4- Social Behavior

- ✓ It can be defined as one consequence of life in groups is the development of social interactions and relationships between group members.
- ✓ Fowls are a **gregarious species** and their social behavior is affected by group composition and group stability in the flocks.
- ✓ They maintain personal space by communication via postural changes.
- ✓ Important signals are associated with the position of the head and the relative angles of the head and the body to other birds.
- ✓ They maintain contact with flock mates by:

a) Sight up to intermediate distances

b) Vocal communication at longer distances or if out of sight.

- ✓ **Examples about social behavior:**

First: individuals often help each other to mutual benefit that may be either simultaneous (as when pheasants roost in contact for shared bodily warmth) or turn-and-turnabout (as when a quail helps others by alarm calling, and is itself helped similarly on other occasions).

Second: social behaviour is especially common between relatives, because relatives have genes in common by inheritance from common ancestors. Thus the genes influencing a turkey hen's care of her poults are likely to be continued (immortalized) because some of the poults will inherit them from her.

➢ There are some factors that influence Social Behavior:

a- Individual recognition

- ➢ Fowls **recognize each other** by appearance based on the shape of the comb, wattles and head generally.
- ➢ Color changes in plumage are identifiable.
- ➢ Only very major changes result in a failure to recognize flock mates.
- ➢ Members of flocks that are broken up forget each other within 3 to 4 weeks.

b- Communication

1- The fowl uses a variety of **sounds** in order **to communicate** with other fowls. For example: food calls, predator alarm calls, pre- and post-laying calls and rooster crowing, Broody hen distress calls and the clucking calls of the broody hen to her brood.

2- Fowls communicate also with others **by displays and changes in posture** such as head up or head down, tail up or tail down, or feathers spread or not spread.

c- Pecking and the peck order

- ✓ Pecking and the peck order is a skill specific for fowls.
- ✓ They **peck to:** 1) escape from the shell, 2) get nutrition (feed and water), 3) obtain and keep personal space and to establish relationships as well as for other reasons called peck order.
- ✓ **Peck order means** establishing a ranking structure in the flock of dominant and subordinate members. This organization is established separately for males and females in the same flock.

5- Breeding = Reproductive Behavior

- Behavioral pattern occurring during reproduction needed to maintain animal species. It includes Sexual behavior and Maternal behavior (nesting behavior).
- **Factors** affecting reproductive behavior in poultry are management practices, flock social interactions, environmental variables, stressors, and disease.
- Fowl is a seasonal breeder and is secretive about its nesting site. Male's mates regularly with hens they move toward her.
- It lays only one egg/ 23 to 26 hours and produces a clutch of about 10-15 eggs.
- During incubation period the hen takes only one major daily break for feeding and plumage care.

- When the chicks are about 10 to 12 weeks old she starts the **weaning** process by driving the chicks from her.

6- Abnormal behavior

Any behavior performed out of it is natural statues. These abnormal behaviors might simply be annoying to animal owners also may be dangerous for the animal and others or even threaten.

Example on abnormal behavior:

A- Feather pecking and cannibalism

Feather pecking occurs when one bird pecks or pulls at the feathers of another. Mild pecking is normal as peck order. Sever pecking can damage plumage and injure a bird's skin and sometimes this behavior leads to cannibalism.

Cannibalism is defined as the pecking, tearing, and consuming of skin, tissue, or organs of flock mates. It is a problem that can occur among birds of any age, type of breed, all types of housing systems. Cannibalism is a learned behavior that can spread quickly through a flock.

Cannibalism is easier to prevent than to treat. The cause has a genetic component, but management conditions play a major role as well. Outbreaks can occur in even the most well-managed flock, but problems are less likely to occur if preventive measures are in place. If cannibalism is not closely monitored, the resulting losses to the flock due to flesh injuries and death can be quite high.

Feather pecking and cannibalism can be prevented by avoiding:

Over-crowding; Over-heating; Excessive light; Inadequate nutrition; Flock size; Flocks of different ages and colors; Sudden changes; Inadequate nest boxes.

B- Escape Behavior – A protective mechanism.

Shortly after, the first signs of aggressive behavior are seen. Two chickens approach each other aggressively and then before contact is made they race away i.e. escape. The final stage is where real contact is made and is the truly aggressive stage. It is from these true fights that the dominant/subordinate relationships are established.