



RESEARCH ARTICLE

LAYING AND EGG QUALITY OF POPULATIONS OF JAPANESE QUAIL (*Coturnixjaponica*), TEMMINCK SCHLEGEL, 1848 NT) REARED IN SOUTHERN COTE D'IVOIRE

Brahima Soro^{1*}, Kpahé Herbert-Michael Kanh², Isidore Kouadio Kpandji¹, Sandy N'dadjiban Bohoussou¹, Barnabe Bakary³, Adama Bem¹ and Didier Paulin Sokouri¹

¹Laboratory of Biotechnology, Agriculture and Valorisation of Biological Resources, UFR Biosciences, University Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire, 22 BP 582 Abidjan 22, Côte d'Ivoire; ²Department of Biochemistry and Genetics, Peleforo Gon Coulibaly University, Côte d'Ivoire, BP 1328 Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire; ³Lamé Agricultural and Fisheries Society, 01 BP 3446 Abidjan 01. Adzopé - Côte d'Ivoire

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*Corresponding author:

Sanihe Ariji

ABSTRACT

The Japanese quail (*Coturnix japonica*) is a Galliformes and Phasianidae family domestic bird. It is a very interesting bird because of the nutritional quality of its meat and eggs. This study aimed to evaluate the reproductive performance of the Japanese quail *Coturnix japonica*. This study was conducted at the Société Agropiscicole de la Mé in Adzopé, Côte d'Ivoire. A total of 72 female quails of white, black, and isabella phenotype aged 9 weeks were laid. The results showed that the Japanese quail had an acceptable egg-laying rate over the four weeks of the experiment (from 38.89% to 54.76% at 9 weeks, rising to 80% to 90% at 11 weeks). The black phenotype exhibits an interesting feed conversion index for egg production. The average egg weight was 12.37 g with an average shape index of 78.41 cm. The shell, white, and yolk weights were 1.18, 8.38, and 3.84 g, respectively, corresponding to proportions of 9.51%, 50.06, and 31.93%, respectively. Eggs of the isabelle phenotype exhibited higher yolk weights and proportions than those of the other phenotypes.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, poultry farming has focused mainly on the production of chicken eggs and broilers. Poultry specialists have become interested in quail farming, also referred to as coturniculture, as a novel approach to enhancing diversity in poultry farming, offering consumers further flavor options and increasing meat output to meet the growing demand for animal protein (Ukashatu et al., 2014). Quails are farmed worldwide for their therapeutic properties. Their eggs strengthen the immune system, promote healthy memory, increase brain activity, and stabilize the nervous system. They treat anemia by increasing hemoglobin levels while eliminating toxins and heavy metals. (Tunsaringkarn et al., 2013). The Japanese quail (*Coturnix japonica*) belongs to the Phasianidae family. Domestic quail species are commonly used as research models for animal physiology, genetics, nutrition, endocrinology, pathology, reproduction, and immunology (Huss et al., 2008). It is less susceptible to certain chicken diseases, such as coccidiosis and salmonellosis (Jatoi et al., 2013 ; Rahman et al., 2016). Since the 1960s, the Food and Agriculture Organization

of the United Nations (FAO) has offered assistance to countries to characterize their animal genetic resources for food and agriculture and to develop conservation strategies. The FAO Council advised on the establishment of a global initiative in 1990 for environmentally sustainable management of genetically modified animals. Characterization of animal genetic resources includes all activities related to identifying, qualitatively and quantitatively assessing, and recording animal populations.

The main aim of this research is to acquire a more in-depth comprehension of the genetic resources of animals, including their present and prospective future applications in the food and agriculture industries within specified environments, and their current standing as distinct racial groups (FAO, 2012). Currently, very little data are available on the egg-laying performance of different quail phenotypes raised on Côte d'Ivoire's SAP La Mé farm. This study aimed to determine the production performance of quail (*Coturnix japonica*) populations reared at the SAP la Mé farm in Adzopé, Côte d'Ivoire.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study site: The Société Agropiscicole de la Mé coturniculture farm is located in the Mé region. The town of Adzopé, the capital of the Mé Region and Department, is located in the southern part of Côte d'Ivoire, 105 km from Abidjan. Located on its northern border is the Department of Akoupé, with the Department of Abengourou situated to its north-east, the Department of Alépé to the south, the Department of Yakassé-Attobrou to the east, and the Department of Agboville to the west. It has six sub-prefectures: Adzopé, Annépé, Agou, Yakassé-Mé, Assiko, and Bécédi-Brignan (Figure 1). Adzopé has a humid tropical climate with a relatively constant temperature of approximately 27.5°C and four seasons of unequal length. The average annual rainfall ranges between 1,350 and 1,400 mm. The average relative humidity currently stands at 75%. The prevailing winds are from the southwest.

Animals used and experimental conditions: At the age of 60 days, 72 white, isabella, and black quails were placed in 9 cages (6 females and 2 males per cage, i.e., a sex ratio of 3 females/male). After the breeding birds were placed in the cages, the cage enclosure was exposed to a 24-hour lighting program consisting of 10 and 14 hours of natural light and 14 hours of artificial light. The average temperature and humidity in the enclosure were 27°C and 70%, respectively. Lighting was provided by 100-watt bulbs. During the finishing phase, lighting was only used at night because of the darkness in the building. The average temperature and humidity in the enclosure were 27°C and 70%, respectively.

The feed distributed during the laying phase was special quail feed, as described by the company (Table I). The quails were fed with 3000 kcal/kg of feed and 20.60% crude protein. Feed rationing was adhered to throughout the experiment, with daily weighing of distributed feed and refusals using a scale accurate to within 1 g. A prophylaxis program was administered to the quails throughout the trial period. An anti-stress, anti-coccidial, anti-parasitic, and hepatoprotective agent was administered every 3 days. During the experiment, the birds were housed in a building measuring 20.5 m long and 10.7 m wide, covering an area of 219.35 m².

Parameters studied

Average breeding bird weight: Throughout the rearing period, the individual body weights of the birds were weighed each week before they were fed, allowing the calculation of average weekly weights for both male and female birds separately.

$$\text{Average weight(g)} = \frac{1}{\text{number of individuals}} \sum \text{individual weights}$$

Feed consumption: Food consumption corresponds to the quantity of food ingested by an animal when it has free access to it. The amount of feed consumed was determined by weighing the daily feed allocation and leftovers. Each week's amounts were combined, and the total amount of feed ingested was calculated by subtracting the quantity distributed from the quantity refused (Tsivingaina, 2005).

Feed intake = feed distribution - refusals

Laying rate: The laying rate is obtained by collecting daily laid eggs. Eggs were collected daily, which enabled the calculation of weekly egg production or laying rate.

$$\text{Laying rate (\%)} = \frac{\text{number of eggs laid} \times 100}{\text{number of laid quails}}$$

Feed conversion index: The feed conversion index is the amount of feed consumed to produce 1 g of egg. The ratio between the quantity of feed ingested per week and the number of eggs laid or the weight of eggs corresponding to this period is calculated.

$$\text{Conversion rate (\%)} = \frac{\text{amount of food consumed}}{\text{number of eggs laid}}$$

Evaluation of egg quality: The eggs were collected daily, cleaned, and preserved for laboratory analysis. A total of 45 eggs (15 per phenotype) were washed, numbered, and analyzed in the laboratory. The study of egg quality involved assessing the external and internal characteristics of quail eggs. The eggs were individually weighed using a 0.1g precision electronic balance. The length and width of the egg were determined using a 0.01 mm precision electronic caliper. The shape index was also determined. The shells were washed with water to remove any remnants from inside the egg, dried at room temperature for a day, and weighed on a 1g precision electronic balance. The shell strength index was determined (Sauveur, 1988 ; Protais, 1994). After separation, the albumen and yolk were weighed separately using a 1 g precision electronic balance to determine their proportions (Silversides and Scoot, 2001 ; Çağlayan et al., 2009).

Statistical analysis: The collected data were recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and analyzed using STATISTICA 7.1 software. The descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) were estimated for each quantitative trait in each phenotypic group. Parametric data were then compared using a one-factor analysis of variance followed by Tukey's multiple comparison test for parameters showing variability ($p < 0.05$) to identify specific differences between phenotypes. The p-value was set at 5%, as was the alpha " α " of the test with a 95% confidence interval (CI).

RESULTS

Laying performance

Average weight of broodstock: The results of the statistical analysis showed no significant difference between the males of the different phenotypes during the entire experimental period. A notable distinction was found in females between the Black and Red phenotypes from the 2nd week of the study. For all phenotypes, sexual dimorphism was very marked, with a greater weight observed in females (Table 1). The different phenotypes exhibited weight variations during the experimental period. Breeding weights varied between 277.8 and 302.8 g (Table II).

Feed consumption: The daily food intake during the egg-laying phase is shown in Table III. Statistical analysis showed no significant difference between the different phenotypes during the first week of the experiment. Significant differences were observed between the different phenotypes from week 2

Table I. component of Japanese quail laying feed

Ingredients	Quantity (%)
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Shell	10
Palm oil	1
Maize	60
Concentrated feed	2.5
Soya meal	25
Wheat bran	1.5

Table II. Average weight of breeding stock during experimental period

		White	Black	Isabella
Week 9	Males	283.7±28.38 ^b	265.3±12.69 ^b	274.7±19.62 ^b
	Females	293.1± 26.72 ^a	290.3±18.74 ^a	311±36.72 ^a
	Global	288.4	277.8	292.85
Week 10	Males	292±20.12 ^a	271±15.43 ^a	283±23.38 ^a
	Females	297.6±28.19 ^{ab}	286.6±20.71 ^a	309.9±35.75 ^b
	Global	294.8	278.8	296.45
Week 11	Males	296.3±17.04 ^b	276.3±15.87 ^b	291±27.18 ^b
	Females	305.3±27.09 ^{ab}	292.6±21.02 ^a	315±34.38 ^a
	Global	300.8	284.5	303
Week 12	Males	289.3±7.87 ^b	281.3±14.35 ^b	292.7± 12.93 ^b
	Females	307±27.77 ^a	295±23.06 ^a	312.9±34.62 ^a
	Global	298.15	288.5	302.8

Mean±Standard deviation. Means marked with the same letters in the same column do not differ significantly at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$).

Table III. Food consumption (g/subject/day) of quails according to phenotype

	White	Black	Isabelle
Week 9	53.33±2.6 ^a	56.81±5.85 ^a	60.88±7.79 ^a
Week 10	51.25±5.04 ^a	44.36±3.46 ^b	60.49±4.41 ^a
Week 11	55.38±3.87 ^a	43.67±1.56 ^b	61.67±2.96 ^a
Week 12	53.23±3.35 ^a	42.43±4.48 ^b	61.1±4.07 ^a

Mean±Standard deviation. Means marked with the same letters in the same column do not differ significantly at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$).

Table IV. Conversion index (g/subject/layed egg) of laying quails according to phenotype

	White	Black
Week 9	9.16±7.90 ^a	8.66±2.72 ^a
Week 12	3.44±0.75 ^a	3.03±0.46 ^b

Mean±Standard deviation. Means marked with the same letters in the same column do not differ significantly at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$).

to the end of the experiment. Food consumption was relatively constant in the isabella phenotype (61.04 ± 4.81). In the white phenotype, food consumption decreased in week 2 (from 53.33 ± 2.6 to 51.25 ± 5.04) and in the fourth week (from 55.38 ± 3.87 to 53.23 ± 3.35). In the black phenotype, there was a progressive decrease in food consumption during the experiment (from 56.81 ± 5.85 to 42.43 ± 4.48).

Spawning rate: The results of the statistical analysis showed no significant difference between the different phenotypes during the experimental phase (Figure 2). The oviposition rate varied throughout the experimental period. At the start of the experiment at 9 weeks of age, the black phenotype had a lower egg-laying rate (38.89 ± 9.62) than the white (44.44 ± 18.15) and isabella (54.76 ± 24.52) phenotypes. At the 11th week, all phenotypes had relatively close egg-laying rates, including the white phenotype (91.27 ± 10.57), black phenotype (81.75 ± 10.98) and the isabella phenotype (86.51 ± 11.04).

Feed conversion index: Table IV presents the evolution of the feed conversion index (g/subject/layed egg). In this This varied from 7.39 to 9.16 for layers at the start of laying and from 3.44 to 3.84 for those aged 12 weeks (Table IV). Furthermore, the conversion index for layers at the start of laying decreases as the age of the animals increases. Statistical analysis. No

significant difference was observed between the different phenotypes during the first week of the experiment ($p > 0.05$). However, during the other three weeks, there was a significant difference between the white and black phenotypes ($p < 0.05$). Throughout all phenotypes showed a decrease in this index throughout the experiment. The value decreased from 7.39 to 3.84 grams per subject per day, as indicated in Table IV.

The external and internal characteristics of the egg: Statistical analyses of various phenotypes found no significant variations in egg weight, length, and width, shape index, shell weight, strength index, shell thickness, spawn weight, proportion of spawn, and yolk colour (Table IV). However, for weight and proportion of yolk, there was a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between the white and black phenotypes and the isabelle phenotype.

DISCUSSION

The average weight of females was higher than that of males, regardless of the phenotype. Sexual dimorphism can explain this. In Japanese quail, females are heavier than males. In our experiment, the weight variation was between 5 and 10 g in the white phenotype, 14 and 25 g in the black phenotype, and 20 to 37 g in the isabella phenotype. The weight variations observed in this study can be explained by stress. Quails are very sensitive to various stresses and easily lose weight. The weights measured in this experiment (ranging from 277.8 to 302.8 g) were greater than those recorded by Mohammed (2000). He observed a weight of 179.68g for subjects aged 6 months on a 2500 kcal diet. Research in a hot and humid climate in eastern India, as reported by Banerjee (2010), yielded live weights ranging from 216 to 250 g by day 50, suggesting that diet, climate, and rearing methods can affect the live weight of quails (Banerjee, 2010 ; Berrama *et al.*, 2011 ; Tarhvel *et al.*, 2012 ; Hantanirina, 2013). The food consumption values obtained in our experiment (42.43–61.67 g) are higher than those reported by Mohammed (2000). In his study, the daily feed consumption of a quail between 8 and 18 weeks of age were 23.99 g on a 2500 kcal diet.

On day 63, Sadi *et al.* (2007) found a value of 21.62–22.06 g for a diet based on an "Oregano" essential oil residue, indicating that the type of diet fed to the animals influenced the quantity of feed consumed. The laying rate for the study period (9–13 weeks of age) varied between 38.89% and 91.27%. This is due to the egg-laying peak of the Japanese quail that has not yet been reached. The quail's laying peak occurs between the 4th and 5th months and decreases after the 6th month (Lucotte, 1975). Amoah *et al.* (2010) found that feeding rice to laying quails at 10 and 13 weeks of age resulted in laying rates of 94.76% and 80.71%, respectively. Soares *et al.* (2003) reported an 80.88% egg-laying rate on day 63 in birds fed a diet containing 18% protein. Sadi *et al.* (2007) reported an egg-laying rate of 87.4%. Phenotypes had no effect on egg production at the start of laying. Razafimandimby (2013) reported that the laying rate varied according to the phenotype from the age of 6 months (24 weeks). Therefore, this parameter is influenced more by the rearing conditions during this period. The feed conversion index reflects the feed efficiency. It indicates the quantity of feed ingested to obtain one gram of egg or 1 egg. The feed is

Table V. External and internal parameters of Japanese quail eggs according to phenotype

Phenotypes	White	Black	Isabelle
	n=15	n=15	n=15
Egg weight	12.27±0.96 ^a	12.47±0.74 ^a	11.87±0.74 ^a
Egg length	33.56±1.13 ^a	33.52±0.99 ^a	33.05±1.28 ^a
Egg width	26.17±0.75 ^a	26.32±0.58 ^a	26.02±0.56 ^a
Shape index	78.07±3.18 ^a	78.56±1.84 ^a	78.59±2.97 ^a
Shell weight	1.13±0.35 ^a	1.2±0.41 ^a	1.2±0.41 ^a
Shell proportion	9.27±2.83 ^a	9.08±3.93 ^a	10.18±3.68 ^a
Shell strength index	20.88±6.47 ^a	22.08±7.58 ^a	22.16±7.66 ^a
Shell thickness	0.89±0.27 ^a	0.94±0.32 ^a	0.94±0.33 ^a
Weight of blank	6±1 ^a	5.87±0.92 ^a	6.33±0.90 ^a
blank proportion	48.72±5.34 ^a	47.99±5.79 ^a	53.46±7.37 ^a
Weight of egg yolk	3.6±0.51 ^a	3.8±0.41 ^a	4.13±0.35 ^b
Proportion of yolk	29.31±3.14 ^a	30.52±3.22 ^a	35.97±3.27 ^b

Mean±Standard deviation. Means marked with the same letters in the same column do not differ significantly at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$).

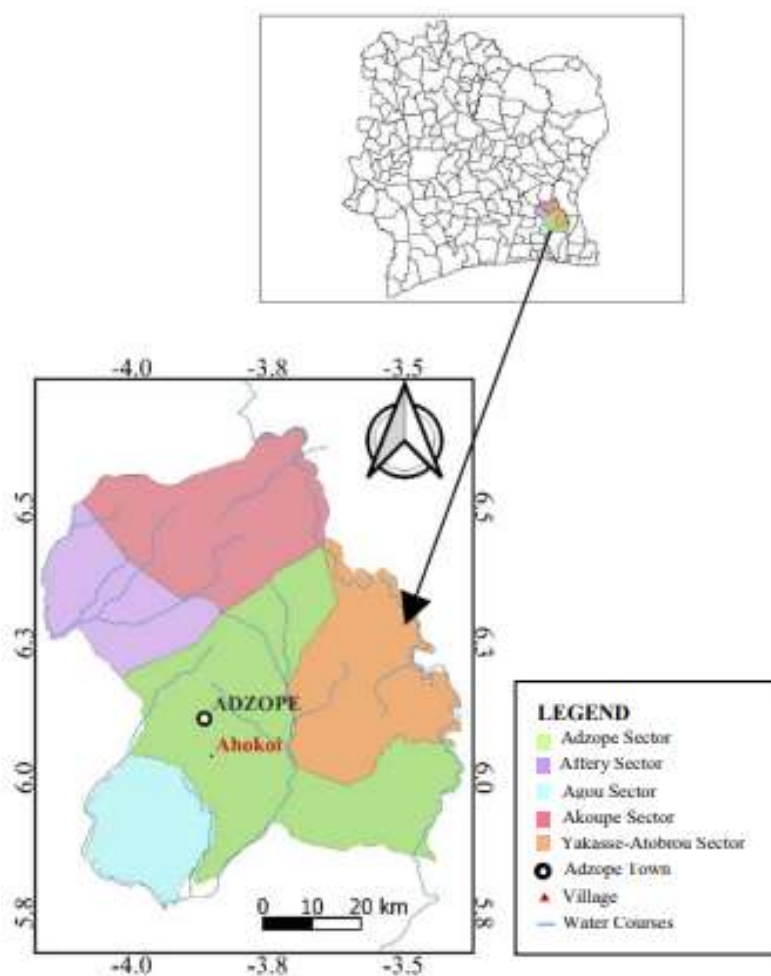


Figure 1. Study site

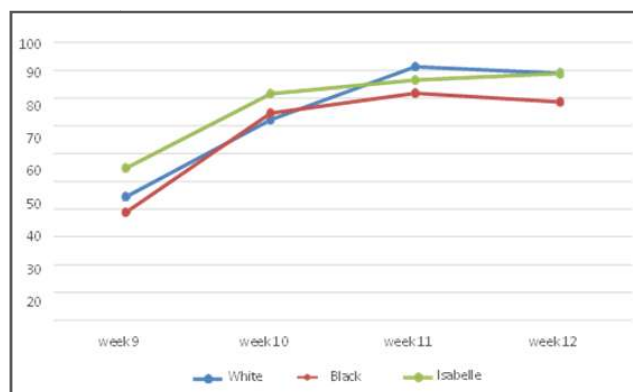


Figure 2. Evolution of the Japanese quail laying rate as a function of phenotype

efficient when the index is low. In our experiment, we observed a decrease in the feed conversion index of the different phenotypes over the 4 weeks. This can be explained by the fact that the feed conversion index of laying hens at the start of laying decreases as the age of the animals increases. Adult quails are better feed processors than younger ones. The black phenotype showed the lowest conversion index, indicating that it assimilates feed better than the other phenotypes. According to Razafimandimby (2013), this index generally remains stationary at the age of 6 months. For producers and consumers alike, egg weight is the crucial parameter, particularly in circumstances where eggs are produced by small poultry breeds, and their weight is significantly lower, typically several times less than the standard weight of a hen's egg (60 - 63 g) (Genchev, 2012). Egg weight was not influenced by the phenotype in our study. The average egg weight in this study was 12.73 g. Our results are close to those reported by Zita *et al.* (2013), who observed weights between 11.96 and 12.69 g between weeks 9 and 13. These results are superior to those of Ouaffai *et al.* (2018) who analysed egg weight variations as a function of density. These results are also superior to those of N'gbo *et al.* (2023), who studied egg weight as a function of diet. These results show that the weight of eggs in Japanese quails can be linked to the type of production and housing density, apart from genetics. The length and width of Japanese quail eggs did not vary according to phenotype. The mean values were 3.34 and 2.62 cm. These results are close to those reported by Ouaffai *et al.* (2018), who reported length and width values of 3.25 and 2.54 cm, respectively. Egg length and width are not influenced by phenotype or rearing conditions. Umba *et al.* (2022) reported that egg length and width are functions of age. This similarity can be explained by the fact that the shape index did not vary according to phenotype. The mean value was 78.41. Our values are also close to the results obtained by Hrnear *et al.* (2014) for meat-type quail eggs (78.18), but this author observed lower values in laying-type quail (76.7). Our results are superior to those reported by Genchev (2012), who reported a shape index of 78.08 at the start of egg laying in Pharaoh quail. During the experiment, Genchev demonstrated that the form index decreased with the age of the layers. According to Nedeljka Nikolova (2006), the youngest clutches have higher shape indices and rounder eggs, which explains the values obtained during our 4-week experiment. The results of our experiment showed no significant difference in weight and white blood cell proportion among the three phenotypes. However, the weight and proportion of yolk were greater in the isabelle phenotype than in the other two. In our experiment, the average weights of the white and yellow samples were 8.38 and 3.84 g, respectively, giving relative proportions of 50.06% and 31.94%, respectively. These results are superior to those of Ouaffai *et al.* (2018), who obtained the sphere's average white and yellow weights 5.8 and 3.5 g, i.e., 50.3% and 30.4%.

The shell weight and proportion did not vary according to the phenotype. Their mean values in our experiment were 1.18 and 9.51, respectively. These results are lower than those of Ouaffai *et al.* (2018), who observed an average shell weight of 1.4 g or a proportion of 12.8 g. Our results are also lower than those of N'gbo (2023). However, our results are similar to those reported by Djinandji *et al.* (2022) for the control and subjects treated with 5% moringa leaf powder. The shell thickness varies with the rearing conditions. The mean shell thickness value did not vary according to phenotype in our experiment. Its mean value was 0.92 mm. The obtained results surpass

those documented by de Bensalah (2016) and Djinandji *et al.* (2022), as well as N'gbo (2023). Furthermore, studies by Ahmadi and Rahimi (2011) and Gerber (2006) indicated that several factors, including feed and water quality, age and variety, stress levels, and elevated temperatures, can affect bird shell quality.

CONCLUSION

The reproductive performance of the Japanese quail (*Coturnix japonica*) was examined. The results show that the quail with the isabella phenotype has the best egg-laying performance. Black quail had a better feed conversion index. The external and internal characteristics of the eggs were similar across all phenotypes. The Japanese quail is a bird that is easy to rear, adapts well to our climatic conditions, and is of significant economic and social interest. In the future, it could become a significant source of protein after chicken.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS: The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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