



Care For Us

Common Ostrich (*Struthiocamelus*)

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be positive, neutral or negative.

An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have positive welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare - throughout their entire life.





Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry for all captive animals, to ensure positive welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.

It is therefore very important we understand their behavioural and physiological needs, so we can meet those needs in captivity.

Ostriches live throughout Africa's semi-arid plains and woodlands and is one of two species of large flightless birds native to Africa of the genus *Struthio*, which is in the ratite family.

Ostriches are very large birds with long legs and a long neck protruding from a round body. Males have bold black and white colouring used by them to attract females. Females are light brown.

The wild ostrich population has declined in the last 200 years. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists the common ostrich as a species of Least Concern, but with a decreasing population trend.

Ostriches are farmed and hunted for their skin, meat and eggs and humans are encroaching on ostrich habitats.



Ostriches Like Different Foods

Ostriches are omnivores and grazers. They feed on grasses, shrubbery, berries, seeds, succulents and also insects and small reptiles. They will eat sand and pebbles to help grind up their food inside their gizzard. Ostriches can rely on the vegetation they eat for water for a short time, but for long-term survival they do need water sources.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Provide continuous grazing opportunities both day and night time, while offering other food options such as seeds in multiple feeding stations to encourage foraging - ostriches will pluck their feathers if they do not have enough grazing opportunities. Always offer clean water in case they are not getting enough from the foods being provided.



Ostriches Like Company

Ostriches live in small flocks that typically contain less than a dozen birds. A male ostrich will escort a flock made up of one head female and a couple of subordinate females. Sometimes, flocks will mingle together and large groups will congregate at a water source. Sometimes, one flock will adopt the young of another, and sometimes groups of subadults will form.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Ensure there is a large enough group and an appropriate sex demographic for positive species-specific interactions. Provide large open spaces with lots of foraging opportunities, which will help reduce inter-group aggression and negative or stereotypical behaviours that may result from stress.

Ostriches Are Polygamous

Courtship is very ritualised and synchronised. Alpha males maintain their flocks and mate with the group's dominant hen. The male sometimes mates with others in the group, and wandering males may also mate with lesser hens. All females lay their eggs in the same nest and the dominant male and hen will take turns to incubate them. The male will help construct the nests, guard the eggs and raise the young chicks.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Maintain appropriate flock dynamics in captivity to encourage positive courtship behaviours between the alpha male and female and subordinates. Provide a choice of quiet areas for nesting opportunities and nesting materials that will encourage positive behaviours involved with the incubation and raising of young.



Ostriches Like to Run

Even though ostriches have thin legs they can run up to 40 miles per hour in open space, with accurate maneuverability for sustained periods of time. This ability to run fast comes from the elasticity in their joints. Not only are ostriches fast, they can also use their legs to kick any potential predators like lions and each two-toed foot has a long, sharp claw that can easily kill. They will fight by kicking forward with their feet to attack.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Provide plenty of open space for ostrich herds to live in, giving them options to run freely if they get spooked. Large open enclosures that also provide some access away from visitors at all times will encourage the ostriches to feel confident and safe within their environment, encouraging natural and normal behaviours.



Ostriches Like to (Dust) Bath



Dust baths are part of bird preening and plumage maintenance, helping to keep feathers in top condition. Ostriches do not have a uropygial gland (the oil gland possessed by the majority of birds) so use dust bathing to keep their feathers healthy and dry. Ostrich wing feathers are particularly important to them for mating displays, shading chicks, covering naked skin to conserve heat and for use as 'rudders' to help maneuverability while running.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Provide plenty of dust bathing opportunities in enclosures so all ostriches can bath. Artificial dust baths can be created, or provide a large enough enclosure with natural substrate where they can create their own.

Ostriches Like To Communicate



The male ostrich has a booming warning call that can sound almost like a lion. They also communicate through body language, for example they will lie down with their heads on the ground if they feel threatened. Their wing and tail feathers are also used for display and courtship - to show dominance they raise them high in the air.

Positive Behavioursto Encourage

Provide an appropriate social structure, space and an interesting environment, that allows for constant foraging, bathing and exploration. This will encourage positive communication and interactions between individual birds in a group.

Ostriches Like Warm Climates

Ostriches' feathers can get very wet without the same waterproofing as other birds (they lack the uropygial gland). They are mainly used to warm weather and will fan their wings in especially hot temperatures, and cover their thighs with their wings in colder conditions.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Ostriches should be provided with shelter in cold temperatures and wet weather.

Providing natural shade in their enclosures via trees or bushes will allow the birds to maintain a cooler temperature when it gets hot. Always ensure there are enough shade and shelter options and space for all individual birds housed together.





Ostriches Enjoy...

Having lots of space to run, dust bath and socialise with others. They spend most of their day foraging and resting.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviours, so they are happy and healthy throughout their lives.

