: 1127-1140.
- 18 VESTERGAARD, K.S. & LISBORG, L. (1993). A model of feather pecking
19 development which relates to dustbathing in the fowl. *Behaviour* **126**: 291-308.
- 20 VIITALA, J., KORPIMAKI, E., PALOKANGAS, P. & KOLVULA, M. (1995).
21 Attraction of kestrels to vole scent marks visible in ultraviolet light. *Nature*, **373**:
22 425-427.
- 23

1 **FIGURE 1.** Total (a), neck (b), back (c) rump (d), tail (e) and wing (e) plumage damage
 2 feather score (mean \pm SE) by flock. Lower score indicates less damage.

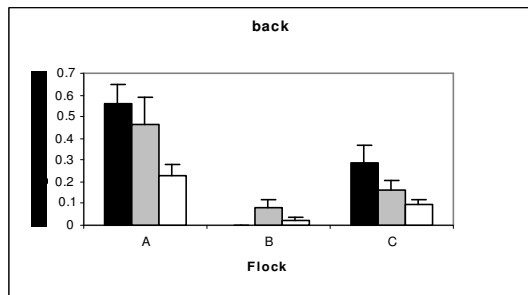
3
 4 (a) total



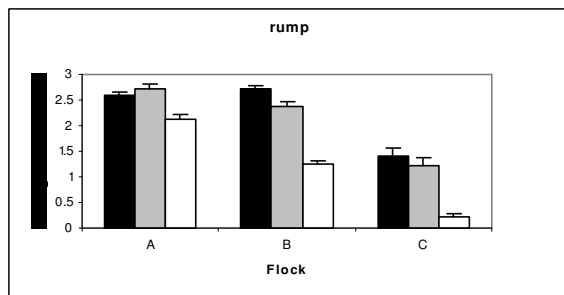
5
 6
 7 (b) neck



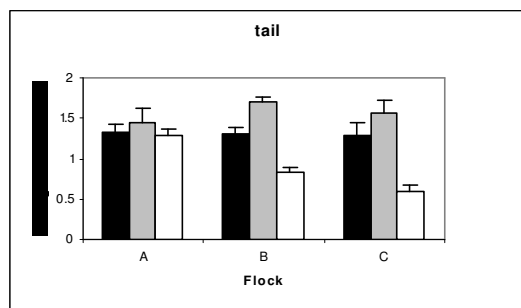
8
 9
 10 (c) back



11
 12
 13 (d) rump



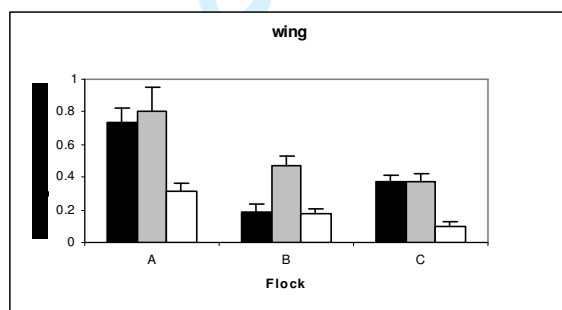
1 (e) tail



2

3

4 (f) wing



5

1

2

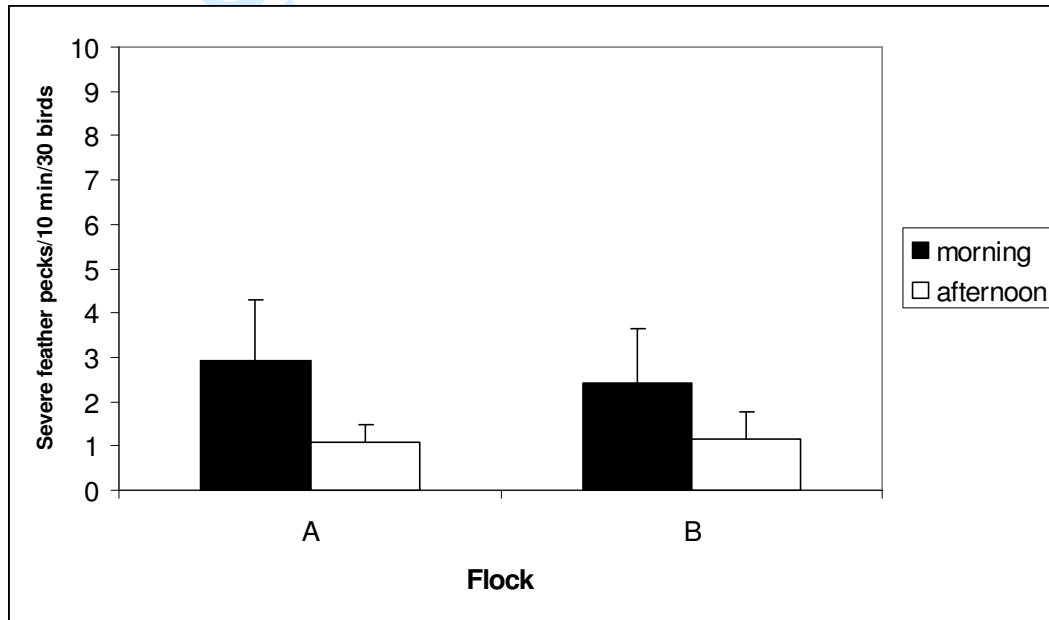
3 **FIGURE 2.** Severe feather pecks/10 birds/30 min (mean \pm SE) by flock for, Time of day

4 (a) and Plumage colour (b).

5

6

7 (a) time of day



8

9

10

11

(b) plumage colour

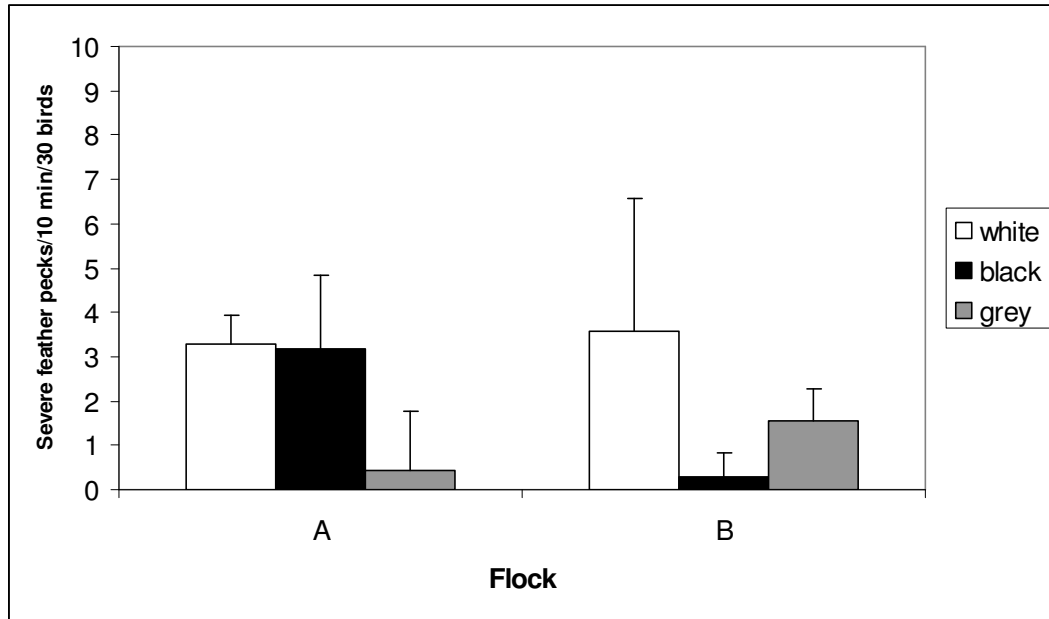
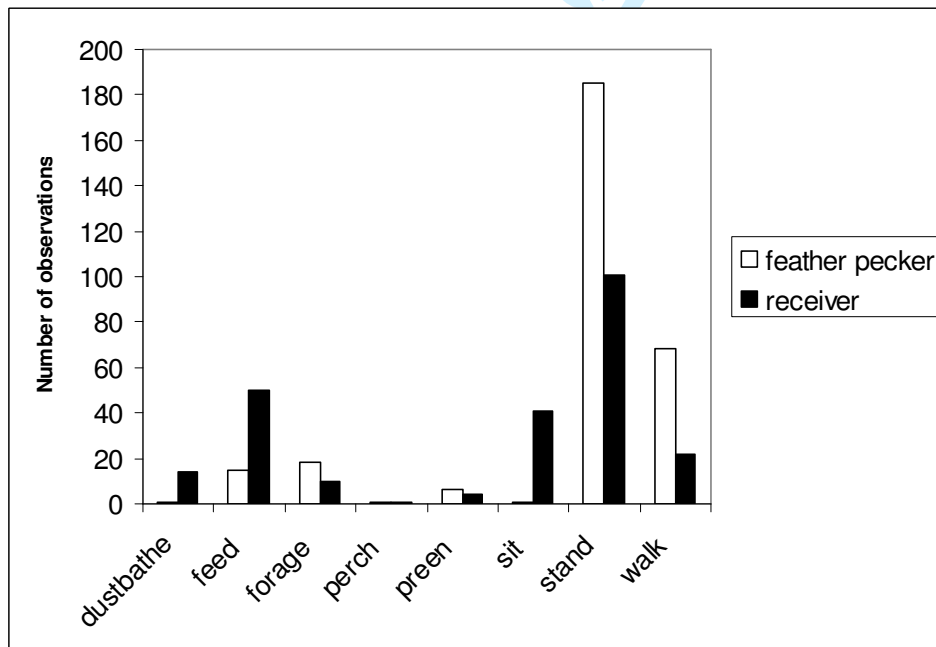
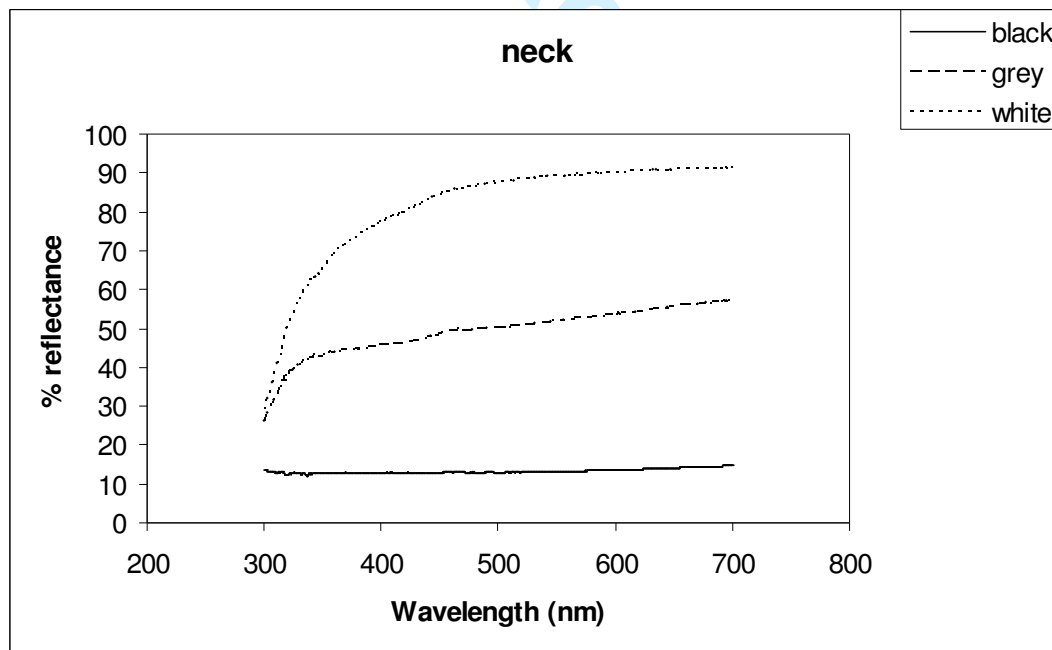


FIGURE 3. Behaviours performed by feather peckers and feather peck 'receivers' during feather pecking incidents.

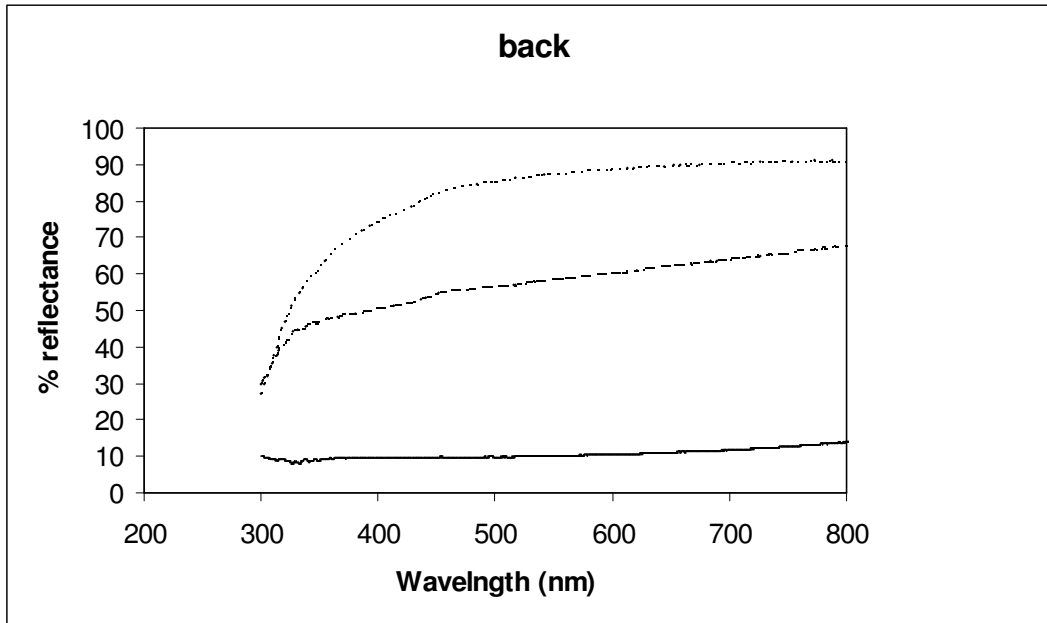


1 **FIGURE 4.** Reflectance spectra of black, grey and white feathers from the neck (a), back
 2 (b), rump (c), tail (d) and wing (e). Between 6 and 11 feathers from each region were
 3 measured using a USB 2000 spectrometer with an R200-7 probe and DH2000 Balance
 4 Deuterium Tungsten Halogen light source (Ocean Optics Inc, Florida, USA).
 5 Measurements were taken at a 90° angle to, and 5 mm from the feather using a probe
 6 holder. A white reference (WS-1 Diffuse Reflection Standard, Ocean Optics Inc, Florida,
 7 USA) and dark measurement were taken before each sample. Spectra were averaged
 8 from 5 scans with a smoothing scale of 3 (OOIrrad-C Software, Ocean Optics Inc,
 9 Florida, USA).

(a) neck



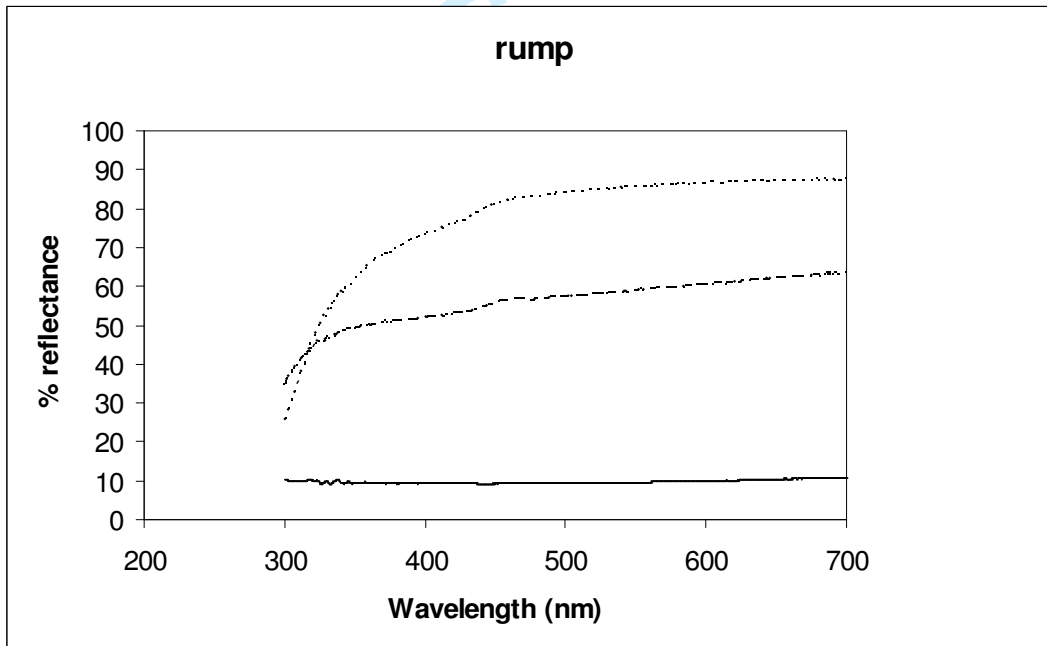
(b) back



23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46

1
2
3

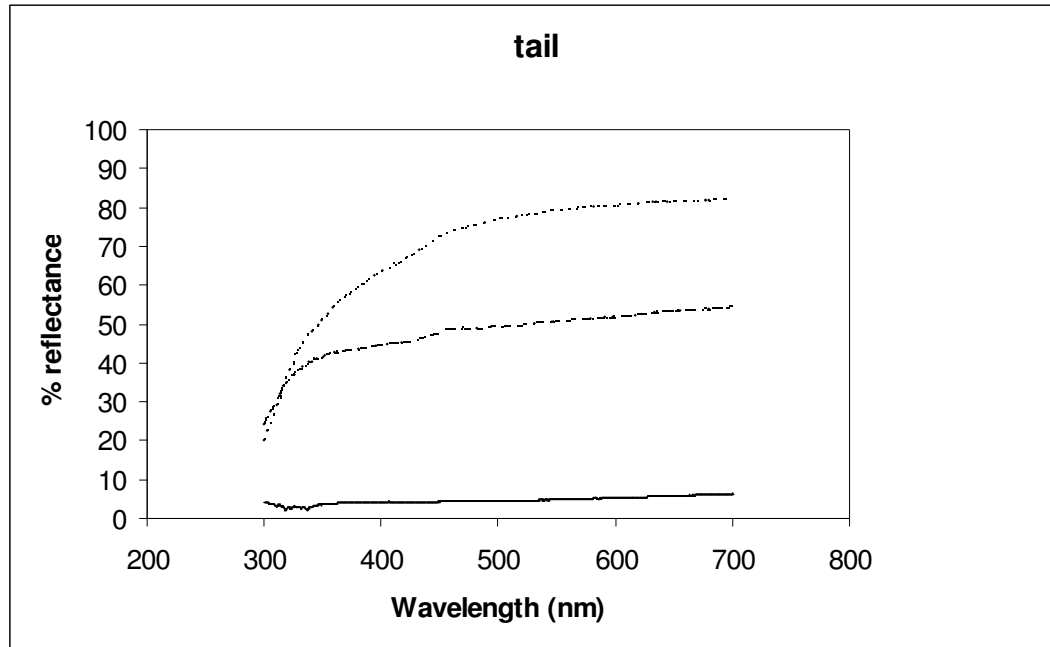
(c) rump



47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

4
5
6
7

(d) tail

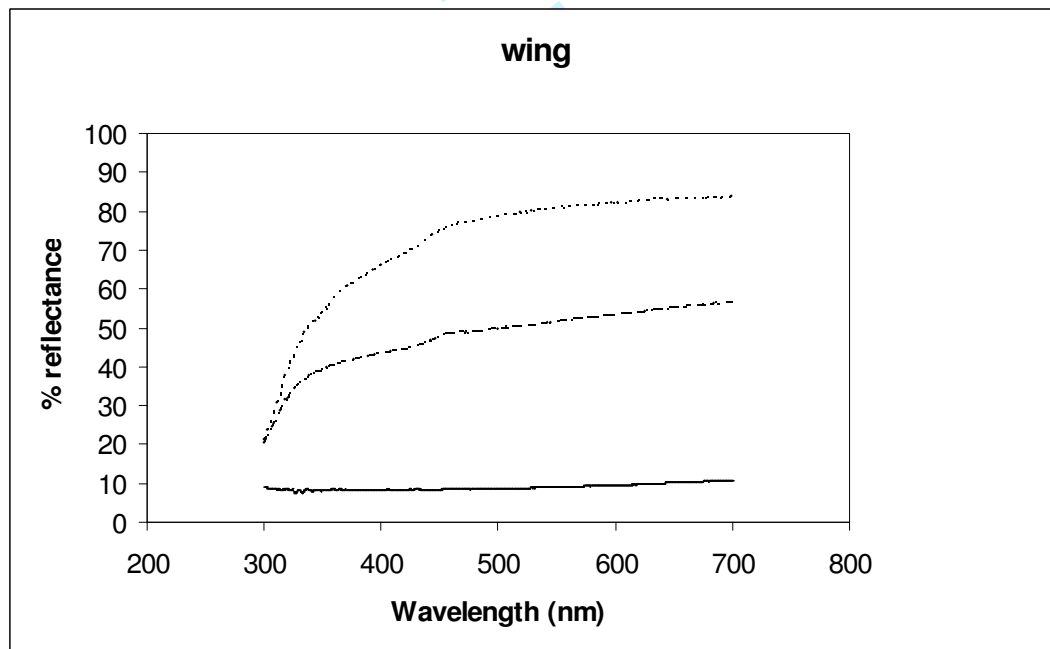


1

2

3

(e) wing



4

5

6 **FIGURE 5.** Typical light spectra at the FAI farm, Wytham, Oxford in the morning and
 7 afternoon with $<$ and $\geq 50\%$ cloud cover on the open range (a), under trees (b), veranda
 8 (c) and house (d). Measurements were taken using a USB 2000 spectrometer

57

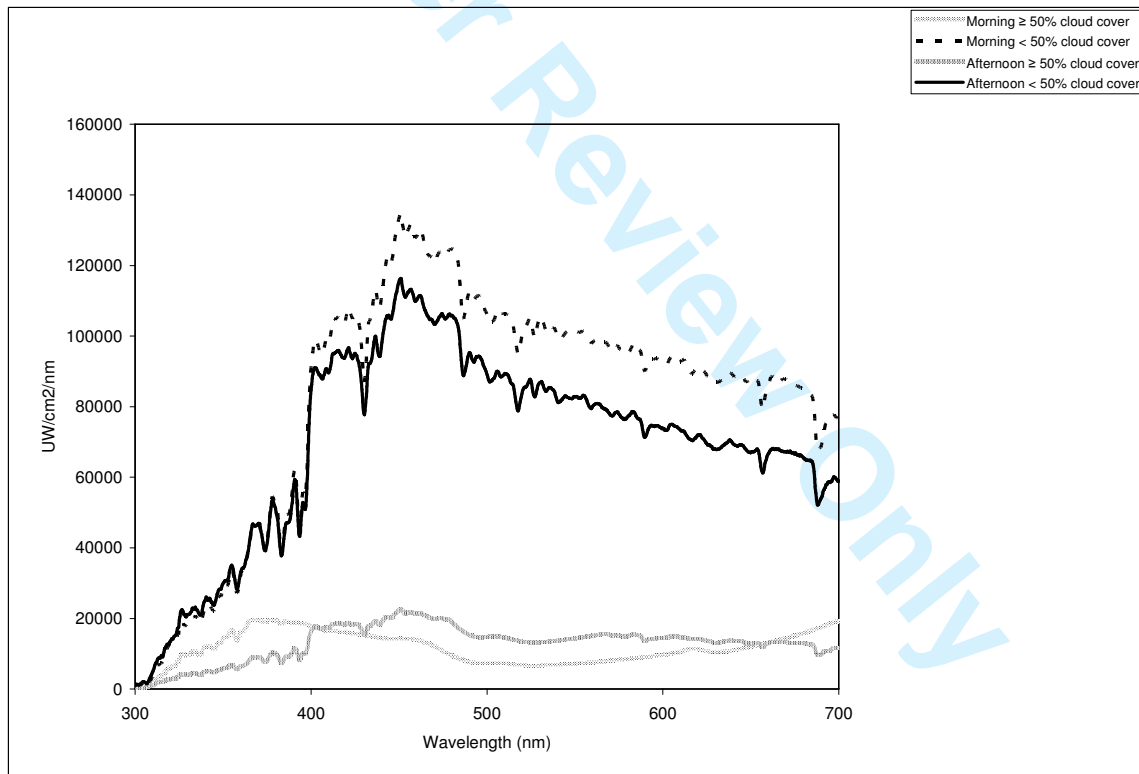
58

59

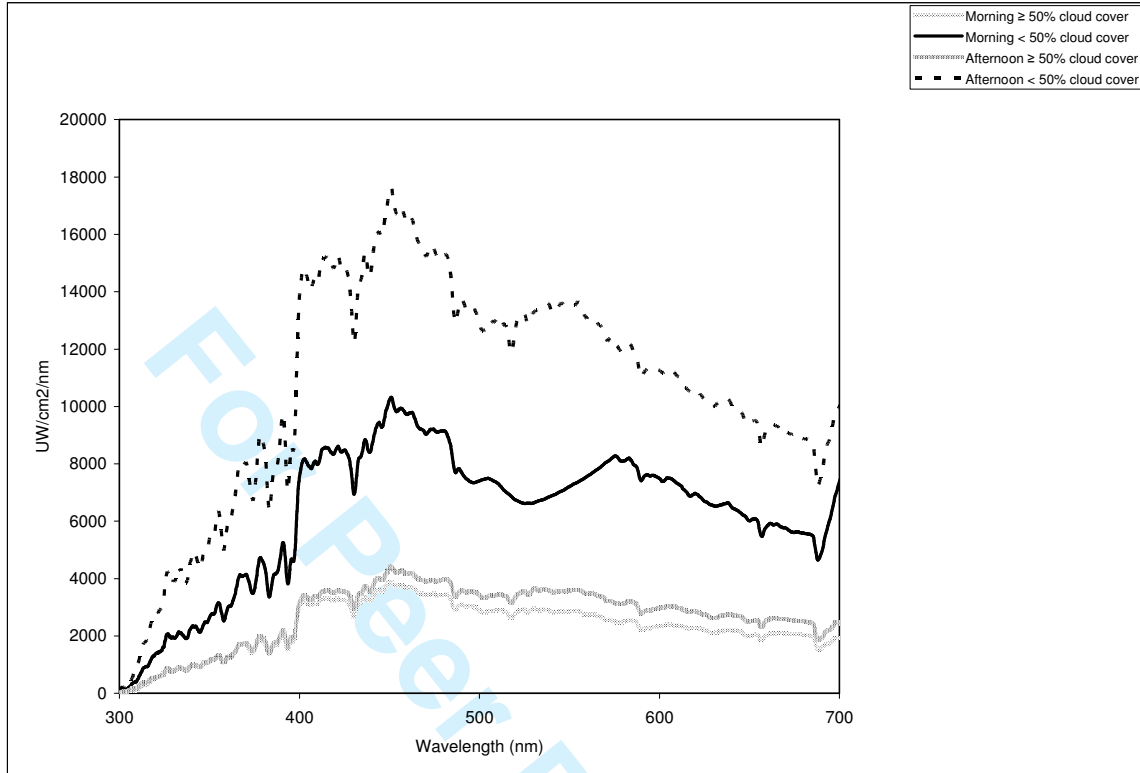
60

1 (UV2/OFLV-4 detector and L2 lens, Ocean Optics Inc. Florida USA) and a cosine-
2 corrected sensor (CC-3-UV, Ocean Optics Inc. Florida USA), custom-calibrated with a
3 DH-2000-CAL deuterium tungsten halogen lamp (Ocean Optics Inc. Florida USA).
4 Measurements were taken at a point approx 30 cm above the ground (chicken height) by
5 pointing a 600 μm fibre end (QP600 2-UV-BX) perpendicular to the sun or, nearest light
6 source (houses only). Dark references were taken for each measurement. Spectra were
7 averaged from 5 scans, with smoothing scale of 3 and an appropriate integration time.

10 (a) range

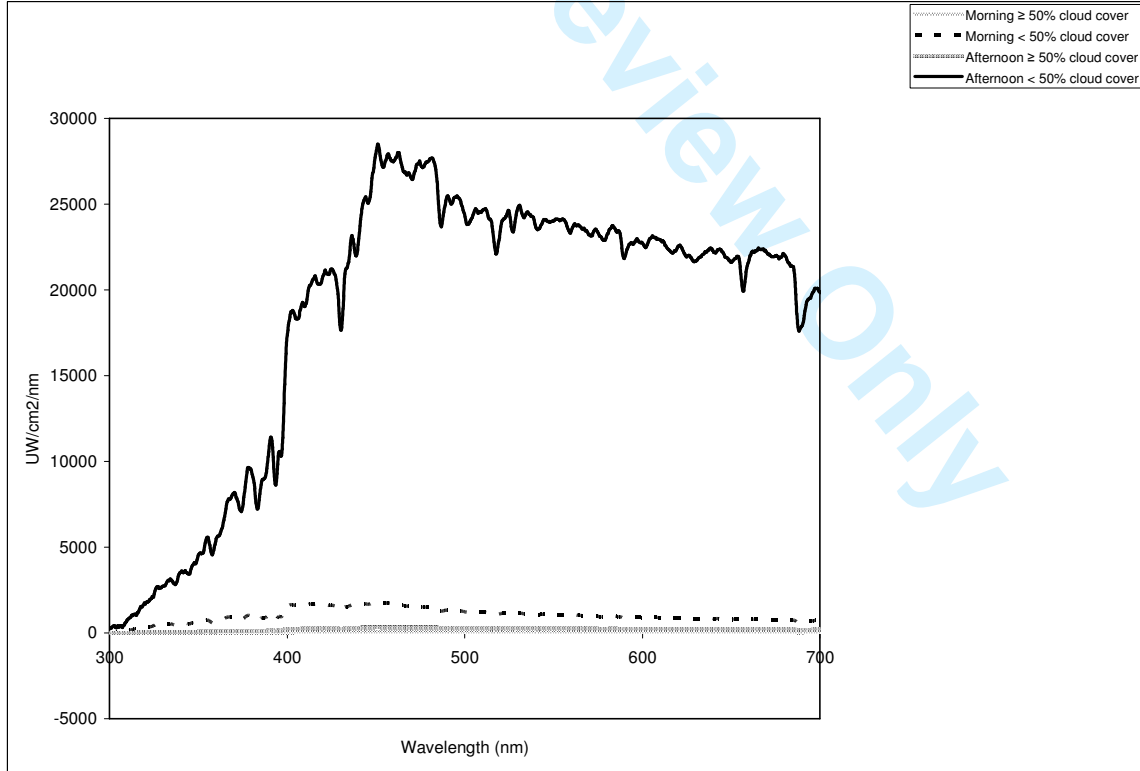


11 (b) trees



1
2
3

(c) veranda



4
5

(d) house

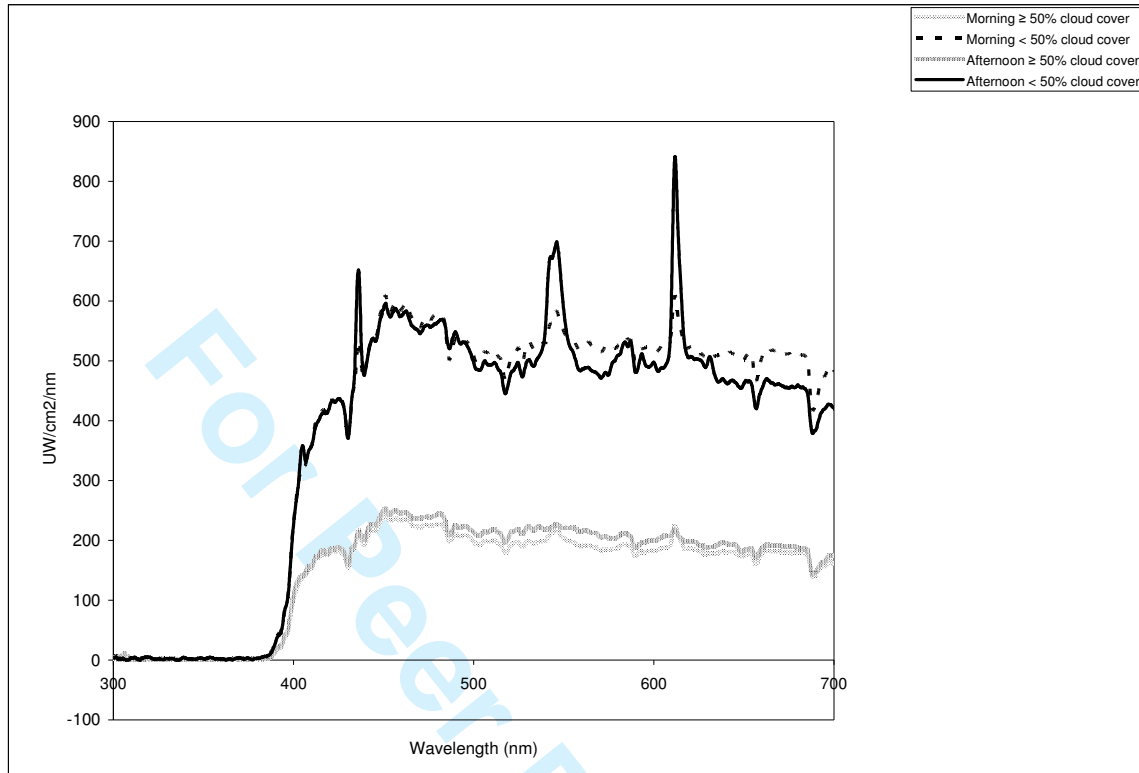


TABLE. *F*-ratio and associated *P* values for GLM on the effects of week, flock (A-C), time of day (morning, afternoon), plumage colour (white, black, grey) and week by flock interaction on severe and gentle feather pecks/10 mins/30 birds. Week was included as a covariate in the model, flock as a random effect. Time of day and plumage colour were nested within flock. $N = 21$.

	Severe	<i>P</i>	Gentle	<i>P</i>
Week	$F_{1,11} = 3.37$	0.094	$F_{1,11} = 0.29$	0.602
Flock	$F_{1,11} = 4.95$	0.048	$F_{1,11} = 0.26$	0.620
Time of day (flock)	$F_{2,11} = 8.75$	0.005	$F_{2,11} = 0.67$	0.532
Plumage colour (flock)	$F_{4,11} = 4.83$	0.017	$F_{4,11} = 1.83$	0.193
Week*Flock	$F_{1,11} = 5.65$	0.037	$F_{1,11} = 0.25$	0.625

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1

For Peer Review Only