English Learning for Curious Minds

Episode #034
Chickens Are From The Jungle // How The Chicken Conquered The World
March 9, 2020

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[00:00:03] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can improve your English while learning fascinating things about the world.

[00:00:16] Today we are talking about the chicken.

[00:00:20] The bird that, from its **humble**[1] South Asian **roots**[2], has conquered the world, at least in population terms, **outnumbering**[3] humans by three to one.

[00:00:32] Before we get right into it, let me just remind that those of you listening to this on Spotify, Google Podcasts, iVoox or wherever you may choose to get your

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[1] not proud or not believing that you are important

[2] family origins, or the particular place you come from and the experiences you have had living there

[3] to be greater in number than someone or something

podcasts, that you can get a copy of the transcript and key vocabulary for this podcast over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:00:51] The transcript comes in PDF format for you to download, it's there on the website too, but also it now comes in animating format.

[00:01:01] So this is a bit like subtitles, but actually way cooler because you can tap on the word and your browser should give you the definition.

[00:01:10] And the key vocabulary is really useful because the less common words are explained.

[00:01:16] You don't have to stop to look things up in a dictionary, and it means that you can also build up your vocabulary while listening to the podcast.

[00:01:25] So go and check that out.

[00:01:26] It's at leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:30] Okay, so chickens.

[00:01:33] Now, I obviously don't need to tell you what a chicken is.

[00:01:37] It's the most common bird in the world, and there are about 23 billion chickens on the planet right now, and this year, 65 billion chickens will be consumed.

[00:01:51] That is obviously a huge amount.

[00:01:54] But let's just put it in perspective.

[00:01:57] That means that 180 million chickens are eaten every day, seven and a half million every hour, 125,000 every minute and 2000 every second.

[00:02:13] Whatever your views are on eating chicken, that is evidently a huge amount of chicken.

[00:02:19] And today we are going to tell the story of how one slightly **obscure**[4] bird from South Asia went from **wandering**[5] around the forest floor looking for insects to being **shoveled**[6] down people's throats at a rate of two every millisecond.

[00:02:41] It's a pretty interesting story, and you could also look at it as a classic example of the **industrialisation**[7] of production, of how humans have shaped the world we live in to meet our needs rather than adapt our needs to what exists in the natural world.

[00:03:01] So there is a little bit of debate about where the chicken actually came from.

[00:03:07] Charles Darwin, the famous biologist and author of On The Origin of Species, he **asserted**[8], he was sure that all modern chicken had a shared **ancestor**[9], the red

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[4] not known to many people

[5] to walk around slowly in a relaxed way or without any clear purpose or direction

[6] to put large quantities of food into your mouth very quickly

[7] the process of developing industries in a country

[8] to behave in a way that expresses your confidence, importance, or power and earns you respect from others

[9] someone or something related to you who lived a long time ago

jungle fowl, Gallus Gallus, which lived in Southeast Asia between Northern India and the Philippines.

[00:03:31] This bird, presumably, had a very nice day-to-day life **foraging**[10], looking for food, on the jungle floor during the day, and then flying up to the trees for the evening to avoid being eaten by **predators**[11].

[00:03:46] Much like how we imagine a chicken now, it was pretty bad at flying, so getting up to the low **branches**[12] of a tree was just about all it could manage.

[00:04:01] There's still some debate between archeologists and geneticists about what other birds the Gallus Gallus **bred**[13] with, but it's thought it was probably a similar bird from Southern India.

[00:04:16] Anyway, the rise of the chicken started almost 4,000 years ago.

[00:04:22] **Remains**[14] of chicken have been discovered in the Indus Valley in modern day Pakistan, and from there it traveled up to Egypt, or rather it was transported by merchants to Egypt.

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[10] to go from place to place searching for things that you can eat or use

[11] an animal that hunts, kills, and eats other animals

[12] one of the parts of a tree that grows out from the main trunk and has leaves, flowers, or fruit on it

[13] (of animals) reproduce

[14] a person's or animal's remains are what is left of their dead body

[00:04:36] And do you can imagine why it traveled so easily, why it was so easy to transport.

[00:04:43] Obviously chickens can't really fly, so you don't have to worry about them escaping.

[00:04:49] They are pretty adaptable to new temperatures, both hot and cold, so you don't need to constantly worry about them getting too hot or too cold.

[00:04:59] They're easy to take on a boat or on a cart.

[00:05:03] They're easy to feed, you just need some **grain**[15].

[00:05:06] They **lay**[16] eggs, so they are a constant source of food.

[00:05:11] And if you're extra hungry, well, they're pretty easy to cook as well.

[00:05:16] So you could say that the chicken's **fate**[17] as a bird that was destined to travel the world was **sealed**[18] by its biology.

[00:05:27] And different civilisations welcomed the chicken in different ways.

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[15] a seed or seeds from a plant, especially a plant like a grass such as rice or wheat

[16] (of an animal or bird) to produce eggs from out of the body

[17] what happens to a particular person or thing, especially something final or negative, such as death or defeat

[18] if an action, event, or situation seals your fate, nothing can stop some unpleasant thing happening to you

[00:05:33] The Egyptians became masters of **artificial**[19] **incubation**[20].

[00:05:38] They figured out, they found a way, to create the exact conditions that an egg needs to **hatch**[21], and they created huge egg ovens, which could **hatch** four and a half thousand eggs in two to three weeks.

[00:05:57] The advantage of this was, of course, that it means that the hens didn't need to sit on their eggs and they could get back to the task of laying more eggs.

[00:06:08] From Egypt the chicken continued to spread throughout the Mediterranean and it soon became a **delicacy**[22] for the Romans, who were probably the first civilisation to try to **industrialise** the production of chicken, keeping them in large farms and doing everything they could possibly do to **fatten up**[23] the birds, to make them fatter.

[00:06:34] It said that Roman techniques for **fattening up** the chickens included giving the chickens **wheat**[24] soaked in wine or even feeding them lizard fat, so the fat from lizards.

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[19] made by people, often as a copy of something natural

[20] the process in which a bird, etc. keeps its eggs warm until the young come out, or the process in which an egg develops until the stage at which the young come out

[21] to (cause an egg to) break in order to allow a young animal to come out

[22] something especially rare or expensive that is good to eat

[23] to give an animal or a thin person a lot of food so that they become fatter

[24] a plant whose yellowish-brown grain is used for making flour, or the grain itself

[00:06:49] After the fall of Rome, the chicken **fell out of favour**[25] a little bit.

[00:06:55] As you know, it's not a particularly tough bird, and given that they no longer lived in this life of luxury in Roman farms, they didn't grow as quickly or as large.

[00:07:09] And in the medieval times, people **tended**[26] to prefer birds that were a little bit tougher, things like **guinea fowl**[27] or geese.

[00:07:21] So when did things change for the chicken?

[00:07:24] If people in the medieval **era**[28] had mostly lost interest in this bird, when did things change?

[00:07:33] Well, and I guess you could debate whether this was a positive or negative change for the fate of the chicken, things all changed when people realised that they could add **antibiotics**[29] and vitamins to the food that was given to chicken, and this would mean that chickens could be **raised**[30] indoors.

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[25] became less popular

[26] to be likely to behave in a particular way or have a particular characteristic

[27] a large grey and white African bird, kept for its eggs and meat

[28] a period of time of which particular events or stages of development are typical

[29] a medicine or chemical that can destroy harmful bacteria in the body or limit their growth

[30] to take care of a person, or an animal or plant, until they are completely grown

[00:07:55] Like any animal, chickens need certain vitamins to develop, to grow, and to process vitamin D, they need sunlight.

[00:08:04] They need to be outside.

[00:08:08] Chickens, naturally, in their natural **habitat**[31] would spend their days wandering around looking for bits of food, not eating particularly fast.

[00:08:18] And of course, this would mean that they wouldn't grow very quickly.

[00:08:23] Or rather they would just grow at their normal rates.

[00:08:28] But keeping chickens inside and giving them vitamins and **antibiotics** now meant that they didn't need to do anything other than eat.

[00:08:39] They could be kept in these huge farms, in very **confined**[32] spaces and focus their attentions on the business of eating, the business of growing to be **slaughtered**[33].

[00:08:53] What this meant was that the price of chicken for consumers was greatly reduced, meaning that **consumption**[34] levels, the levels at which chicken was eaten increased dramatically.

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[31] the natural environment in which an animal or plant usually lives

[32] to keep someone or something closed in a place, often by force

[33] killed for meat

[34] the amount used or eaten

[00:09:08] And whatever you might think of the actual business of chicken farming, and putting aside any kind of **moral**[35] questions for one minute, it is now an incredibly efficient way if turning grain into **protein**[36].

[00:09:24] It takes less than two kilos of chicken feed, of chicken grain, to produce one kilo of chicken.

[00:09:34] And if we compare that to other animals, for pork it takes three kilos to produce one kilo of pork.

[00:09:42] And for beef it takes seven kilos to produce one kilo.

[00:09:47] So the chicken industry is now incredibly efficient and the price of chicken is **reflective**[37] of that.

[00:09:55] Almost anywhere in the world chicken is one of the cheapest meats available.

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[35] relating to the standards of good or bad behaviour, fairness, honesty, etc. that each person believes in, rather than to laws

[36] one of the many substances found in food such as meat, cheese, fish, or eggs, that is necessary for the body to grow and be strong

[37] if something reflects something else, it shows that it is affected by it and is adjusted accordingly

[00:10:02] And its **affordability**[38] has meant that it is **ubiquitous**[39], it's everywhere, and it forms a part of almost every cuisine in the world.

[00:10:13] From a French chicken chasseur, to Chinese gong bao chicken to Caribbean jerk chicken, to the famous British roast chicken, to chicken katsu curry, there aren't many countries that don't use any chicken.

[00:10:31] And aside from the price, the fact that chicken is so easy to **raise**, to grow, is a big reason for this.

[00:10:39] But also the fact that chicken is a relatively **bland**[40], a relatively plain meat, means that cooks are free to add their own spices and sauces to it.

[00:10:51] So it can easily take on almost whatever taste the cook decides.

[00:10:58] Indeed, the **sheer**[41] scale of how much chicken is eaten is testament to just how popular it is.

[00:11:06] If this podcast has been going on for 10 minutes now we're coming up to 1.5 million chickens having been eaten just while you've been listening.

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[38] the state of being cheap enough for people to be able to buy

[39] seeming to be everywhere

[40] not having a strong taste or character or not showing any interest or energy

[41] used to emphasize how very great, important, or powerful a quality or feeling is; nothing except

[00:11:19] It's the sort of thing that, if human life on earth were to be **wiped out**[42] tomorrow, and all historical records **erased**[43], if a new generation of archeologists arrived in a thousand years, I'm sure they would be quite **puzzled**[44] by how much chicken was eaten by people all over the world.

[00:11:41] For the **ancestor** of the chicken, the Gallus Gallus, the red jungle fowl, life in the jungle continues.

[00:11:49] It is free to **forage**, to **wander** around the jungle, looking for little bits of food and to **retreat**[45] up to the trees when night **draws in**[46], when night comes.

[00:12:00] But, and this is a somewhat cruel **twist of fate**[47], the population of red jungle fowl is decreasing as its **habitat** is gradually **eroded**[48] in part due to people making way for large farms for what we now know as the chicken.

[00:12:23] As one passing thought, my parents kept chickens for a while.

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[42] to destroy something completely or cause something to be completely lost

[43] to remove or destroy something, especially something that shows that that person or thing ever existed or happened

[44] a situation that is difficult to understand

[45] to go away from a place or person in order to escape from fighting or danger

[46] if days, evenings, or nights draw in, it becomes darker earlier because autumn or winter is coming

[47] if something happens by a twist of fate, it happens by chance, and it is strange, interesting, or unfortunate in some way

[48] to slowly reduce or destroy something

[00:12:28] We had four, I think it was, and they just had a little **patch**⁴⁹ in the garden.

[00:12:35] They are actually really sweet animals, they're really friendly and would always want to come and see what you were doing, to be near you.

[00:12:45] And they always seem to be curious about what was going on, which of course I liked a lot.

[00:12:53] And one final point, the idea for this podcast actually came as I was walking along the street with my wife and we saw a chicken.

[00:13:01] I pointed at it and said, 'they're from the jungle, did you know that?'

[00:13:06] She didn't, but she said it would make an interesting idea for a podcast.

[00:13:12] So there you go.

[00:13:13] Chickens are from the jungle, although they've come a long way, for better or for worse, from their **roots**.

[00:13:22] As usual, if you are looking for their transcript and key vocabulary for the podcast, you can get that on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:13:30] As I said at the start of the podcast, the transcript is available in new animating form, so a bit like subtitles, but even better.

[00:13:39] So do go and check that out, that's at leonardoenglish.com.

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⁴⁹ a small area that is different in some way from the area that surrounds it

[00:13:43] I'm Alastair Budge and you've been listening to English Learning for Curious

Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:13:49] I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Humble	not proud or not believing that you are important
Roots	family origins, or the particular place you come from and the experiences you have had living there
Outnumbering	to be greater in number than someone or something
Obscure	not known to many people
Wandering	to walk around slowly in a relaxed way or without any clear purpose or direction
Shoveled	to put large quantities of food into your mouth very quickly
Industrialisation	the process of developing industries in a country
Asserted	to behave in a way that expresses your confidence, importance, or power and earns you respect from others
Ancestor	someone or something related to you who lived a long time ago
Foraging	to go from place to place searching for things that you can eat or use
Predators	an animal that hunts, kills, and eats other animals

Branches	one of the parts of a tree that grows out from the main trunk and has leaves, flowers, or fruit on it
Bred	(of animals) reproduce
Remains	a person's or animal's remains are what is left of their dead body
Grain	a seed or seeds from a plant, especially a plant like a grass such as rice or wheat
Lay	(of an animal or bird) to produce eggs from out of the body
Fate	what happens to a particular person or thing, especially something final or negative, such as death or defeat
Sealed	if an action, event, or situation seals your fate, nothing can stop some unpleasant thing happening to you
Artificial	made by people, often as a copy of something natural
Incubation	the process in which a bird, etc. keeps its eggs warm until the young come out, or the process in which an egg develops until the stage at which the young come out
Hatch	to (cause an egg to) break in order to allow a young animal to come out
Delicacy	something especially rare or expensive that is good to eat

Fatten up   to give an animal or a thin person a lot of food so that they become fatter

Wheat   a plant whose yellowish-brown grain is used for making flour, or the grain itself

Fell out of favour   became less popular

Tended   to be likely to behave in a particular way or have a particular characteristic

Guinea fowl   a large grey and white African bird, kept for its eggs and meat

Era   a period of time of which particular events or stages of development are typical

Antibiotics   a medicine or chemical that can destroy harmful bacteria in the body or limit

their growth

Raised   to take care of a person, or an animal or plant, until they are completely grown

Habitat   the natural environment in which an animal or plant usually lives

Confined   to keep someone or something closed in a place, often by force

Slaughtered   killed for meat

Consumption   the amount used or eaten

Moral   relating to the standards of good or bad behaviour, fairness, honesty, etc. that

each person believes in, rather than to laws

Protein   one of the many substances found in food such as meat, cheese, fish, or eggs,

that is necessary for the body to grow and be strong

Reflective   if something reflects something else, it shows that it is affected by it and is

adjusted accordingly

Affordability   the state of being cheap enough for people to be able to buy

Ubiquitous   seeming to be everywhere

Bland   not having a strong taste or character or not showing any interest or energy

Sheer   used to emphasize how very great, important, or powerful a quality or feeling

is; nothing except

Wiped out   to destroy something completely or cause something to be completely lost

Erased   to remove or destroy something, especially something that shows that that

person or thing ever existed or happened

Puzzled   a situation that is difficult to understand

Retreat   to go away from a place or person in order to escape from fighting or danger

Draws in   if days, evenings, or nights draw in, it becomes darker earlier because autumn

or winter is coming

Twist of fate   if something happens by a twist of fate, it happens by chance, and it is strange,

interesting, or unfortunate in some way

Eroded

to slowly reduce or destroy something

Patch

a small area that is different in some way from the area that surrounds it

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

You can email us at hi@leonardoenglish.com.