



All About EMUS

Flightless birds offer challenges and opportunities, grower says

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

KALISPELL, Mont. — Emus are curious birds, longtime rancher Don Collins mused as he entered a pen full of yearlings.

About 20 of the large, flightless birds immediately flocked around him.

That curiosity makes working with them

tricky, Collins said. A farmer might feel a pinch from a beak or get a tool snatched out of his hand.

“Anything that’s different, they will peck at,” he said. “Especially shiny stuff.”

It’s a quiet Tuesday morning on Collins’ Kalispell, Mont., ranch, except for the drum beat vocalizations of the emu hens and the occasional grunts of the males.

Collins, 64, good-naturedly chats about emus. He knows these birds — he’s run one of the nation’s largest emu ranches since 1992, raising 600 emus at a time on his 40 acres.

Some people incorrectly confuse emus with ostriches, which are territorial and ornery. “If these were ostriches, I’d be dead,” he said as he emerged from a pen.

Emus don’t graze and can’t be turned out to forage. They must remain penned and require high-protein pelleted grains.

On the rare occasion that an emu slips out of a pen, it won’t run.

“They are a very flock-oriented creature,” Collins said. “If one gets out by itself, it’s back over there, (by) the fence, wanting to be with the other ones.”

Emus were once supposed to be the “next big thing” for American ranchers. Collins got in the business back then, and never got out. He’s been raising them

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Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
A 2-week-old emu chick in its pen.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Curious emus cluster around rancher Don Collins June 22 at his Montana Emu Ranch in Kalispell, Mont.

EMUS AT A GLANCE

Native to Australia

• Adult size is 5 to 6 feet tall and 125 to 150 pounds

• Maximum running speed is 31 mph

• Live for about 30 years, may produce eggs for more than 16 years

• Female is dominant member of the pair

• Male sits on the nest

• Products include leather, meat and oil

Information: Texas A&M University system

Getty Images

Severe drought drives cattle ranchers to take painful measures

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

As drought intensifies across the West, cattle ranchers are making difficult decisions.

Amid water and forage shortages, mounting hay prices and market fluctuations, many ranchers are selling cattle so they’ll have fewer mouths to feed. Some are culling cows, selling calves early and reducing breeding stock numbers. Others are selling entire herds.

“This is probably the most serious drought California has seen in my existence,” said Steve Faria, corporate broker at Turlock Livestock Auction Yard in California’s Central Valley. “I’ve been marketing cattle going on 43 years, and I haven’t seen



Courtesy of K’Lynne Lane/Oregon Cattlemen’s Association

Tanner McIntosh, a rancher from Gilliam County, Ore., herds a group of cattle.

the issues that we’re seeing today.”

Many ranchers say they’re worried about drinking water supplies.

Wells, ponds, streams and lakes are drying up. Some ranchers are having water trucked in — a huge expense.

DROUGHT RESOURCES

Check out this list of drought resources compiled by Oregon Cattlemen’s Association: <https://orcattle.com/resource/drought-resources/>

Paul Lewis, who runs cattle on leased land in Klamath County, Ore., said he’s concerned he’ll no longer have water from nearby Gerber Reservoir by the start of August.

“Everybody’s knuckled down, saving water,” he said.

Cyndie Siemsen, another Klamath Basin rancher, said she’s worried about her aquifer.

“If the well goes low, we’re going to have to start hauling water,” she said.

Ranchers across Oregon and California say forage is parched and limited. Some are driving out of state in search of pasture. Others are rotating pastures more often.

“It’s the worst I’ve ever seen it,” said John Shine, a rancher in Lake County, Ore.

Shine charges other ranchers a fee to graze their cattle on his summer pasture, but because grass is limited, this year, he’s stocking 30% to 40% fewer animals.

Tom Sharp, president of Oregon Cattlemen’s Association and a

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Capital Press File

Grasshopper activity is high in parts of the Oregon.

Grasshopper, cricket activity on rise

By **MIA RYDER-MARKS**
Capital Press

Along with a punishing heat wave, active wildfire season and a persistent drought drying up crops across the West, farmers also have to deal with growing numbers of grasshoppers and Mormon crickets.

The USDA’s “2021 Rangeland Grasshopper Hazard” map shows that parts of Eastern Oregon and Southern Idaho have high numbers of the insects. The map shows part of Ore-

gon has densities of at least 15 insects per square yard. Eight grasshoppers per square yard are considered enough to cause economic damage on pasture and cropland, according to Helmuth Rogg, director of Plant Protection & Conservation Programs for the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

In 2020, Oregon had over 1 million acres of grasshopper infestations.

“The biggest biomass consumer in this country is not cattle, it is not bison, it is not whatever else — it’s grasshoppers,” Rogg said.

Agricultural damage from grasshoppers can be catastrophic. Grasshoppers can eat 30 to 100 milligrams of dry plant material each day, and six to seven grasshoppers per square yard will eat as much as one cow.

According to the USDA, the 17 western states impacted annually by the insects have an average of \$400 million in forage losses and 20% cropland losses.

This spring, officials worked with

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