Abstract

Almost every household in the rural and sub-urban areas in Kenya keeps poultry under the traditional type of management. The feeding is poor and growth of birds depends on scavenging feed wherever it can be found. Similarly, there is very little disease control undertaken and the potential for productivity is undocumented. A study was therefore conducted using a structured questionnaire which was served to owners of small-holder enterprises keeping ducks to determine productivity parameters, constraints and household characteristics in rural areas close to the city of Nairobi. Majority of household heads were men (60%) while a fair proportion were headed by women (40%). The main occupations were: business (35%), farming (33%), manual labour (11%), formal employment (5%), and the rest did not have a steady place of work.

Local breeds of ducks, usually crosses between Peking and Moscovy ducks, were kept. The reasons farmers chose to keep ducks were: resistance to diseases, easy management, high growth rate and productivity, and ease of availability, in that order. Most farmers gave supplementary feeds to their ducks to achieve early maturity. Most farmers housed their ducks and the coops were cleaned once a month. Most ducks started laying at 6 months and laid 10-36 eggs per duck per clutch. Most ducks had three clutches per year. Seasonal variation was seen in the laying of ducks with warm weather and the abundance of feeds and water just after the rains favouring more laying. More eggs were used for brooding, while some were eaten and the rest sold. An average of 14 eggs were set for brooding, out of which 12-14 hatched. Weaning age was on average 3 months. However, most farmers did not wean off their ducks arguing that the mothers provided maximum protection from preditors and that the ducklings had less stress and better growth. Disease, preditors and accidents were reported as the causes of death. Ducks were sold to neighbours, business people at the farm or in the markets.