

EMUS



The emu is the second tallest bird in the world and the tallest native to Australia. It stands up to 2m (6.6 ft) tall. Only the ostrich is taller at 2.4m (7.9ft). Emus are flightless, weigh up to 45kg and are distantly related to cassowaries.

Emus belong to an ancient group of birds called Ratites. They are flightless birds that lack a keel on their breastbone to attach flight muscles.

The noise made by an emu is called booming. It is produced by an inflatable pouch in their windpipe and consists of deep grunts and drumming noises. Booming is most commonly produced during the breeding season and can be heard over 2km away.

Emus are usually solitary, but can be found in flocks.

HABITAT

The last remaining species of emu is found all throughout Australia except for Tasmania. Smaller emu species once lived on King Island and Kangaroo Island but were hunted to extinction by European settlers.

Emus are flexible in their habitat use but are rarely found in extremely arid regions, rainforests or heavily human populated areas. They have a preference for sclerophyll forests and woodlands.

DIET

In arid areas, emus are nomadic and will roam the land following climatic conditions and food sources. They can roam up to 25km per day. A layer of fat is stored under their skin to help them in times of environmental hardship.

Their diet is mainly made up of herbs and fruit, but they will sometimes eat insects, flowers, nuts, grasses, animal droppings, seeds and leaves.

SELF DEFENCE

When threatened, emus make a fast retreat by running speeds of up to 50km/ hr (30mph) and covering distances of up to 3m (9.8 ft) in one stride.

When running away from an airborne predator the emu runs in a zig-zag pattern. It defends itself by kicking with its large feet and strong legs.

BREEDING

After courtship, a nest of grass and sticks is constructed on the ground. The female will then lay five to twenty dark green eggs over a two to four day interval (March to November). The female takes no further interest in the eggs and will wander off. She may even mate again that same season.

The male is then left with the responsibility of incubating the eggs and raising the chicks. During incubation (eight to ten weeks) the father rarely leaves the nest not even to eat or drink. He loses a considerable amount of weight at this time.

Upon hatching the chicks are covered in cream and brown stripes, which eventually fade to the grey-brown feathers of the adult.

The father is extremely protective and will ferociously defend the eggs and chicks even against other emus. The chicks stay with him for six months before reaching independence.



1-month-old chicks

Emus are fully grown at one year of age and reach sexual maturity at 18 months of age. Their lifespan is 25 to 30 years.

It is estimated that there are up to 725,000 emus left in the wild.



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