We keep a rooster with the hens. Even though he eats more than a hen and never gives us a single egg in return, his contribution is significant. When he talks, the hens listen. It’s not a paternal type of domination as it might sound, but rather, a survival mechanism. Here’s a short story of my most prized animal emotion event involving the chickens:

We feed the hawks here too. They are our #1 predator of the hens, capable of depoling one hen a day. One morning, I heard the rooster sound the distress call, I look out to witness an attack. The ten second warning the rooster provided gave enough time for all the hens to scramble for cover. The hawk lost round one. Still, all the chickens now stayed close to the hen house. The rooster went inside. Sometimes, let’s his guard down, just smoozing with the ladies in the henhouse. For all I know, maybe he was officially "on break". Regardless, that hawk was still hungry and returned when the "air raid siren" wasn’t able to sound. This time, I became aware of the attack due to the sound of a hen in distress. The hawk had her pinned down as it began to strangle her. It was pure pandemonium in the field. The more the victim vocalized distress, the more the others instantly responded, first with a run towards their downed flockmate, then a rapid retreat. (For the first few moments of distress, other hens will provide aid, only to quickly retreat as they experience direct danger.)

Then, out from the door of the henhouse fly’s, (yes, he was flying), SUPERrrrrrrROOSTER to the rescue. (Que the Mighty Mouse music: "Here I come to save the day"). It was almost as if he had thought "not on my watch" and out he came with a vengeance. His squawking was as aggressive as his speed as he charged the hawk, risking his life in the process. I couldn’t help but apply a sense of chivalry to his valiant response. But the hawk somehow knew something the rooster did not. Even though the pound for pound the rooster outweighed him, the hawk held his grip on that hen while lashing out and screaming at the rooster. The rooster retreated, screaming at the hens to do the same. This time, the hawk won.

If I end the story right here, clearly, we would all recognize human-type emotions in these birds. We feel that they think about each other and care about each other. But, as Paul Harvey would say, it’s time for... the rest of the story.

To you and I, it is a morbid thought to think of a predator eating one of our own kind directly in front of us. But there that hawk sat, ripping the feathers and flesh from the head and neck first, (hawks always eat the head and neck meat first), as the entire flock of hens watched nervously from a distance. But the nervousness didn’t prevail, not like you or I would think. Instead, the hens gradually released their fear and ventured cautiously close to the hawk, still feeding on their flockmate. Now the behavior I began to notice was similar to the “you’ve got something and I want it too” that is innate in chickens. Because the hawk was feeding, it was content with the kill that it had. The hens not only demonstrated less fear of the hawk, they now wanted the hawk to share. A bit later, after the hawk was gone, the balance of the carcass was fought over by the hens - each ripping off a piece of flesh and running with the prize as a line of others chased in close pursuit.