



OSTRICH

STRUTHIONIFORMES
Family: Struthionidae
Genus: Struthio
Species: camelus



K Chadbourne Collection

Range: Africa south of the Sahara

Habitat: Sandy grassland and open country where there is little cover

Niche: Terrestrial, omnivorous, diurnal

Biomes:

Wild diet: Seeds, berries, flowers, succulents, wild figs, insects, small reptiles and tortoises.

Zoo diet: Ratite diet (commercially prepared) and feline diet (fortified meat)

Life Span: (Wild) 40 yrs.
 (Captivity)

Sexual dimorphism: Male with black plumage is larger than female with gray plumage

Location in SF Zoo: African Savanna

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The ostrich has a long, mobile, nearly naked neck covered with reddish (Northern subspecies) -blue (Southern subspecies) skin, tiny head, broad bill, very large eyes with thick eyelashes and exceptional eyesight. Feet have two toes each with short nails and powerful thick bare legs. (Leg bones are solid) This allows the Ostrich to reach speeds of 40 mph. A male's wings and tail are white while females are grayish-brown.

The difference in coloration is tied to the ostrich's need for camouflage while incubating in daylight for females and night time for the males. Ostriches can go without water for days but when it is available they sometimes submerge all but head and neck. The ostrich is the world's largest living bird. It has only two toes, while all other ratites and birds have either three or four. The word 'ratite' is a term applied to flightless running bird with a flat sternum (there is no keel). The absence of a well-developed flight muscles make a keel superfluous.

Weight: M up to 330#
 F up to 300#

Height: M up to 8'

STATUS & CONSERVATION

5 subspecies once ranged throughout Africa, Syria and Arabia. The Asian subspecies was last noted in 1941. They have since been introduced into Southern Australia. The plume trade did much to reduce the range of this species.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

The vocal organ is not well developed leaving only a penetrating, grunting roar, usually heard in early morning

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Males defend their territories in the breeding season by patrolling and displaying to chase out intruders, and by 'booming'. Their call is surprisingly loud and deep, and is accompanied by inflation of the brightly colored neck skin. Aggressive display consists of repeated flicking of wings and postures with both wings raised. Breeding males display dramatically to females by squatting and waving their huge spread wings alternately. Females solicit by lowering the head and both wings and quivering the later. Breeding seasons vary with locality, but in East Africa ostriches mainly nest in the dry season. A male makes a number of shallow scrapes in his territory. A female (the 'major' hen), with whom he has a loose pair bond, selects one of these scrapes. She lays, on alternate days, up to a dozen eggs. 3 to 6 'minor' hens also lay eggs in the nest, but play no further role there. The major hen benefits from the presence of extra eggs in her nest because her own are protected by the dilution effect against small predators (ie, her own eggs among the 20 - 40 (50 have been recorded) present are less likely to be damaged). The extra eggs she is unable to cover are rolled to an outer ring of the nest, where they are not incubated and are doomed. As she is able to discriminate among the many eggs, she ensures that the eggs she rolls out are not hers. The major hen and the cock share equally, for the increasing periods, in first guarding and later incubating the clutch, female by day, male by night. Unguarded nests are conspicuous from above and vulnerable to predation by Egyptian vultures which throw stones to break the 2mm thick shells. As the chicks become older and leave their parents they form crèches that are guarded by a single pair of adults.

Incubation: c. 42 days	Sexual Maturity: 3-4 years
# of eggs: 7 - 12 glossy white eggs 6" in size and 2 ½ lbs	Weight at birth:

MISCELLANEOUS

To avoid detection a nesting bird may lower it's so that its neck is several inches and parallel to the ground thus given rise to the misconception that they were burying their head in the sand.

There are 5 subspecies (races) -

- ◆ Masai - of southern Kenya & Tanzania has pink thighs and neck
- ◆ Somali - from eastern Kenya to southern Ethiopia has grayish- blue neck and thighs
- ◆ Southern - found in south-western Africa also has a grayish- blue neck and thighs

Sources:

(49, 50, 51, 52, & 53)

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Birds of Africa © 1980 Adkinson Parrish Limited by John Karmali pages 20-22, 78

Encyclopedia of the Animal Kingdom © 1984 Crescent Books by Maurice & Robert Burton p 321