

Grasscutter production

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investigated in order to confirm that it is a suitable location for grasscutter exploitation. If this is the case, a small production unit should be initiated – a pilot scheme – run and assisted by skilled people familiar with the handling of the animals and the management of the breeding livestock. Such a unit can fulfil three major goals:

- (i) It can bring together a combination of traditional and modern systems of production (traditional boxes and cages), adapted to produce enough breeding stock to supply future farms.
- (ii) It can train local farmers who are willing and interested to become involved in grasscutter production.
- (iii) It can explore ways in which local resources can best be adapted to housing, feeding and breeding the species.

This method is the one currently used in Gabon, within the project 'Elevage de Petit Gibier', implemented by the NGO 'Vétérinaires sans Frontières' and financed by the French Cooperation Office, whose goal is to promote the production of grasscutter and brush-tailed porcupine (*Atherurus africanus*).

The introduction and development of grasscutter production in rural areas will depend on results reported from village pre-extension programmes in Bénin, Gabon and other African countries. The success of such projects will be influenced largely by the socio-economic conditions under which technological know-how is transferred rather than on zootechnical data. Rational grasscutter exploitation promises to be a useful, sustainable development model which could be implemented by aid agencies for economic, cultural, nutritional, biological and environmental reasons. Moreover, its development might serve as an example of sustainable utilization of wildlife that could be applied to other small game species, in the search for a more rational use of wildlife in African countries – for example, the giant rat (*Cricetomys* spp.) (Codjia, 1985; Malekani and Paulus, 1989), the brush-tailed porcupine (*Atherurus africanus*) (Rahm, 1962), the striped ground squirrel (*Xerus erythropus*) (Codjia, 1985), and the African giant snail (*Achatina* spp.) (Ajayi, 1978; Hodasi, 1984).

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