
Emu

Dromaius novaehollandiae

Class: *Aves*

Order: *Casuariiformes*

Family: *Dromaiidae*

Characteristics:

The largest bird in Australia and second largest bird in the world (determined by height—up to 2 meters [6 feet] tall) and weighs 90 to 120 pounds. The emu does not have any flight feathers but rather the body is covered in mottled brown comb-like plumage that grows in pairs. Their neck is extremely long and the head is covered in black feathers under which you can see a bluish area of skin from behind the eye down the neck. The beak is bluish black and eyes are brown. Emus are too large and heavy to fly but still possess a vestigial wing at the end of which is a single sharp claw.

Behavior:

Emus are docile and curious but will flee or defend themselves if necessary. Their powerful legs allow emus to walk for great distances to forage and run 25 to 30 mph ([A to Z Animals](#)). They adapt well to most temperatures but do require a lot of water, drinking 2 to 4 gallons each day. Emus enjoy the water, will often play in it, and prefer habitats with a water source.

Reproduction:

Emus pair up from summer to fall and the male builds a rough nest of twigs, leaves and grass on the ground in which the female lays 5 to 15 emerald-green eggs. The female then leaves the nest and the male incubates the eggs, getting up only to turn the eggs and clean the nest. He doesn't eat during this time. The eggs hatch after an 8-week incubation period. The females may go off and lay eggs for other males as well and can clutch up to three times per year ([San Diego Zoo](#)). Chicks can walk immediately after hatching.

Diet:

Wild: Fruits, insects, seeds

Zoo: Ratite pellets, dog chow, greens, oyster shell

Conservation: Emus are common and chicks are very hardy with a survival rate around 75%.

FYI: Emus were once a key species for the survival of Aboriginal tribes. They were a source of food, shelter and clothing. Today, they are often farmed for meat, oil, leather and eggs. Emu oil is said to have medicinal properties for relieving sore joints and arthritis ([Emu Facts](#)).



Range & Habitat:

Lightly wooded grassland areas near water where tree cover isn't dense



Lifespan: up to 35 years in captivity, 10 to 20 years in the wild.

Special Adaptations: Stay-at-home super dads! Male emus incubate the eggs and raise the chicks until about 18 months old.

IUCN Conservation Status:
Least Concern

