



Struthio camelus camelus

Common name: **Ostrich**Latin name: **Struthio camelus camelus**

Local name: النعام



ECOLOGY

Type:

Wild

Role in Ecosystem:

As a flightless species in the rich biozone of the African savanna, the common ostrich must face a variety of formidable predators throughout its life cycle. Animals that prey on ostriches of all ages may include cheetahs, lions, leopards, African hunting dogs, spotted hyenas, and Nile crocodiles. Ostriches help keep their ecosystems healthy by controlling rodent populations and spreading the seeds of the many plants they eat. They also form symbiotic relationships with other animals in the ecosystem. For example, ostriches allow gazelle to share their feeding grounds, and in return, the highly responsive gazelles provide an early warning of incoming predators.

HABITAT

Ostriches are restricted to drier and sandy regions of central and southern Africa in dry savanna, grasslands, and shrublands.



Food

Herbivore

Ostriches are herbivorous living mostly on plant matter, but they occasionally eat animal remains left by carnivorous predators. They are selective feeders, taking the seed heads of grasses and certain flowers and seeds. They sometimes eat locusts. Lacking teeth, they swallow pebbles that act as gastroliths to grind food in the gizzard. An ostrich in captivity requires 3.5 kg of food per day. They can survive without water for long periods.



Movement and Communication

Ostriches are diurnal but may be active on moonlit nights. They can run for a long time at about 50 km/h, the fastest land speed of any bird. If concerned, the ostrich can attack with a kick of its powerful legs.

Ostriches use a variety of vocalizations to communicate with each other, including chirps, hisses, growls, and honks. Male ostriches can also make a booming sound by filling a special sac in their throat with air. These low-pitched sounds can travel across great distances. They make these booming calls during the breeding season.



Social Habits

Social

Ostriches live in flocks of 5 to 50, and they are normally found in the company of grazing animals like antelope and zebras. Flocks occupy territories of 2-15 sq km during the breeding season, which lasts around 5 months. Smaller, looser groups of 2-5 members are formed outside of the breeding season. They perform complex mating displays.



Reproduction

Oviparous

The exact pattern varies geographically. Ostriches form bisexual groups with a complex structure. Territorial males compete for flocks of 3 to 5 hens. Elaborate displays, including hisses and other noises, are often used by males to intimidate each other. Once divided into mating groups, ostriches in some areas use communal nests to hold anywhere from 15 to 60 eggs. The nest is a hole scraped in bare ground. The average egg is 6 inches in length, and 5 inches in width, weighs about 3 pounds, and is shiny and whitish. Eggs take approximately 40 days to hatch. Caring for their eggs is divided up between males and females. Males watch over them during the night, and the various females of the mating group take turns during the day.



Attributes

Size

1.8-2 m

Weight

150 kg

INTRODUCTION

The common ostrich (*Struthio camelus*), or simply ostrich, is a flightless bird native to certain large areas of Africa and is the largest living bird species. It is one of two extant species of ostriches, the only living members of the genus *Struthio* in the ratite order of birds.

The word *camelus* is based on the similarities ostriches have with camels, such as their prominent eyes and eyelashes, their large size and their remarkable tolerance to the desert habitat. It is distinctive in its appearance and unmistakable with a long neck and legs. It is a huge (stands 2 m tall), terrestrial bird. Males are black and white, females gray-brown, and can run for a long time at about 50 km/h, the fastest land speed of any bird. It lays the largest eggs of any living bird. Although ostriches do not bury their heads in the sand to avoid danger, the saying 'Head in the Sand' is associated with this species.

LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

Human interaction

Ostriches are hunted or domesticated for their meat, skin, feathers, and eggs.

They can be bred in special enclosures and farms because they need wider spaces to run to build their thighs that store much of the meat. Ostrich meat is highly rich in protein. That is why it was used in the past to nourish pregnant women in some places in Sudan.

It is also cholesterol-free. This renders it suitable for diabetics and persons with heart problems and high blood pressure.

Compared with other animal hides, ostrich hide is the best-selling because it is softer and more resilient. It is used to manufacture handbags and shoes.

Ostrich eggs are cooked and eaten. They are also used in pastries.

Ostrich fat, which contains a large amount of unsaturated fats, is used to manufacture medical fats.

Emptied ostrich eggs are used by artists to produce gifts of different shapes and colours. The shells are also cut to make flat beads, a practice that has been going on since the stone age.

Cultural value

Ostriches have a big role in the Sudanese cultural heritage. Their feather was and is still used as decoration in some parts of Sudan, particularly on happy occasions and festivities.

Sudan army officers and soldiers in the past had a thick crown of ostrich feathers protruding from the left side of their hat. Ostrich feathers were also used to decorate the hats of tribal monarchs and chieftains. In some parts of Sudan, women used to decorate mattresses and tablecloths with colorful ostrich feathers. Wherever ostriches were present in the wildlife, the locals would be happy to catch, cook, and present their meat to important guests. Ostrich feathers have deep cultural, social, and symbolic significance among several Sudanese tribes. They serve as a visual representation of wealth and prestige. The headdress with ostrich feathers identifies the leader in the dance as Hawazma Baggara from southern Kordufan. In Darfur, it is used to make hand fans, pillows, bed sheets, and house decorations for important leaders and wealthy people. In "Jertig" ceremony the groom's headdress is decorated with a few ostrich feathers which is the reason behind calling the groom "Abu Reesh".

In the ancient history of Egypt and Sudan ostrich, ostrich hunting and ostrich feathers are represented via paintings and drawings.

The "Head in the sand" myth may have been a misunderstanding of sticking their heads in the sand to swallow sand and pebbles to help digest their fibrous food or the defensive behavior of lying low, so that they may appear from a distance to have their head buried. Another possible origin for the myth lies in the fact that ostriches keep their eggs in holes in the sand instead of nests and must rotate them using their beaks during incubation; digging the hole, placing the eggs, and rotating them might each be mistaken for an attempt to bury their heads in the sand.

Cultural expression

Ostrich Feathers: A Sudanese play from the history of Sudan in the sixteenth century AD

THREATS

The common ostrich is listed as least concern on the IUCN Red List, meaning it's not endangered or considered close to becoming endangered in the near future. However, the IUCN notes that the ostrich's population trend is decreasing, and they face several threats such as hunting, habitat loss, and natural predators.

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