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**Dr Greg Gilbert & Associates**

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Advice for keepers of small flocks of chickens

Dr Louise Baskind

Are your chickens losing condition, looking restless, and not producing eggs and you're not sure why? The problem could be Red Mites. The Red Mite is a parasite which lives off the chooks in the day and feeds on the chooks at night. It causes itchiness, depression, anaemia and loss of production. It can even cause death.

To check for Red Mite observe the chooks and chook-shed with a torch at night. Red mites are visible to the naked eye, but may look like specks of dirt as they are only 1mm long. They are a red-grey colour. Watch the specks to see if they are moving.

The birds may have pale combs and seem out of sorts. Poor hatching rates of fertilised eggs can also be due to heavy infestations, as roosters may be rendered infertile.

The mites are brought in by wild birds and then hide in dark crevices. They can build up very rapidly in warm weather. They can even survive for up to one year without having a feed!

As a routine, birds should be provided year round with access to dustbaths containing diatomaceous earth (DE). This should help control numbers, but if an outbreak occurs, pyrethrin based sprays are essential. Other strategies are to use a blowtorch in the crevices of the shed, or to replace the roof tin with clear polycarbonate roofing to let in more sunlight.



DAVID AND LYNDA AVERY, THEIR DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW AND TWO GRAND-DAUGHTERS TRAVELLING BY CAMEL.

Surprise desert

Lynda Avery shakes the sand from her shoes

United Arab Emirates was one of those spots on the world map that had little meaning for me and not on my 'bucket list' to explore until a member of our family moved to Dubai to live and work there. I did not know at that time this was to become a regular visiting place for the next ten years or so — putting meaning, colour, faces and experiences on that part of the world map.

Dubai is an assault on the senses. There is an opulent air in the arrival hall of Dubai airport. It has the feel of a palace adorned with shining marble and chandeliers. The Emirati customs officials and arrival hall staff even look like princes gliding around in their crisp white dish-dashes, crocheted skull caps and either white or red and white kufiyahs. My friendly and grateful arrival after the fourteen-hour flight from Sydney is met with neither a cheery welcome nor complication, just resignation that another plane load of passengers need to be processed.

After a happy reunion with family, my tired self was refreshed just to see their happy faces and hear their excited chatter. The heat hits like a wall as I leave the air-conditioned comfort of the arrival hall so I am grateful to be driving home in air-conditioned comfort.

Or am I? I had not been prepared for the road home. Road or race-track? Not only are we on the 'wrong' side of the road but we are doing 130kph on the wrong side surrounded by vehi-

cles, big and small, that all seem to be changing lanes and at the same time going even faster that we are. I can't look. I am close to panic when I realise my daughter has the steering wheel, which is also on the wrong side of the car, and is in control.

I have noticed a billboard at the side of the road several times and even at speed I notice dark eyes that seem to follow as we pass by. I find myself fascinated, even dare I say, deeply affected by these dark, mysterious men. Sheik Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum and two of his sons portray steely determination, impeccable grooming, history and the very essence of men of an ancient culture who are proud of it. Unknowable, yet, here for all to see. Some questions tumble in to my thoughts. What kind of ruler is this

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man? Is he a good husband, father? Do these young men respect him? I would eventually find answers to these questions.

Dubai, the city, sandwiched between the sparkling turquoise waters of the Persian Gulf and the sand of the Arabian Desert, looked out of character. It rises to great heights from beneath the sand and in some instances from the water. Fast, noisy, flourishing businesses, flashy shopping malls, some even offering fun on the snow or ice.

Surprisingly, it isn't the malls or the beaches that I feel drawn to but the desert. I discovered this a few nights later while sitting on the silky, warm sand watching the sunset over the Arabian desert. Such beauty and serenity as the last of the sun's rays turned the sand dunes into fluid gold with shadows that gave the scene a mysterious and dramatic accent.

I was transfixed by the beauty and harshness of this ancient and moveable landscape. No footprints from the past but I was aroused with a curiosity of who may have set foot here. As the light faded and the stars appeared, a velvety cloak seemed to cover all I had seen. My reverie and the spirituality of the passed moments broke as the driver and guide for the evening announced dinner would be served shortly.

What could be more romantic than dinner under the stars in the desert? This promised to be another assault on my overloaded senses. I was not disappointed. An Arabic camp, luxurious and colourful with a delicious, smoky aroma of meat cooking, my hunger arose to another level.

The mystical atmosphere that belongs to the desert was enhanced and completed by rich Arabic music. The menu was perfect. Mouth-watering mountains of fresh fruit including dates accompanied the distinctive

BURJ KHALIFA WITH THE FLAMINGO SANCTUARY IN FOREGROUND.



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