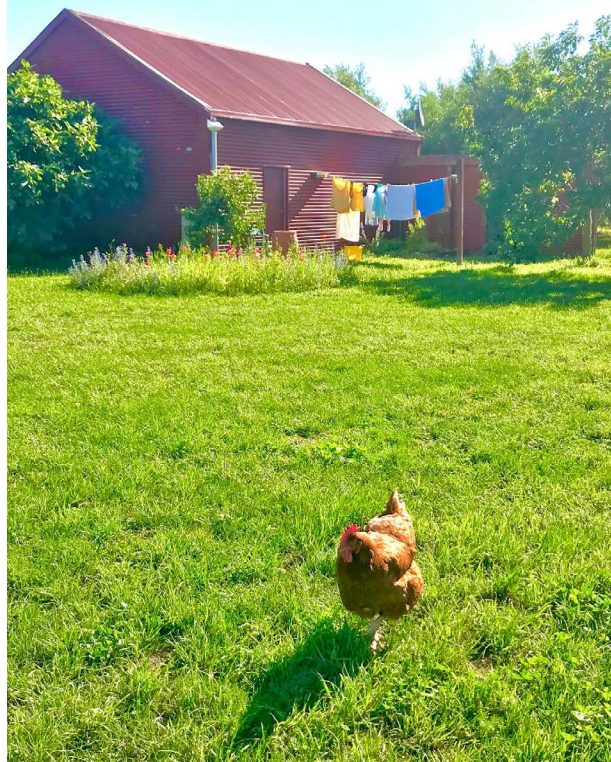


Tackling the hens

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- McCallum's previous book *XYZ of Happiness* was a *Listener* top ten poetry book 2018.
- Poem 'Sycamore Tree' was selected for Best NZ Poems.
- McCallum was the inaugural winner of the Caselberg Trust International Poetry Prize.
- Appearing at Featherston Booktown and Blackball festivals.

Hens can be fun visitors, when they gossip and sunbathe and pop inside for a chat, but they can outstay their welcome and tackling them to send them home isn't easy. They aren't the only creatures in the pages of this book – there's Ursula the golden-eyed cat, a leporine emperor, singing mice and all the swallows! Then there are the people who interact with them: an entomologist in love with the spiders he observes, a builder who releases a trapped mouse, a woman who attracts bees as a flower does – and Mary and the hens, of course.

And there's more to tackle: the steepness of Devon Street, unpicking a cardigan, the loss of a mother. Here are poems that are busy in the world, telling people's stories, crunching words between their teeth. They remind us at every turn that life is many things at once: long and short, difficult and brilliant, sad and joyful – and, like the hens, all we can do is truck on.



Mary McCallum is a writer and publisher who lives in the Wairarapa and Pōneke. Her own published work includes award-winning novel *The Blue*; a poetry book *XYZ of Happiness* and a children's novel *Dappled Annie and the Tigrish*. She won the inaugural Caselburg Trust International Poetry Prize and her poem 'Sycamore Tree' was selected for Best NZ Poems. She is a director of Mākaro Press and The Cuba Press.

We tackle the hens before it gets dark.
Bill's the first. She's in the basket with
the lid, preternaturally quiet. We grab
George. But when we open the lid
to deposit her, Bill takes her chance and
scarpers. George is off too, a flurry of wing
and complaints. Mildred has disappeared.
Bill and George hole up in a huff under
the hedge. Bill's giving me the side-eye.
George's eyes are shut—she appears to be
meditating. Mildred shimmies through
the gate, claws the grass, looks murderous.



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