Donated by Allen & Myra Charleston

EMU CHICK HEALTH CONCERNS

Most emu chick health issues can be prevented through healthy prenatal nutrition or chick nutrition. Some things we have been asked about:

Before the Hatch:

Assisted Hatch - We don't normally assist emu chicks when they are hatching because the action of their struggling out of the shell helps to pull the yolk sac up into their body. If an emu chick is positioned correctly, their head and beak will be towards the air space in the egg. If their tail is towards the air space, they are malpositioned, probably cannot 'sound' or break into the air sac and will suffocate before being able to hatch. Whistling or chirping is a sign that an egg has sounded, but is no guarantee that the chick is not malpositioned.

If you suspect you have a malpositioned chick (the egg is overdue for hatching) you can open the cool end of the egg (air sac), wet a finger and feel for the beak through the membrane. Don't break the membrane. If you cannot find the beak, you can make a guess as to where you think it is and carefully open another hole elsewhere. The membrane will often be brown where the beak is trying to break through. Make an air hole here so the chick can breathe. Let the chick hatch on its own if at all possible. Sometimes the head is between the legs and it needs more help, but this is a judgment call you will have to make. After you have made a breathing hole for the malpositioned emu chick, give it a couple of days to hatch on its own before giving further assistance.

Unabsorbed Yolk Sac - If a chick is hatched (whether with your help or not) and the yolk sac has not been drawn up into its body, it is going to die. I have been told that if only a small amount of the sac is out, you can lubricate the area with a disinfectant ointment and push it into the naval. Then wrap the chick's body in plastic wrap and a bandage for a couple of days to allow it time to absorb the sac. I do not know if this will work or not and offer it here only as hearsay.

After the hatch

Star Gazers, Head Retraction/Weaving - the head retracts back until the beak is pointed upwards or over its back. There may be head tremors. Sometimes the chick chirps excessively. This theory is that high weight loss dehydrated the egg and that nutrients have not been absorbed properly. Prevention: Give electrolytes in the water, expose to sunlight. Treatment is Vitamin B complex shots.

Leg Problems

Splayed Legs - the affected leg twists out away from the body, rotating to point the toes to a right angle from the body. Splayed legs appear to be caused by two different things, injury and nutritional deficiencies.

- Injury: crowded pens, slick floor surfaces, getting caught behind watering dishes or feeders. Prevention - lots of room, putting a towel down on the hatcher floor, straw or another material on the chick floors, eliminating 'danger areas' in the pens.
- Nutritional deficiencies in the breeder hen is passed on to the chick. Prevention - feed a balanced breeder ration prior to and during breeding/laying season.
- Nutritional deficiencies caused by rapid or excessive weight loss in eggs during incubation. If an egg is losing weight too fast, put a piece of paper tape over a section and monitor it.
- Nutritional deficiencies in chicks - chicks need a balanced ration in order to develop strong tendons, bones and muscles.

I get several phone calls or emails from site visitors asking if the chick can't be kept alive. In the wild this chick would not be able to keep up and would die early. Even with human intervention it will eventually get so bad that the chick cannot get around. You have a choice. You can prolong it's life by:

- Hand feeding it and watering it several times a day.
- Clean up after it frequently so it is not laying in its own manure.
- Moved into sunshine during nice weather and under shelter in bad weather.
- Protect from the other emu so they don't peck his eyes out or kill him.
- Dig a larger hole to bury the body when it dies anyway.

Or you can put it down immediately.

Deformed Legs This includes bowed or twisted bones, one leg shorter than the other. etc. This is caused by a deficiency in the B vitamins and if caught early can be treated by changing to a better diet. Some deformity may remain, but the chick can at least be raised to processing weight.

CLAW REMOVAL

This is not something that we have personal experience with, but we will share what we have been told by farmers that do remove them.

This is done when the chick is at least 12 hours old, usually as it is on its way from the hatcher to the brooder box, however, other farmers return the chick to the hatcher for another 12 hours.

Using a cauterizing chicken debeaker, remove the two outside claws by cutting the claws off at the first knuckle just behind the claw.

Some farmers dip the toes in a powder blood stop after cauterization. Others use a 7 percent iodine for seven consecutive days to prevent infection. The chicks must be watched closely and good biosecurity used to prevent infection.

On the pro side of this practice, the birds are less likely to damage each other or you when you are handling them. The hides will not be damaged. There is no harm to the health, growth or breeding of these birds.

On the con side, well, we don't like declawing cats either. That's just us.