

# Ostriches

## Reading and Discussion

The **ostrich** is the largest and heaviest living bird in the world. This bird lives in Africa in the African savanna and desert lands. It belongs to the **Struthionidae** family and **Struthio** genus. It is the only living species of its family and genus, but it has three living relatives: the **cassowary**, the **emu**, and the **rhea**. A full grown male ostrich weighs about 300 pounds and can be 6.9 to 9 feet tall. A female ostrich can weigh 240 pounds and is between 5.7 and 6.2 feet tall. The life span of an ostrich is 30 to 70 years, with an average of about 50 years.

Ostriches have flat heads and long bare necks and legs. Their bodies are covered with very smooth and soft feathers. As their feathers do not hook together or connect, their feathers always look messy and shaggy. They do not have the waterproof gland that many other birds have. This means that when it rains, their feathers will get very wet. Ostriches have very good eyesight. Their eyes are about 2 inches in diameter, making them the largest eyes of any land animal.

Though the ostrich has wings, it is a flightless bird. It cannot fly because its short wings cannot support its large body in flight, though they do provide support and balance for running. The ostrich's body is extremely well suited for running. Its legs are thick and very powerful, and ostriches can cover large distances. There are only two toes on each foot, and this gives them the ability to run at high speed. When running at full speed, an ostrich can run up to 43 miles per hour. It can maintain a speed of around 30 miles per hour, and in one stride, the ostrich can cover a distance of 10 to 16 feet.

When an ostrich senses danger from predators, its natural defense is to run, but sometimes it will lie still on the ground with its head and neck in front. Because the head and neck are light in color, it seems to be burying its head in the sand. However, in reality, ostriches do not bury their heads in the sand. When they are cornered and unable to run, they use their powerful legs against their attacker. A kick from an ostrich can actually kill some predators like lions.

Ostriches eat whatever they can find in their environment. They are omnivores and they eat plants, roots, leaves, seeds, insects, lizards, and other small creatures. They have very tough intestines which can be up to 46 feet long, and they can even digest things like small stones and pebbles. They do not need to drink water, as they get most of their water from the plants they eat, but if they come across a watering hole, they will take the opportunity to have a drink.

Ostriches go about in herds of less than a dozen. They can be seen traveling in pairs, especially in winter. Female ostriches lay their eggs in a shared nest, which could contain between 15 to 25 eggs. The eggs incubate, or hatch, in around 42 to 46 days. The eggs of the ostrich are the largest eggs of any bird. One ostrich egg can weigh as much as 24 chicken eggs.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Activities

### Activity A: Multiple Choice:

1. Ostriches are all except the following:
  - a. Largest birds
  - b. Herbivores
  - c. Very fast runners
  - d. Only living species of the family Struthionidae
  
2. One of the relatives of ostriches is:
  - a. Penguins
  - b. Emus
  - c. Swans
  - d. None of the above

### Activity B: List three things Ostriches eat:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Activity C: True or False:

- \_\_\_ 1. Ostriches bury their heads in the sand when they feel danger.
- \_\_\_ 2. Ostriches can be found in South America.
- \_\_\_ 3. Ostriches can run up to 43 miles per hour.
- \_\_\_ 4. Ostriches have the gland that most birds have that allows their feathers to be waterproof.
- \_\_\_ 5. Ostriches can go without drinking water.
- \_\_\_ 6. Each female ostrich has her own nest, and never shares the nest.
- \_\_\_ 7. The kick of the ostrich is strong enough to kill lions.
- \_\_\_ 8. Ostriches only have three toes o help them run faster.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Answer Key

### Activity A

1. Ostriches are all except the following:

- a. Largest birds
- b. **Herbivores**
- c. Very fast runners
- d. Only living species of the family Struthionidae

2. One of the relatives of ostriches is:

- a. Penguins
- b. **Emus**
- c. Swans
- d. None of the above

### Activity B

Plants, Roots, Leaves, Seeds, Insects, Lizards, Other small creatures, Stones, Pebbles

### Activity C

  F   1. Ostriches bury their heads in the sand when they feel danger.

  F   2. Ostriches can be found in South America.

  T   3. Ostriches can run up to 43 miles per hour.

  F   4. Ostriches have the gland that most birds have that allows their feathers to be waterproof.

  T   5. Ostriches can go without drinking water.

  F   6. Each female ostrich has her own nest, and never shares the nest.

  T   7. The kick of the ostrich is strong enough to kill lions.

  F   8. Ostriches only have three toes to help them run faster.