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## Oklahoma Ostrich Farms Increasing



By Opal Hartsell Brown

Checking up on exotic animal farms in Oklahoma, there are fifty breeders of the world's largest birds — ostriches. Having three toes on each strong foot and two wings, they cannot fly, but are stately creatures, which emit a "mournful" cry. Ostriches are becoming a more common sight and a new source of income in Soonerland.

As a matter of fact, Oklahoma is headquarters for the National Ostrich Breeders Association. Leon Vandiver of Bethany is founder and president of the organization, which has 130 members in 18 states.

Vandiver has nine adult ostriches, four emues and one pair of rheas. The emues, similar and related to the ostriches, are Australian birds. The rheas, too, are similar to the ostrich, but smaller and are native to

South America. This is Vandiver's second year as a breeder. And why did he choose to raise these exotic birds?

A former mechanic, he said he "saw the potential of raising them for a diversified market." Besides that, he found ostriches easy to raise. He feeds each of them about three pounds of grain and alfalfa a day and gives them plenty of water. They add to their own diet stones and other hard compounds to help grind their food.

These birds grow from six to ten feet tall, run faster than a horse and live about seventy-five years. Vandiver understands they lay about thirty of those years. He has an incubator, but when the birds are allowed to sit, the male and female take turns at the nest. Incubation takes forty-two days.

In some countries, ostriches are used as draft animals to pull sulkys in races, but their uses in this country are primarily for show, such as in parks, zoos and circuses, and for their hides. Leather from these hides can be used to make the same things as leather from other creatures.

Records of ostriches reach back to antiquity. Although hunters have said their flesh is "palatable," it has never been popular as food. There is an account in Roman literature, however, where one character feasted on the brains of six hundred ostriches.

Plumes from their tails and wings were used for fans in royal courts of the East and later for decorating hats and robes. An ivory-handled fan of plumes was found in the tomb of Egypt's King Tut, and it is on display in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Plumes decorated hats and robes in this country into the 1940's. Maybe later.

According to Harper's Bible Dictionary, "In Christian symbolism, the ostrich egg motif, pendant from lamps for example, suggest that Christ is watchful over His church, like the ostrich over its egg."

Other places in the state, where ostrich breeders operate, are in the vicinities of Ardmore, Lawton, Chattanooga, Gotebo, Ryan, Rush Springs, Chickasha, Roosevelt, Duncan, Comanche, Sentinel, Marlow, Mt. View, Wayne, Mustang, Newalla, Noble, Moore, Tuttle.

Also Blanchard, Edmond, Owasso, Hinton, Jones, Sayre, Cheyenne, Blair, Elk City, Yukon, Wanette, Oklahoma City, Canute, Felt, Shawnee, Canton, Sweetwater, Skiatook, Boise City, Freedom, Rattan, Turpin, Tulsa, Inola, Ada, Checotah and elsewhere.

Besides exotic and unusual animal farms already mentioned, there are the alligator farm of C. C. Killian in Beckham county, the greyhound farm near Harmon and at least one farm of Angora goats. Fish farms, also, have come into prominence. ■

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