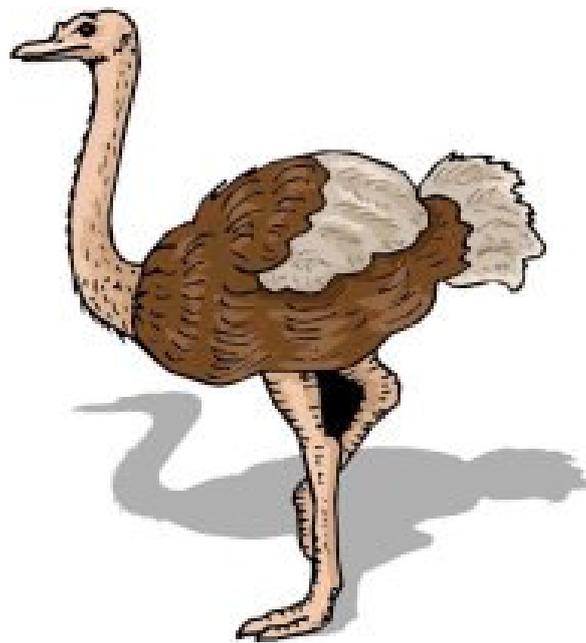


The Ostrich



Among birds, the ostrich is a record-breaker.

It is the tallest and the heaviest of all birds. An ostrich stands up to 9 feet (2.7 meters) tall. That's more than three feet (one meter) taller than the average man. And this bird can weigh as much as 350 pounds (159 kilograms).

One ostrich egg is about as big as 24 chicken eggs.

- While the huge ostrich is a bird—with wings and feathers—it does not fly. Instead it runs.
- It has long, strong legs. One stride can cover up to 16 feet (4.9 meters)—about the length of a mid-size family car! The bird is speedy, too. It can run just over 40 miles (64 kilometers) an hour for a short distance, and can keep up a speed of more than 30 miles (48 kilometers) an hour over longer distances.
- The ostrich uses its short wings for balance, holding them outstretched when it runs. On each foot, it has two toes and a four-inch-long (10-centimeter-long) claw, which help give it traction as it speeds along.
- Strong legs don't only carry an ostrich where it wants to go. They can also be used for self-defense. If an ostrich is cornered and can't run from danger, it will kick with a force mighty enough to kill a lion.

When danger approaches, an ostrich will often lie low to hide, stretching its neck along the ground. Its feather colors blend with the sandy soil where it lives.

- From far away, the position the ostrich takes can look as though the bird has buried its head in the sand. Many people thought that was what ostriches did when they were trying to hide, but that is not true. This myth began because of an optical illusion.
- Ostriches are mainly vegetarian, eating roots, leaves, flowers, and seeds. But they will also eat insects, lizards, and other small creatures.
- Ostriches generally live in the vicinity of grazing animals such as wildebeest, antelopes, and zebras. It's a good partnership: The grazers stir up insects and rodents for

- the ostriches to eat, and the ostriches help alert the grazers to dangers such as approaching lions.
- An ostrich group, called a herd, generally numbers about 12 individuals. Male ostriches compete with one another for control of a group of several females. A herd has a dominant male—the one who successfully fends off challengers—and a dominant female. She mates only with him, though he may mate with other females as well.
 - All the egg-laying females, called hens, lay their eggs in the nest of the dominant female. Then that female—whose eggs are positioned in the center of the nest, the most well-protected spot—and her mate take care of all the eggs in that one nest.
 - A communal nest may have from 15 to 60 eggs in it, and each egg can be up to 6 inches (15 centimeters) long and weigh 3 pounds (1.5 kilograms). Eggs hatch after about 40 days of incubation.
 - The ostrich chicks hatch feathered and ready to walk around. They leave the nest within days to follow their parents, who protect them from the hot sun or rain by keeping them huddled under their body or outstretched wings.
 - By the time the young ostriches are 18 months old, they are fully grown and have become record-breaking birds like their parents.

Text by Catherine D. Hughes

FAST FACTS

The scientific name of the ostrich is *Struthio camelus*.

A wild ostrich can live to be 30 to 40 years old.

Ostriches live in Africa's savannas and deserts, in terrain that is mainly dry and sandy.

- Female ostriches are grayish brown; males are black and white. Their necks and thighs are bare (feather-free).

One ostrich egg is about as big as 24 chicken eggs. An average ostrich egg is six inches (15 centimeters) long, five inches (13 centimeters) wide, and weighs about three pounds (1.5 kilograms).

- It would take about 40 minutes to hard-boil an ostrich egg.

Ostriches get most of the water that they need from the plants they eat.

- Ostriches enjoy taking a bath; they like water, when they can find it.

A male ostrich lets out a booming call to announce his territory. Ostriches also whistle and snort.

In some places, mainly South Africa and North America, ostriches are raised on ranches for their meat and hides.

- Ostriches and their relatives belong to a group of flightless birds called ratites. They include the rhea of South America, the emu of Australia, the cassowary of Australia and New Guinea, and the kiwi of New Zealand.

Ostriches are ready to begin having chicks of their own by the time they are three to four years old.

Source: <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/Animals/CreatureFeature/Ostrich>



The following photograph is © National Geographic and was taken by Stephen St John





Handwriting practice lines consisting of 12 horizontal rows. Each row is composed of three parallel lines: a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line.



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