



## Sex and the Emu



**Emus are short day breeders.** In the past it has been speculated that the cold weather brings on breeding season, but scientific research in Australia reveals it is the length of the day that is important. The photoperiod (amount of daylight) apparently affects the production of the reproductive hormones. As the days shorten, there are increases in the plasma concentrations of luteinizing hormone and testosterone in the male emu. After roughly 115 days of 10-hour (or less) days, there is an increase in prolactin concentrations. As the prolactin concentrations continue to increase, the Luteinizing and testosterone will decrease until eventually the male stops breeding. During this period of time the female's hormones begin to stimulate egg production and make her receptive to the male's advances.

In Australia, this means that breeding season runs from April through September. For us in Tennessee, this means that breeding season begins towards the end of October and ends towards the end of March. Keep in mind that not every emu believes in scientific research and they will breed during the summer months just for fun.

When breeding season begins you may see such activity as:

- the **male rubbing against the fence** to the extent that he has removed feathers
- **feathers scattered** about the pen
- **tail feathers on female broken off or ruffled**
- new **black feather growth on neck of female** where male has been pecking her during intercourse

- the **male walking very close to the female** as she struts or both birds strutting together
- the **female strutting for the male** and then pecking him on the neck
- the **male pecking the female on or near the tail** to encourage her to sit down
- the **male leaning on the female as he walks with her** in an effort to get her to sit down
- **increased grunting from the male and booming from the female**



## Actual Breeding

Breeding will begin roughly 50 to 54 days before you see the first eggs. The eggs the male fertilizes during each sexual act don't show up for 50 to 54 days.



When breeding both birds will drop to their knees. The female will lean forward on her chest with her posterior in the air, flex the tail feathers and expose the vent. If there has been some earlier fighting between the pair the male may approach from several feet away on his knees to avoid alarming her. A well matched pair will see the male walking up and dropping to his knees right behind her. The male will walk on his knees to get into position and mount her. As he ejaculates, he will peck her on the neck. In some females you will see a patch of dark, new feathers by the end of breeding season.

## Trios

There is always an alpha female that gets bred first. The male will breed her for a couple of weeks before breeding the second female. A problem arises if the beta comes into season prior to the alpha - he won't touch her so the first few eggs are infertile from that hen.

If you are hatching with an incubator, it is a waste of electricity to incubate infertile eggs, so when running trios you have to consider the fertility rates. If you have put two hens in there that are producing large numbers of eggs, is he going to be able to fertilize all of them? If he has in the past successfully fertilized at least 95% of the eggs in a 50 plus high layer, you can try it and see. Some people put a high fertility male in with two "lower" layers. However, keep in mind that a hen laying 20 eggs is eating just as much as one eating 40.

## Group Pens

When there are several males in a pen, all the females are going to be bred. The alpha female may not like it and she may try to fight or chase the other females, but breeding will take place. If you

go out to the pens after dark, you may even see the males lined up behind the female being bred. She will often submit to several males in a row before getting up and walking away.