



# Animals of the World: Birds



## THE OSTRICH

The ostrich is the largest bird in the world. Despite having large wings, it cannot fly, because of its size and weight. Its long and strong legs help it run fast. It belongs to the Ratites family, which means nonflying birds.

They are native to Africa, but there are ostrich hatcheries all over the world. They can adapt to a wide variety of ecosystems, although they prefer warm climates with sand.

It is a myth that these birds hide their heads in the sand. Using their beaks, male ostriches dig shallow holes, deep enough to keep the eggs safe. When looking from a distance with your head on the ground, it appears that the ostrich's head disappears under the sand. They bring their head and neck to ground level to hide their height and go unnoticed.

An ostrich's eyes are about 2 inches, 5 centimeters. They are larger than their brain, which is the size of a nut.



Ostriches are very tall animals. An adult male ostrich can reach for an object that is 2.8 meters away, much higher than any professional NBA player. Its weight ranges between 150 to 180 kilograms.

The longest and strongest part of its body is the legs, which it uses to walk and run great distances. The ostrich can run at speeds of 65 kilometers per hour; it can move as fast as a vehicle going a medium speed. He also uses his legs to defend himself, kicking his attackers, if necessary.

Its plumage is dark in color. The females are brown or grayish, and the males are black with white at the tip of its wings. This color allows them to camouflage themselves in the sand when they kneel by folding their legs.

They are omnivorous birds, so they eat most vegetables and creeping animals, such as insects, rodents, snakes, roots, tubers, and plants.



They are primarily diurnal animals. They are active during the day, but they also do some activities at night. With their tall stature and sharp eyesight, ostriches can recognize their predators long before they become a potential danger.

Ostriches usually live in a herd, but there are seasons that they live in pairs or alone. Large numbers of ostriches gather during the mating season. All of the ostriches lay their eggs in a single nest that belongs to the dominant female. This helps the ostrich to protect all the eggs from predators and other environmental hazards.

Just like the ostrich is the largest bird in the world, its eggs are also the largest in the world. An ostrich egg weighs about one and a half kilos, which is equal to the weight of two dozen chicken eggs. Its shell is white, hard, and very bright.

The egg hatches after 42 days of incubation. A chick emerges from the egg, grows fast, and is running as soon as possible. Within a month, small ostriches are running at speeds of 55 kilometers per hour.



An unusual behavior of ostriches is the courtship dance the male performs for the female. The male ostrich kneels in front of the female, bats his wings rhythmically, moves his long neck from side to side, and hits the ground with his legs.

Ostriches are large and strong; they can carry the weight of smaller people. In some countries, people ride them like they were horses.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# THE OSTRICH

Answer the questions.



1. Ostriches are \_\_\_\_\_

- a. very large flying animals.
- b. from Europe.
- c. very tall animals.
- d. animals with colorful feathers.
- e. omnivorous animals.
- f. animals with good eyesight.



2. Ostrich legs are important because \_\_\_\_\_

- a. they use them for momentum when flying.
- b. they are used to run very fast.
- c. they are used to sleep on their feet.
- d. they use them to build their nests.



3. Ostriches are diurnal animals, but do some activities night.

- a. True
- b. False

4. To defend against predators, ostriches use \_\_\_\_\_

- a. their strong legs and sharp eyesight.
- b. their sharp beak.
- c. their brightly colored feathers.
- d. their tiny claws.



Name\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

5. Number the animals below from tallest to shortest.

\_\_\_\_\_ Elephant 2.9 meters

\_\_\_\_\_ Zebra 1.4 meters

\_\_\_\_\_ Giraffe 4.6 meters

\_\_\_\_\_ Lion 1.2 meters

\_\_\_\_\_ Ostrich 2.5 meters

6. Ostrich eggs are \_\_\_\_\_

- a. very large, weighing a gram and a half.
- b. equivalent to 24 chicken eggs.
- c. white, soft, and very bright.
- d. incubated for 55 days.

7. Ostriches are omnivorous mammals, so they eat almost anything.

- a. True
- b. False

8. For courtship, ostrich \_\_\_\_\_

- a. males change the color of his eyes to attract the female.
- b. hit their neck against the ground.
- c. females build a large, strong nest.
- d. males kneel in front of females and move their wings rhythmically.

9. Ostriches live \_\_\_\_\_

- a. in herds.
- b. in couples.
- c. in solitary.
- d. All the answers are correct.

10. The brain of an ostrich is large.

- a. True
- b. False

