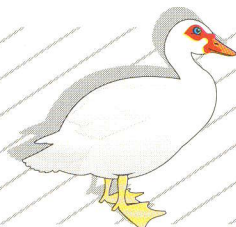


Spotlight on Agriculture

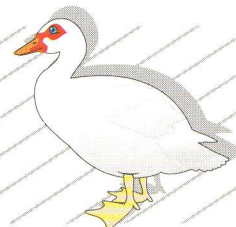
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Ministry of Agriculture,
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DUCKS A GOOD OPTION



INTRODUCTION

The market for table ducks (meat producers) is still steadily increasing, while the numbers of layers (egg producers) are declining due to the strong flavour of duck eggs. Table ducks are extremely fast growers, with a live weight of 2 to 3 kg being attainable in 7 to 10 weeks at a food conversion efficiency of 3:1. (Sainsbury, 1992.)

Except for meat and/or eggs, the feathers and down can be used for stuffing pillows and duvets. The feathers and down of ducks are however of a lower quality and thus will fetch lower prices than goose feathers and down.

WHY DUCKS?

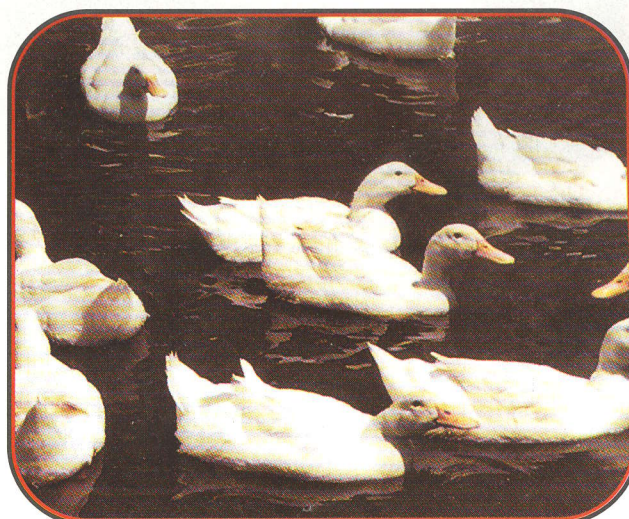
Ducks are preferred above chickens due to the following:

- They are resistant to most poultry diseases, especially Newcastle Disease. Conditions such as coccidiosis or intestinal worms do not normally affect ducks, therefore no routine medication should be applied. Vaccination against duck virus hepatitis (DVH) and duck virus enteritis (DVE) should only be used on farms which have experienced a previous incidence of these diseases.
- Of importance to free-range farms and/or small scale farms:
- They are even better free-rangers than chickens with a better feed conversion ratio than chickens.
- The Muscovy duck ('makou') is also able to incubate its own eggs and look after its young.

GENERAL

Ducks can be kept in systems ranging from free-range to fully intensive. Although ducks are excellent free-rangers, they still need adequate additional feed in the form of left-over porridge, pearl millet or maize, and vegetable peels, etcetera. This is to ensure high production and good growth.

One of the important management rules, also for free-range ducks, is the continuous adequate supply of clean fresh drinking water. Ducks do not need a pond to swim in or for mating as many



Pekin ducks (Photo provided by Farmer's Weekly)

people believe, but a big enough water font is needed for the ducks to put their heads in, in order to prevent eye infections.

The ratio of drakes to ducks should be 1:4.

Ducklings that hatch naturally, can swim immediately, while artificially hatch ducklings need to be kept out of the water for at least the first 10 days after hatching.

When kept free-range, the plume feathers of the one wing of the duck can be clipped to put them off balance and prevent them from flying away.

DUCK BREEDS

A wide variety of duck breeds are available for egg and meat production, and also some breeds kept for shows. The most popular table duck (meat) are the Muscovy duck and the Pekin duck.

Modern hybrid strains of both egg and table birds are developed from existing breeds, combining the best features of the breeds used, while they still produce a high degree of vigour and uniformity.

MUSCOVY DUCK ('Makou')

The Muscovy originated from South America and is not a true duck. The progeny are sterile when crossed with other breeds. It is a heavy breed; drakes (males) weigh 5.0kg and ducks (females) 2.7kg in average. Many colour varieties are available, the most common white, black or white and black. The eggs have a white colour and takes 35 days to hatch (instead of 28 days as for other duck breeds). The skin of the white Muscovy does not have dark patches like the other colour variations, thus improving the marketing value of the white Muscovy.



A white Muscovy drake (male) of 4 months of age. It still looks a bit scruffy, as it has feathered recently and all the new feathers have not grown out yet.

Males and females can be distinguished at around 6 weeks of age on size (average weight of males 2.35kg; females 1.74kg). At 10 weeks of age for females and 12 weeks for males, when fed intensively, Muscovys have almost reached their adult weight and can be slaughtered. At this stage they are fully feathered. They must however be watched carefully to ensure that they are slaughtered before the new pin feathers appear and while the feather can still be removed fairly easily.

Unlike other ducks and geese, Muscovys can not be plucked regularly, but only when slaughtered. This is because the Muscovy's feathers do not grow out simultaneously like in other ducks and geese, making it unable to pluck feathers of the same maturity at a specific time.

PEKIN DUCK

Traditionally, the Aylesbury was the supreme table breed, but it has been challenged by the Pekin due to genetic improvement of this breed in the U.S.A. Although about 0.45kg lighter than the Aylesbury, the Pekin is a heavy duck and of Chinese origin. The Pekin is also more fertile, a better layer and a more economical grower than the Aylesbury. For the Pekin, the average weight of the drake is 4.1kg and the duck 3.6kg.

The Pekin has a creamy white colour with a bright yellow bill and orange coloured legs. The eggs are white and takes 28 days to hatch. The drakes are very fertile and the ducks are good layers. Pekins are seldom bred for broodiness, as it reduces egg production. Thus, in general, the Pekin does not hatch its own eggs. If an incubator is not available for incubation of eggs, Muscovys can be used for this purpose.



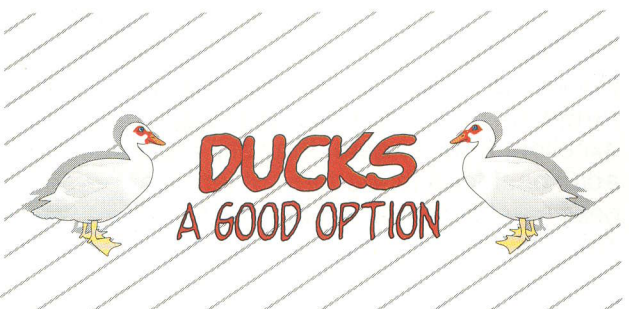
Pekin ducks (Photo provided by Farmer's Weekly)

KHAKI CAMPBELL AND INDIAN RUNNER

These two breeds are two common egg-laying varieties and are both prolific producers (an egg a day for a year is attainable).

The Khaki Campbell is of British origin and was bred from the wild Mallard together with the Fawn, White Indian Runner and Rouen. It is a light breed - drakes weigh 2.4kg and ducks 2.1kg. The colour is a warm khaki. It is an excellent white egg producer with a pleasing and delicate taste of egg, and a good medium sized table duck.

The Indian Runner is a light breed of Malayan origin, with the drake weighing 2.0kg and the duck 1.7kg. Several different colour varieties are available, while the egg colour is white or greenish.



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