

EMUS FACT SHEET

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The outback, with its large expanses of mulga, leopardwood, sand and gibba mixed with shrubs and grasses, provide homes for little-known or seldom-seen native animals. One very special and commonly-seen animal is the emu, the native bird from our coat of arms.

- **Ngurri** is the Ngemba people's word for emu.
- Emus are the largest native Australian bird.
- Emus are the third heaviest bird in the world - after the ostrich and the cassowary. They are also the second tallest bird in the world - after the ostrich.
- Emus can run up to 50km/hour - the speed limit in most country towns.
- Emus lay very large, blue-green eggs.
- Emu feathers are very unusual - they are in pairs. Unlike most birds, where the shaft is the part we see and the aftershaft is the tiny downy bit at the bottom, Emu feather shafts and aftershafts are the same size.
- Emus are very curious and will come to investigate anything strange in their territory.
- Unlike most birds, the male sits on the eggs (incubates) and takes care of the chicks. The female courts the male and fights other females for him.
- You can tell an adult emu from a juvenile emu because they have blue skin on their face and neck. Emu chicks have stripes along their body which helps camouflage them.
- It is difficult to tell male and female emus apart, but the female is larger than the male and has a wider rump. She also has more black 'hairs' on her head.
- They have a very loud, low booming call that can be heard up to 2km away.
- Emus were a traditional source of food for Aboriginal people.





EMUS ACTIVITIES

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1. There are three living species and two extinct species of emu in Australia. How are they different from one another and where are they found?
2. Unlike Aboriginal people, Europeans sometimes considered emus as agricultural pests and killed them in large numbers. The most famous example of this was the 'Emu War' of 1932. Find out about this war and its consequences.
3. By 1865, it was noted that emus were no longer common. In the 1930s, more than 60,000 emus were killed a year. Large-scale killings continued until the 1960s. They are now considered a "Declining Woodland Bird" and are a protected species in Australia. What are the modern threats impacting the emu?