



Caring for Ostriches & Emu

Emus and ostriches are large, flightless birds native to Australia (emus) and Africa (ostriches). They are primarily raised for their meat, feathers, leather, and in some cases, for their eggs. While they share some similarities, there are important differences in the care and management of each species. Both require ample space, proper diet, and special attention to their physical and environmental needs to ensure they remain healthy and thrive.

Housing and Environment

Space Requirements

- **Emus:** Emus require plenty of space to roam. They should have access to an enclosed area of at least **2 acres per bird**. This allows them to exercise, forage, and move freely. They are very active birds and enjoy open spaces.
- **Ostriches:** Similar to emus, ostriches are large birds that need plenty of space to roam. Ideally, ostriches need **2-3 acres** of land per adult bird. A larger space will also allow for social interactions and natural behaviors.

Fencing and Enclosures

- **Height of Fencing:** Both emus and ostriches are capable of jumping or running at high speeds. The fencing should be at least **5-6 feet tall**, preferably with a solid bottom to prevent digging.
- **Material:** Strong woven wire or mesh fencing is recommended, as both birds can easily escape if the barrier is not sturdy. It's important to ensure there are no gaps or weaknesses in the fence that they could exploit.
- **Shelter:** While both species are resilient, shelter is necessary to provide protection from extreme weather conditions. They need a **well-ventilated but sheltered space** where they can rest, especially during storms or high temperatures.

Bedding and Flooring

- **Ground Surface:** Both emus and ostriches prefer a soft, dirt-covered area where they can forage for food and dust bathe. Avoid hard, rocky surfaces as these can cause injury or stress.
- **Bedding:** You can use **straw, hay, or sand** for bedding in their shelter, but it's important to keep the area dry to avoid bacterial growth. Change bedding regularly to maintain cleanliness.

Diet and Nutrition

Emus and Ostriches' Diets

Both emus and ostriches are omnivorous, but they primarily consume plant-based diets supplemented by insects, small animals, and seeds. They need a balanced diet that provides the right mix of nutrients for growth, reproduction, and general health.

Main Components of Their Diet:

1. **Grains:** They need a high-quality **grain mix** that contains the appropriate balance of protein, fiber, and vitamins. A good commercial poultry feed or specially formulated ratite feed is a good option.
2. **Fresh Vegetables:** These birds enjoy fresh vegetables such as **carrots, spinach, lettuce,** and **sweet potatoes**. These provide essential vitamins and minerals.
3. **Fruits:** Offer fruits like **apples, bananas,** and **berries** in moderation. Fruits are rich in vitamins and natural sugars.
4. **Proteins:** Though mostly plant-based, both emus and ostriches benefit from **insects, earthworms,** and occasionally small amounts of **meat** (such as chicken) for extra protein, especially during periods of growth or breeding.
5. **Grass and Forage:** Access to fresh **grass** is critical for both species, as they naturally graze. Make sure they have a constant supply of forage or pasture.
6. **Gravel/Sand:** Both emus and ostriches eat small **gravel or sand** to aid in digestion. This helps grind up the tough plant matter in their stomachs.

Feeding Guidelines:

- **Emus:** Emus generally need a diet with around 12-14% protein, depending on their life stage (adults vs. growing emus).
- **Ostriches:** Ostriches require a higher protein intake of about 15-20%, especially during the first few months of life, to support their rapid growth.

Water:

- Both emus and ostriches drink a significant amount of water. They should have access to fresh, clean water at all times. Water containers should be cleaned daily to prevent bacterial growth.
- **Water Intake:** On average, adult ostriches and emus can drink **1-2 gallons of water per day**, especially in hot climates.

Health and Veterinary Care

Common Health Issues

- **Foot Problems:** Due to their size, both emus and ostriches are prone to foot and leg injuries. Make sure their living environment is free of sharp objects or debris that could cause harm. Regularly check their feet for cuts or infections.
- **Parasites:** Both species are susceptible to external and internal parasites such as **worms, lice,** and **mites**. Regular deworming and maintaining cleanliness in their pens can help

prevent these issues.

- **Leg Injuries:** These birds are large and heavy, so they can suffer from sprains or fractures, particularly if they are housed in cramped spaces. Provide plenty of room to run and exercise to reduce the risk.
- **Respiratory Issues:** Both emus and ostriches are sensitive to respiratory infections. Ensure their shelter is well-ventilated, and avoid housing them in damp or poorly aired environments.
- **Obesity:** Overfeeding or a lack of exercise can lead to obesity in these birds, which can cause joint problems. Monitor their body condition and provide adequate space for exercise.

Vaccinations:

- Consult a veterinarian to determine the necessary vaccinations for emus and ostriches, as this can vary by region. Common vaccinations may include **avian flu** and **Newcastle disease**, though your veterinarian will be the best source of advice.

Breeding Care:

- **Ostriches:** In the wild, ostriches are typically polygamous. When breeding in captivity, you may need multiple hens for each male. Ensure they have enough space to avoid territorial disputes.
- **Emus:** Emus breed once a year, and the male typically takes the responsibility for incubating the eggs. Make sure the nest area is safe and clean for egg laying.

Behavior and Social Needs

Socialization

- **Ostriches:** Ostriches are social birds and thrive when housed in small groups or pairs. However, they can be aggressive toward each other, particularly during breeding seasons, so ensure there's enough space to avoid conflict.
- **Emus:** Emus are generally more solitary than ostriches, but they can be housed in pairs or small groups. Emus do not tolerate crowded conditions well, so ensure they have sufficient space.

Exercise

- Both emus and ostriches need plenty of space to run and exercise. These birds are built for speed and should have room to move around freely. Lack of space can lead to stress, obesity, and other health issues.

Enrichment

- To prevent boredom, provide enrichment such as large **balls**, **piles of hay**, or **branches** for them to interact with. They may also enjoy dust baths, which they use to keep their feathers clean and protect themselves from parasites.

Handling and Safety

- **Emus:** Emus are generally more docile than ostriches but can become skittish. Approach them slowly and calmly. They may kick if they feel threatened, so avoid sudden movements.
- **Ostriches:** Ostriches are much more aggressive and protective of their territory. Always approach with caution. Keep your distance from the birds during breeding seasons, as they can become very territorial and aggressive.
- **Safety Gear:** If you need to handle these birds, it's recommended to wear sturdy boots and gloves. When moving them, consider using a large, open pen to guide them to the desired location.

Both emus and ostriches are fascinating, hardy birds that require plenty of space, a balanced diet, and proper care. With the right environment and attention, they can live healthy, productive lives. Whether you're raising them for their eggs, meat, or feathers, or simply as exotic livestock, ensuring their physical and mental well-being will help them thrive. Regular check-ups with a veterinarian, proper housing, a balanced diet, and exercise will ensure that both emus and ostriches lead happy and healthy lives.