



Birds That Fight

Emus are normally not aggressive to humans, but they do establish a pecking order when there are two birds or more in a pen. On these pages we will try to cover aggressive birds and what to do with them.

Difficult To Handle Birds: Normally if a bird "rears up" and becomes taller than you are, it is trying to establish dominance. Simply raise your fist high above your head and become taller than the bird. This is normal behavior and should not be a worry. Keep in mind that each bird has its own temperament and can pass this on to its offspring. It is a rare emu that allows you to move it from pen to pen or give shots without a struggle. However, if you have a bird that hisses or kicks at you simply because you entered the pen, then perhaps it needs to be culled from the herd.

Chicks: I have never seen a chick under the age of 3 months fight. I have seen larger chicks peck smaller chicks and this seems to be the way they establish who is the boss.

Grow Out Pens: If you are raising chicks, the pecking order will be established early and by the time the birds are old enough to do any damage to each other they are getting along fine. However, if you move two groups together at 3 months, there is some readjustment. For this reason, some emu farmers now remove the outside claws on each foot at hatch. This prevents injuries later on.

You should never put two vastly different age groups together. I once foolishly put together a group of coming two's with some yearlings. The coming two's alpha female killed the yearling alpha female (her sister by the way) within 24 hours.

Yearlings & Up: When emus reach their "teens" and the hormones come into play you will see a lot of sparing, running and mock fights. You will be able to tell if it is serious. Usually the birds will rear up as high as they can to establish dominance. At this point one will usually break and run away, being chased a short distance by the dominant bird. If you have provided cover - trees, round hay bales, etc. and the pen is large enough - the chase will end when the dominant bird loses sight of the loser. However, if the dominant bird is really angry (or really in need of culling from the herd) the chase may last longer and result in injury to the loser. If you have a emu that you can handle, but it seems overly aggressive with the other birds, try to ascertain why. Does it object to all the birds or only other members of its own sex?

Breeders and Trios: You can tell whether the fight is "I'm top dog and you better accept it" or "I'm going to kill you, you can run but you can't hide". Most males don't mind one way or the other, but some females will not accept another female at all. Be prepared to intervene and remove the one getting the heck beaten out of her quickly if that is the case.

There will always be an alpha female in the pen. If you are going to run trios and think you know which one will be the alpha, put the beta in the pen first, add the alpha a day or two later. The alpha will not know how long the beta has been there, only that she is coming into an established territory. Read more about this on the [Sex and the Emu](#) page (see below).

During breeding season you may be shocked to see your normally gentle male trying to kick the female into submission. He wants her to "assume the position" and breed - and naturally she really trusts him after being kicked! Or perhaps you have a female that is in with a male that is too young for her - she is ready to breed and frustrated because he is not. She may become abusive.

One method for dealing with an abusive partner is to attach a dog's collar with an attached chain to one leg. The emu will try to kick but be distracted by the chain. I have to say though that we watched one abused male not only help his mate to remove the dog collar, he actually buried it and the chain!