

# Outstanding Ostriches

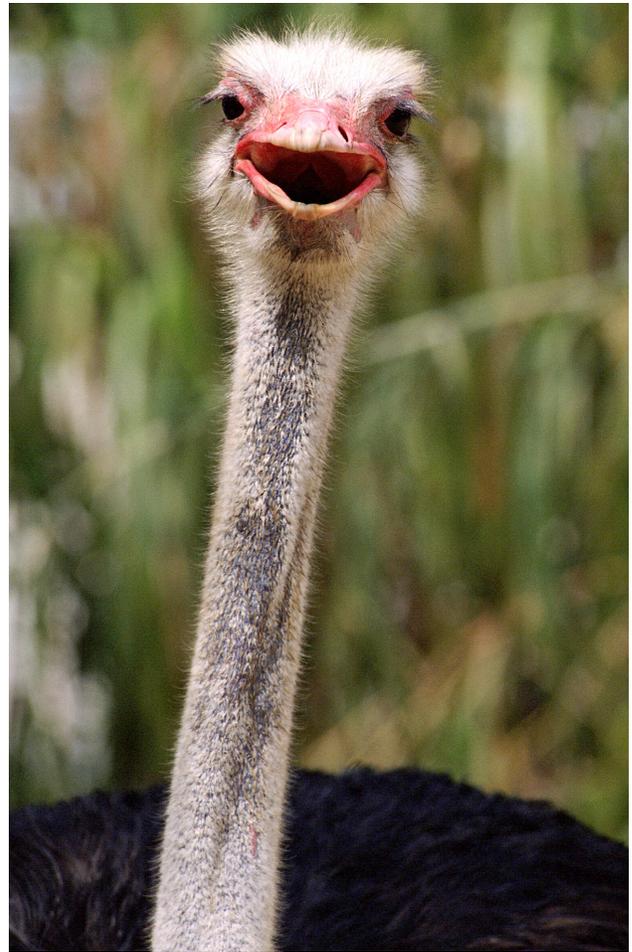
Have you ever wondered why ostriches bury their heads in the ground? Or why they cannot fly? From their enormous size and lightning speed to their unusual behavior, ostriches are fascinating birds!

## Ostriches Hold World Records

The ostrich holds many world records. Standing up to 10 feet tall and weighing more than 300 pounds, the ostrich is the world's largest bird. The ostrich is also the fastest running bird. It can reach a top speed of 50 miles per hour. The ostrich's long muscular legs help it run quickly. The ostrich can claim a third record: it has the biggest eyeballs of any bird. Ostrich eyeballs are about 2 inches wide and the size of a billiard ball. Ostriches also lay the largest eggs of all birds. An ostrich egg weighs more than 3 pounds and measures 7 inches long by 4.5 inches across.

## Ostriches Have Super Survival Skills

Ostriches are built for a harsh **habitat**, or home. Native to Africa, they live in deserts and **savannahs**, dry grassland areas with few trees. Although ostriches will drink water when it is available, they can also survive without water. They can get the moisture they need from their



food, grass, berries, seeds, insects, and small reptiles. Ostriches have very long intestines that help them absorb and **digest**, or break down, tough plants. Ostriches also eat sand and small stones to help break down the food in their **gizzards**, which are the pouches in their stomachs that grind food.

Ostriches have several scary **predators**—cheetahs, lions, leopards, wild dogs, and spotted hyenas. But they also have good defenses! When an ostrich is in danger, it will sometimes lie flat on the ground with its neck stretched out to hide. Ostriches also sleep in this way. From far away, it might look like its head is buried in the sand, but that is just a myth.

An ostrich also protects itself with its amazing speed. Its powerful legs help it outrun predators. When an ostrich is cornered, it can also fight back. Ostriches defend themselves by kicking with their strong legs. Ostriches have one powerful kick! Ostriches have only two toes, but the bigger one, which is about 7 inches long, has a sharp, slicing claw. The ostrich claw can slice and kill a lion!

### Are Ostriches Mean?

Some people think that ostriches have nasty tempers. It is true that they can be aggressive and try to pick a fight. They can also be territorial and try to defend their home. They may stomp their feet, flare their wings, hiss and roar loudly, or

charge. Usually, an ostrich will warn you before attacking, but as with any other large, fast animal, it is wise to keep your distance and to have an escape plan when you enter “ostrich territory.”

#### Fun Facts:

- Although ostriches are birds, they cannot fly! Their wings are not strong enough or big enough to support their heavy bodies.
- You could fit 4,700 hummingbird eggs or 24 hen eggs in a single ostrich egg!
- Ostrich intestines are 46 feet—twice the length of those of a human!

