

A robust indigenous poultry breed saved from extinction

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Fast growers: A four-month-old bird is sold for Rs. 600-800. Photo: Special Arrangement

Backyard poultry rearing is nothing new to farmers. They have been doing it for many years. The birds grow by scavenging on kitchen and other waste, generate some revenue, and also take care of the nutritional need of the farmer. The last two decades have seen the poultry sector focusing more on commercial poultry rearing like broilers for meat and eggs. As a result many indigenous species have completely become extinct or are on the verge of extinction.

Nativity

One such breed is the Kalamasi or Kadaknath fowl breed that is native of Bhil and Bhila tribal regions in Madhya Pradesh. The birds are jet black in colour and reared mainly for their meat, which is also black in colour but softer than that of other desi birds. "A survey programme conducted by the Jhabhua Krishi Vigyan Kendra some years back threw light on the alarming fact that the breed is slowly becoming extinct and only a few hundreds are left. Through the National Agriculture Innovation Project (NAIP) of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) under Rajamata Vijayaraje Scindia Agricultural University, Gwalior, attempts were made to revive the breed and today nearly several hundred tribal beneficiaries are rearing this breed," says Dr. I.S.Tomar, Programme Coordinator, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, near Rajgarh Naka, Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh. The birds are robust by nature and can tolerate extremes of climate. They can be reared quite easily and there is no need for any special attention or round the clock care for them. They thrive well in a minimal management system and are good scavengers. As a result, feed cost gets considerably reduced. They can be housed in large bamboo baskets or inside store rooms.

Grow fast

Both the cockerels and hens grow quite fast and the hens start laying eggs from sixth month of age onwards. In a year a single hen lays 80-120 eggs. Kadaknath birds are poor brooders. They do not hatch their eggs. Therefore the tribals use other desi hens to hatch the eggs. The desi hen is placed on the eggs kept in a bamboo basket lined with dry straw or grass to provide a cushioning effect. This traditional practice is being encouraged to propagate this breed through natural means and ensure availability of chicks in the villages.

Good price

"The birds command a good price in the market. A four month bird is sold for Rs, 600-800 and a one year old bird above Rs. 600 (other desi varieties fetch Rs. 100-150). The eggs are sold at Rs.10-12. The dark black meat is considered a delicacy by the tribals. Both the eggs and meat are a low source of fat (3-5 per cent) and high source of protein (25-40 per cent)," says Dr.Tomar. The NAIP initially started a pilot project

with only 10 poultry houses each with 100 birds and named it as Kadaknath Murgi Palan Samooh Jhayda. Presently around 500 poultry units are functioning at Jhabhua with active support from Gramin vikas trust and Integrated watershed management programme in Jhansi. "The tribal beneficiaries rearing this breed are today able to get an income of Rs.80,000-90,000 a year. This has encouraged many people to remain in their lands and continue farming operations in their fields also. In a way this bird has been able to check migration of families from their land in search of work," says Dr. Tomar.

Hatching unit

A hatching unit has been established at a cost of Rs. 40 lakhs to increase the availability of this breed to other interested growers. All the growers have been trained on scientific management of this breed, balanced feed, health management and marketing. Timely vaccinations have been administered by specialists and deworming at periodical intervals is also being done. By adopting such measures they have succeeded in bringing down the mortality of the bird from 50 per cent to 10-12 per cent. The birds attain a body weight of 1.5 kg in 105- 120 days. This sustainable system of livelihood through Kadaknath rearing has been well recognised by the district administration of Jhabhua and the Kadaknath Murgi Palan Samooh Jhayda and awarded a certificate of appreciation by the district administration.

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