

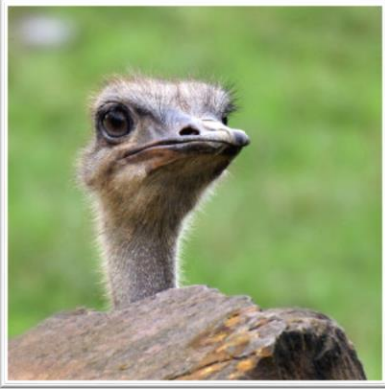
# Common Ostrich

**Scientific Name:** *Struthio camelus massaicus*

**Class:** Aves

**Order:** Struthioniformes

**Family:** Struthionidae



Ostrich males reach a height of up to 8 feet, while females are somewhat shorter. An ostrich can weigh up to 160 pounds and is the largest living bird, and also the heaviest. The head is small in relation to the size of the bird, but its huge eyes, protected by long, black eyelashes, are the largest of any terrestrial vertebrate, with a diameter of 2 inches. The feathers are unusual in that the barbs are loose, due to the absence of hooks on the barbules, and the plumage is soft and smooth. They are unable to water-proof their feathers, which tend to become sodden in rain. They have only two toes, a result of an adaptation for running which helps make the ostrich the fastest runner in the bird world. It also has great stamina, and can keep up a speed of 31 miles per hour for over 30 minutes. They use the wings for balance at

high speeds.

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## Range

Southern Kenya - Tanzania

## Habitat

Open, semi-arid plains, from desert to savanna; also open woodland. Does not require standing water.

## Gestation

42 to 46 days

## Litter

2 to 11 yellowish eggs, averaging 5" x 6" in size.

## Behavior

Ostriches may cover great distances searching for food. At night they roost at regular communal sites. Individuals of a group are always within sight and hearing of each other but may be varying distances apart. They squat with the necks raised most of the night, although the eyes are closed. The ostrich is gregarious, and this may have evolved as a defense strategy. They form groups of up to 100 birds. Each group has its own sites for feeding, roosting and dustbathing, and tends to avoid contact with other groups. There is a pecking order with dominant males and females, which are copied in their activities by other members of the group. There are frequent social interactions between individuals, and sometimes short fights. They are polygamous, each cock having a harem of 3 to 5 hens. The hens lay in a common nest scraped out of the ground, and together lay up to 30 eggs.

## Reproduction

Shell of the ostrich egg (one-sixteenth of an inch in thickness) is so strong that a man may walk, even stomp, upon the clutch, and cause no harm. An ostrich egg equals about 24 hen eggs but is only 1.5 % of the female's weight. For the Egyptian Vulture, the contents of an ostrich egg are a delectable challenge; the vulture has learned to throw stones at the egg until it cracks. A female can lay up to eight eggs, each weighing two to three pounds.

## Wild Diet

Small animals, fruit, grass, vegetation