Abstract

Free scavenging chicken is the most abundant type of livestock in Kenya, other African countries and also other non-African developing countries. Practically every family in village set-up, settled or nomadic, owns some form of poultry in varying numbers so that, in aggregate, the total poultry population in most tropical countries is very large. It is estimated that there are about 29 million chickens in Kenya currently, of which more than 75% (i.e. about 21.8 million) are scavenging local village ones (SLC). These birds supply meat and eggs in villages and also account for about 20% of urban and peri-urban poultry demand – the rest is supplied by exotic commercial poultry. When put at the same level of management and feeding, the village chicken appears a poor producer of egg and meat; however, in cases where the birds have to survive on their own, the village chickens excel over the exotic ones. Considering the poor quality feed that these birds normally take during scavenging, as they are normally kept, the extent of food conversion efficiency is excellent, with respect to the resultant production. This paper compares the laying capacity of these birds with that of the commercially/exotic laying birds brought to the Agricultural Society of Kenya Show, Nairobi, over a period of 10 years. The parameter of egg production capacity was estimated by the pliability of bones, especially the pubic bone spread and the distance between the pubic bone and the keel/breast bone, measured as number of fingers that can fit between each space, respectively. The investigation has shown that the indigenous birds have a high potential of egg production, compared to the reports from village experiences. The birds studied were very close, with some showing even higher ability than respective commercial birds. This observation indicates that, with a little extra effort in feeding, protection against predators and disease prevention and treatment, these birds could increase their respective egg yields. Thus, the owner will subsequently earn more from the birds, and this will contribute towards poverty alleviation for these villagers.