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Amazing Animals
Fact sheets

Ratites

The Ratite family includes flightless birds with a flat, keelless breastbone (the keel is where the flight muscles connect). Most of their muscle is in their legs and thighs. There are only five species around the world. Cassowary, Emu, Ostrich, Rhea and Kiwi.

Emu

An adult Emu may reach 2 meters in height and can weigh up to 45 kilograms, making them the tallest bird inhabiting Australia. They are outweighed by only one other bird in Australia- their relative, the Cassowary. The feathers of an Emu are double shafted, giving the birds a loose, shaggy look. Emus are brown in colour, although the intensity of this colour varies according to the season of year, changes in surroundings and the behavior of nearby birds.

Although they have feathers, they cannot fly because their wings are too small. Also due to the structure of the feathers they are no longer capable of creating lift. This open structure serves the sole purpose of insulating against the elements. Emus have three toes, the underside of these toes is flattened with a small pad, to aid traction over rough terrain.

Habitat

Emus are found throughout Australia in almost all habitat types.

Diet

Emus feed mainly on grass, flowers, seeds, fruits and insects. Emus also consume stones which aid in the digestion process.

Breeding

Emus are sexually mature at around 2 years of age. Breeding season will usually occur between April and November. Normally Emus are silent, but during breeding season, the female will make a deep booming noise. Emus will lay a clutch of 6-11 eggs which are dark grey-green in colour and are about 13.5cm in length and 9cm wide.

It is up to the male to take care of the eggs during the 60 day incubation period and he is the sole parent for up to 2 years after the eggs hatch. After laying her eggs the female will find another wandering group and usually another mate with which she will lay another clutch of eggs. Female Emus can lay several clutches of eggs to numerous males in one breeding season.

Australia Zoo Emu profiles

Eddie

This bloke is a real character, as are all the emus. He has a light coloured plumage, and a 'cool hair do'! He has a great nature, but come breeding season you don't want to get on the wrong side of him or go near his nest! This bloke is a great father, and does a wonderful job incubating 'Emily's eggs' and looking after their chicks.

Eddie became part of the Zoo after being rescued and caught in the surrounding forestry. He was in very poor condition and very hungry when we took him in. Since coming to live at Australia Zoo Eddie has flourished and now lives with his better half Emily and is proud father to Elle.

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