The origin of ostrich farming

Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*) belongs to a flightless bird family (Ratite), the birds belonging to this family are the largest ones compared to all the other bird species.

**Ostrich farming originated in the 1860s in South Africa** (Hastings, n.d). However, there is contradicting information about their origin as palaeontologists displayed evidences that ostrich farming has its origin in Asian steppes in the Eocene Epoch about 40 to 50 million years ago. In the 18th century, ostriches were on the verge of extinction because their precious feathers were highly demanded.

However, in 19th we witnessed an increase in the number of ostriches because at that period the ostrich’s breeding became very popular due to the good profit margin arising from the sale of their feathers.

Characteristics of the species

Ostriches are game animals, they are omnivores and their diet is based on shrubs, succulent plants, seeds and insects. They can live up to 30-70 years. Males and females can be distinguished by the color of their feathers: males have black plumage with some white shades in the final part, while the females have shades of brown and grey. Ostriches start mating at 2-3 years of age and start to lay eggs between April and August.
Five types of subspecies of ostriches are known

However, the Arabian ostrich became extinct and nowadays only 4 subspecies of ostriches are still existing.

Characteristics that makes ostrich the best bird to farm:

- Highly adaptable

Ostrich can survive under harsh conditions and they hardly need to be in the shade. In addition, their feathers act as a good insulator minimizing the amount of heat coming from direct sun rays (Shanawany, n.d). They can survive without drinking a lot of water being able to maintain their normal body temperature also without a large amount of water intake. The ostriches can either use their wings to dispose of heat during hotter seasons or to keep themselves warmer during winter seasons.

2. Good predators

Having ostriches acute hearing and eyesight from a distance of about 12 km away farmers do not need to take preventive measures to protect their animals (Shanawany, n.d; Abbas, 2018). They are able to protect themselves from predators by means of a power kick thanks their long legs with two toes on the feet, they are the fastest bird on ground at a speed of 70 km/h (43.5 mph), thanks to their wings that keep them balanced while running (Abbas, 2018) and they can also lay flat on the ground.
3. Ostrich products

- **Meat:** The meat is red with *lower fat* (3.0 g), *cholesterol* (83 mg) and *calories* (142 KCal). It is also a **good source of iron** (3.2 mg) and **protein** (26.9 %) (Iwuoha, 2013).
- **Eggs:** The eggs are about 6 inches long, 5 inches wide and weighs 2 kg. The ostriches can lay about 15-45 eggs per season. **The ostrich egg is rich in protein, 1 ostrich egg is equivalent to 25 chicken eggs.** Ostrich eggs are believed to protect houses from lighting and their shells can also be used as a water vessel, cups and vase. In addition, the eggshells are used in making necklace beads.
- **Feathers:** The feathers are extremely valuable and durable. Feathers should be harvested when the birds weigh 60 kg of more (Engelbrecht, 2014). The feathers are used to make dusters for cleaning, hat and home decorations.
- **Skin (leather):** Ostrich leather is of **high quality** being **thick, soft and durable.** It is used to makes *handbags, carpets, clothing, boots* etc.

**CONCLUSION**

Ostrich farming is much more profitable than raising other traditional farm animals. Ostriches are loving birds, they are quite **easy to raise** and **require little maintenance** from farmers.

One of the reasons why ostrich farming is a **lucrative business** is the number of valuables an ostrich has to offer; and very little ever goes to waste.

**References**
Ostrich farming: a high profitable business


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