Abstract

Poultry are majority livestock in Kenya. At 71,000, the duck population is small but it contributes to the smallholder economy in the semi-urban and some rural areas. They, however, are a sizeable number among the farmed birds when chickens are excluded. As local chickens, they are reared in order to provide protein in terms of eggs and duck meat, to meet some financial needs, and as a socio-cultural bird for the smallholder farmers.

The common local ducks are crosses of Muscovy, Pekin and Aylesbury. They are on average 4-18 with a range of 1 to 85 in a flock. Most of them are under free-range management and a few under semi-intensive management. Housing, feeding and watering are similar to those of the local chickens, although they need more water than chickens due to their feeding habits, swimming and cooling of the body.

A study was carried out on ducks in Machakos (Athi River), Kiambu (Githunguri and Kikuyu), Kajiado (Ngong) and Nairobi (Embakasi, Dagoreti, Kibera, Westlands) where the management of ducks was found to be similar, although in some aspects were in contrast to that of the local chickens. They were found to lay as many eggs as local chickens that were bigger, more fertile and had higher hatchability rates. Ducklings had high growth rate such that at 4 months the drakes were on average 2.5 kilograms while the ducks were 1.5 kilograms in body weight.

Their main constraints were inadequate feed, poor housing and diseases. Some of the diseases are specific to the duck while others, like fowl cholera, are shared with other farm birds. Up to date research findings on Pasteurella multocida in the area are outlined.

Ducks are generally resistant to common poultry diseases, including Newcastle disease, which can infect them but may not cause serious disease. If improved, so as to enhance their production, the local duck can complement or be an alternative poultry to local chickens in semi-urban and some rural areas. Research methodologies that encourage duck production with women participation, appropriate breed selection, improved policy issues and marketing strategies can make local ducks a tool for poverty alleviation, provide food security and gender empowerment.