



## Feed Requirements for Emu

Feed your emus correctly and they will reach their genetic potential. Don't feed them correctly and they won't. Simple as that.

I know that it is difficult to get emu feed in many areas of the country. Sometimes you are lucky if you can just get a general ratite feed. These are usually created more for ostrich or rhea and have 5% more fiber than an emu really needs.

A lot of farmers mix their own feed, and this is fine if they know what they are doing. Click here to read a study regarding [selenium toxicity](#).

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### **Apparent selenium toxicity in emus (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*).**

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*A commercial emu breeder experienced high embryonic mortality during the 1992-93 breeding season, apparently associated with high levels of selenium. The feed was a mixture of catfish food supplemented with a vitamin E and selenium premix. The mixture contained an average of 1.4 ppm selenium. Selenium analysis was conducted on eggs from several hens laid during the period of vitamin and selenium supplementation and after the supplementation was withdrawn. Initial egg selenium levels ranged from 1.2 to 7.1 ppm, with a mean value of 4.2 +/- 0.7 ppm (n = 9). Eggs collected over a 2-month period post-withdrawal contained 2.1 +/- 0.2 ppm selenium (n = 6). Eggs sampled between 2 and 3 months post-withdrawal contained 1.1 +/- 0.1 ppm selenium (n = 4). Egg selenium levels decreased significantly over the 3-month period (P < 0.05) for each individual sample.*

**Feed Conversion Ratio:** this refers to feed efficiency during the growth stage, in other words, how many pounds of feed does it take to make one pound of weight gain. It should be noted that emus experience "growth spurts" which will affect the conversion rate. By one year of age, the ratio of 6:1 is average, higher than that indicates a problem. Please keep in mind that there are growth spurts between 2 to 7 months which will give much higher FCR's (4:1, 3:1 or even 2:1)

Adult emus on a good, balanced ration will eat around 1 1/2 pounds of feed per day, averaged out over the year. Growing chicks and coming 2's may consume 2 pounds per day, averaged out over a year.

**Chicks: 0 to 8 weeks** - Chicks need a 20% protein emu chick starter. Do not feed a higher protein than this or you will have a problem with splayed legs! Feed free choice and several times per day. Chicks this age should not need more than 2 pounds per day of a good nutritionally balanced feed.

**Chicks: 2 Months to 14 Months** - At around 8 weeks the chicks should be moved to a 20% Emu Grower and fed free choice. The birds will be going through growth spurts and the amount they eat will vary but average out to 2 pounds and under per day, provided you have a good nutritionally balanced feed. Some emu breeders move the birds to an 18% Grower feed at around 6 months. At fourteen months the birds that have not been pulled for the breeding program are sent to slaughter.

**Yearlings for the Breeding program: 12 months to 24 months** - Emu that are pulled from the grow out pens and slated for use in a breeding program should be moved to a 16% or 18% emu maintenance feed and fed free choice.

**Breeders: 24 months and up** - During the "off-season" we feed the breeders the same 16% emu maintenance feed we give the yearlings mentioned above. At the end of breeding season the emus will start to eat voraciously for about a month to 45 days. When breeding season ends varies from one hen to the next, so you may have some still eating breeder feed while the next pen over is on maintenance.

Prior to egg production the breeders are moved to a 21% Emu Breeder ration. We try to start the higher protein feed at least one month before breeding season starts, which is nearly two months before egg production starts. For us in Tennessee, we start feeding breeder feed no later than the first of October. During breeding season, the amount of feed consumed drops sharply - from 2 pounds per day to 1 pound.

## **Feeding Practices**

What I am going to say here does not agree with what many feed experts say. We are told to feed a set amount each day, twice a day and to provide clean fresh water daily. The idea behind this is to be able to measure the amount of feed taken in daily, and to allow the birds to clean up the feed so none of it gets stale.

It has been my experience that if you feed a set amount twice a day this is what happens:

In a Breeder pen the alpha will eat first and block off the other emu with its body. When it is finished, the second bird will eat whatever is left - or if there is a trio in the pen, the last bird to eat may get very little of the ration. Because it has gorged itself so quickly, the alpha emu will not utilize the feed as effectively as the other two do and this will show in the manure being thick instead of liquid.

In a group pen, no matter what the age of the birds, there will be a feeding frenzy and again, the birds gorging themselves will pass much of the feed on through their manure.

For these reasons we feed free choice. We do not pour the feed in a trough, we use top load feeders which allow the new feed to drop down as old feed is consumed. During the off season we load the breeder's feeders twice a week. During breeding season, we load them once a week. In grow out pens we load the feeders every two weeks. There is no rush to eat, no wasted feed and they actually eat less. We keep up with the amount of feed eaten weekly, not daily and that reduces our paperwork as well as time spent loading feeders.