

# Transporting a Pair of Adult Ostrich over 1600 kilometres

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The Ostrich, *Struthio camelus*, is a large, flightless bird native to Africa. It is the only living species of its family, Struthionidae, and its genus, *Struthio*. Ostriches share the order Struthioniformes with Emu, kiwis, and other ratites. It is distinctive in its appearance, with a long neck and legs and the ability to run at maximum speeds of about 45mph (72km/h, the top land speed of any bird). The Ostrich is the largest living species of bird and lays the largest egg of any bird species.

Five subspecies are recognized namely:

**a) *Struthio camelus camelus*** in North Africa, sometimes called the North African Ostrich or Red-necked Ostrich. It is the most widespread subspecies, ranging from Ethiopia and Sudan in the east throughout the Sahel and the Sudan to Senegal and Mauritania in the west, and at least in earlier times north to Egypt and southern Morocco, respectively. It is the largest subspecies, at 2.74 m (9 ft) 154 kilograms (340 lb). The neck is red, the plumage of males is black and white, and the plumage of females is grey.

**b) *Struthio camelus australis*** in Southern Africa, called the Southern Ostrich. It is found south of the Zambezi and Cunene rivers. It was once farmed for its feathers in the Little Karoo area of Cape Province.

**c) *Struthio camelus massaicus*** in East Africa, sometimes called the Masai Ostrich. It has some small feathers on its head, and its neck and thighs are bright orange. During the mating season, the male's neck and thighs become brighter. Their range is essentially limited to southern Kenya and eastern Tanzania and Ethiopia and parts of Southern Somalia.

**d) *Struthio camelus syriacus*** in the Middle East, sometimes called the Arabian Ostrich or Middle Eastern Ostrich, was a subspecies formerly very common in the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, and Iraq; it became extinct around 1966.

**e) *Struthio camelus molybdophanes*** in southern Ethiopia, northeastern Kenya, and Somalia, is called the Somali Ostrich. The neck and thighs are grey-blue, and during the mating season, the male's neck and thighs become bright blue. The females are browner than those of other subspecies. It generally lives in pairs or alone, rather than in flocks. Its range overlaps with *S. c. massaicus* in northeastern Kenya. Ostrich is farmed around the world, particularly for its feathers, which are decorative and are also used for feather dusters. Its skin is used for leather and its meat which is marketed commercially.

In India the Tamilnadu University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (TANUVAS), Chennai had taken an initiative to introduce farming of Ostriches. As a result *Ostrich chicks* were imported by the university from Malaysia 10 years back and a farm was established in the outskirts of Chennai at Kattupakkam. However, due to change in policy of the University, it was decided to provide Ostriches to Indian Zoos from their farm for display purpose. The Tata Steel Zoological Park had approached the Vice Chancellors office and requested for providing a pair of adult Ostrich to the zoo. The request was quickly accepted and a pair of adult Ostrich was set aside for the Zoo in June, 2009. Tata Steel Zoological Park was the first zoo in the country to get these birds from TANUVAS.

Since there were no records of transportation of the adult birds over distances more than 1000km by road, it was a big challenge to us. According to the advice provided by the university officers and scientist and knowledge gathered by us from literature, the journey from Kattupakkam to Jamshedpur was embarked upon by a team comprising of Dr. Manik Palit, Veterinary Officer, Mr. Dilip Dey, Animal Keeper and Mr. R. Srinivasan, Field Assistant on 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2009. The details of preparation made and new experience gained are enunciated below.

Materials and methodology adopted: A Tata 408 truck was used for transportation of the Ostriches. The available floor space of the truck was 8ft X 6ft with height of 7ft. The truck was converted into a mobile pen by placing river sand (3" thickness) and paddy straw (2" inches). The side of the truck was padded by using paddy straw cushion to avoid injury during transit. To avoid heat stress the roof of the truck was partially covered with plastic sheets keeping 30% area open for proper ventilation.

The pre-segregated ostrich pair was captured manually one by one by holding their wings and neck was put in downward direction so that the bird could not kick the handlers or run away. The birds were thus made to walk to the truck and were loaded on it by using a wooden plank as ramp. The inclination of the ramp was about 30 degree. The birds were slowly released on to the truck bed and food and water was provided *adlib* using their old utensils. To acclimatize with their new environment the birds were left overnight in

\*See image on web version @ [www.zoosprint.org](http://www.zoosprint.org)

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**Photographs of the preparation made to transport the Ostriches**



**The truck being converted into a mobile pen for the animals**



**Ostrich being walked towards the truck**



**Ostriches loaded on the truck**



the truck itself. The birds were watched by the keepers for any weird reactions throughout night. On the next day (18.6.2009), the journey began at 3 pm. During transit a halt was provided every 3 to 4 hours for allowing rest, so that the ostriches could take their food and water with ease. Drinking-water was provided to them mixed with glucon-D, Electral powder and herbal anti-stress formula, RESTOBAL. Sprinkling of water was done on the birds at frequent intervals. On the second day it was observed that the birds had become nicely accustomed to journey. They were taking food and water normally and even allowing the keepers to move freely on to the truck bed. While on the journey, the female ostrich laid an egg, which was removed to avoid any attacks, which the birds generally show during brooding. During the process of transportation animals were also medically examined for fatigue etc. at the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park, Vishakapatnam. On the fourth day of journey the birds reached TSZP, Jamshedpur without any transit injury and heat shock. They were slowly released from the truck to a quarantine enclosure and kept under observation till 29.6.2009. Finally the ostriches were released to open enclosure on 30.6.2009 for the visitors to view the charismatic species.

#### **Our experience**

The experience gained through this long and arduous journey proved many a myth wrong, those being:

1. While transporting the ostriches by road, it is not all required to confine them in small transport crates. Instead they can easily be transported in well-padded, small, holding pens.
2. Ostriches can be transported over long distances without any problem.
3. Indian zoos that are in the process of acquiring ostrich from Kattupakkam or elsewhere can take a cue from our experience and plan transportation of adult ostriches and emus in this manner, thus reducing the journey stress on animals to minimum.

#### **Acknowledgement:**

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Our thanks are also due to the entire management of Tata Steel Zoological Society for providing the necessary encouragement in accomplishing this mission.

## **Announcement**

### **1st Southeast Asian Animal Enrichment and Training Workshop 2010, 04-07 October 2010, Singapore**



Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS) is pleased to announce the 1st Southeast Asian Animal Enrichment & Training Workshop. This unique four-day workshop will present an array of topics relating to animal behavioural management with particular emphasis on environmental enrichment, positive reinforcement training techniques and problem-solving processes. The workshop is open to zookeepers, aquarists, managers, supervisors, curators, and veterinarians from the Southeast Asian and Australasian region.

**We are pleased to inform that Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS) will subsidise 50% of the registration fee for participants who require sponsorship.** This is limited to 15 participants and will only be offered on a case by case basis after careful assessment by the organising committee.

Registration form can be found at [http://www.zoo.com.sg/images/innova\\_images/registration%20form%20final%20with%20questionnaire.pdf](http://www.zoo.com.sg/images/innova_images/registration%20form%20final%20with%20questionnaire.pdf)

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