



Emu

Dromaius novaehollandiae

Classification *What groups does this organism belong to based on characteristics shared with other organisms?*

Class: Aves (all birds)

Order: Struthioniformes (cassowaries, emus, kiwis, ostriches, rheas)

Family: Dromaiidae (emu)

Genus: Dromaius (emu)

Species: novaehollandiae (emu)



Distribution *Where in the world does this species live?*

Emus are native to Australia

Habitat *What kinds of areas does this species live in?*

Emus inhabit many environments ranging from savannah forests and grasslands to semi-arid lands

Physical Description *How would this animal's body shape and size be described?*

- Emus are the second tallest flightless birds, only ostriches are larger. They range from 4.9 to 6.2 feet (1.5 to 1.9 meters) tall and may weigh from 66 to 121 pounds (30 to 55 kilograms).
- These birds have long necks and muscled legs capable of carrying them at speeds to 30 miles (48 kilometers) per hour over distances.
- Their legs terminate in feet with 3 forward facing toes, but they have no backward facing toes.
- Emu feathers start out black, but fade to a brownish color when exposed to sun. Unlike other birds, the emu follicles produce 2 feathers. Their feathers have widely spaced barbs giving the feathers a loose hair-like appearance.
- Males and females of this species look alike, however females are slightly larger than males.

Diet *What does this species eat?*

In their historic range: These birds are omnivores (consume plant and animal matter) eating seeds, fruits, plant material, insects, and small animals.

At the zoo: Emus are fed gamebird grain, produce, alfalfa.



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Predators *What eats this species?*

Adult emus are relatively free of predation, dingoes or wedge-tailed eagles are their only natural predators. Emus have also been hunted by humans for generations.

Social Organization *How does this animal interact with others of its species?*

Emus are typically solitary birds, coming together in large flocks only when migrating in search of better food resources. Males and females will bond and stay together during mating season.

Life Cycle *How does this species mate, raise young, grow and develop?*

Breeding season will bring emus together, and pairs will stay together until the male begins to incubate the eggs. At that point the female typically departs to potentially mate with other males and lay additional eggs in another male's nest. Male emus will incubate 5- 15 avocado colored eggs for approximately 48-56 days. During incubation these fathers never leave the nest and therefore may lose up to a third of their body weight. At the end of the incubation, all of the eggs hatch within a short period. Emu chicks are brown and white with horizontal stripes which help them blend into their environment. These chicks will stay with their male for 5- 7 months, learning the necessary survival skills. The chicks are fully grown at around 12 months, but do not mature sexually until around 18-20 months. In the wild emus live 5-10 years, but in captivity they may live 35 years.

Adaptations *What physical and behavioral characteristics enable this animal to survive and thrive?*

- Emus' **strong muscular legs** allow them to leap into the air, thus protecting their heads and neck from attack. These same muscular legs allow them to defend themselves by kicking.
- The **hair-like nature of their feathers** provides protection for solar radiation or sunburn.
- Emus have a **pouch in their throat** that can be inflated as a part of their vocalizations.
- These birds have **stiff tail feathers** that can be rattled to scare off predators like dingoes.

Collection Connection

Ralph can often be seen patrolling his habitat, just across from the Gates Center. He was hatched 1/1/1997. He is known to be a very sweet bird and enjoys attention from his keepers and watching zoo guests.

Conservation Status *Is this animal at risk for extinction and why?*

IUCN Status: Least concern

Emu populations are stable. These birds are also raised commercially for their meat, leather and oil.

Resources and Where to Learn More

San Diego Zoo Animals and Plants: <https://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/emu>

Smithsonian National Zoo: <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/emu>