

Podcast 146 – The Emu – Australia's Flightless Bird

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 146 – The Emu – Australia's Flightless Bird

<https://traffic.libsyn.com/secure/slowenglish/podcast146.mp3>

(This podcast is 9 minutes and 51 seconds long.)

Hi,

The government of Australia has a Coat of Arms, a national symbol of Australia. There are two animals which are part of that symbol. They are the kangaroo and the emu. Everyone is very familiar with the kangaroo and I have previously written a podcast about this unique Australian animal (see [Podcast 37](#)). The emu is less well known around the world but well known to all Australians. Like the kangaroo, it is found in the wild in large numbers across most of Australia. In this podcast, I would like to tell you a little about this interesting Australian flightless bird.



A full grown emu.

Image by [Petra](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The emu is the second tallest bird in the world, with the African ostrich being the tallest. The emu can grow up to 190cm tall, but has an average height of around 175cm. They have a long neck and long, powerful legs. It is easy to see why people would confuse them with the ostrich – they do look quite similar. Emus have wings but they are small and not meant for flying. Because of their long and powerful legs, the emu can run fast, up to 50 kph. The females are slightly bigger than the males and can weigh as much as 60kg. Mostly, they weigh within the range of 32kg to 37kg. Their feathers are a grayish brown and have a somewhat shaggy look. The skin on their neck is light blue in colour, which can be seen through their sparse feathers.

It is estimated there are approximately 700,000 emus on the Australian mainland, although there are no longer any in Tasmania. They prefer open plain country but are also found in forests and in the high country of the Australian and

Victorian Alps. They move around in search of food and have been known to walk and run up to 25 km a day. They are seldom found in populated areas, in contrast to kangaroos, which inhabit grasslands close to our cities. For example, on my walks near the edge of Melbourne, I regularly see many kangaroos, but have never seen an emu. I can remember seeing wild emus during a road trip our family made in our car through the country in New South Wales. It was quite interesting to see them grazing in farm paddocks as we drove past. I have never seen any in my many motorcycle trips through country Victoria, although there must be many there.

One of the most unusual aspects about emus is their breeding behaviour. Unexpectedly, the males take the major role in incubating the eggs and subsequently look after the young chicks. The eggs are very large and are coloured green.



Emu eggs.

Image by [Ursula Schneider](#) from [Pixabay](#)

They weigh around 550gm and are around 13cm long. The male

incubates the eggs for around 8 weeks and during this time, he does not leave the nest to eat, drink or defecate. Now that is what I call dedication. Over that period, the male will lose around one third of his body weight. Once the chicks have hatched, they will remain with the male for up to seven months while he teaches them how to find their food. The male will also protect the young emus while they are in his care. The young chicks initially have a soft coat of feathers with white and brown stripes, but this gradually changes after around 3 months to the typical grayish brown shaggy feathers of an adult.



An adult emu with chicks.

Image by [ejakob](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The emu is a recognizable symbol in Australian life, as it is shown on the 50-cent coin as part of the Australian Coat of Arms shown there. This coat of arms, with the emu, is also shown on all Australian government websites, always on the left-hand side at the top. So, although real emus are not

necessarily seen very often by the average Australian, the emu's image is more common than you might think in our everyday lives.

Many people have tried to farm emus and sell emu products over the years in Australia. It has never really been that successful, although there are still some emu farmers making a living. Some of the emu products tried include emu meat for human consumption, emu leather for shoes and other clothing items, emu eggs for decoration and for art work, and finally emu oil. Of these, only emu oil has really had any success. Emu oil is claimed to be a beneficial moisturizer and soother for your skin, a remedy for particular skin problems and an anti-inflammatory for joint conditions such as arthritis. It is also used as an additive for soaps, creams and hair shampoo.

The Post Office has also put the emu on several postage stamps over the years, emphasizing the uniqueness of this Australian animal. There have also been various companies which have used the emu name in their products for marketing purposes. One classic example is a beer from the state of Western Australia, where the Swan Brewery still makes a popular beer called Emu Bitter. It is not to my taste, but then I am not really a beer drinker. It still sells well all over Australia.

One of the most popular references to the emu is in a song by Australian singer John Williamson. In 1970 he wrote and recorded the tune Old Man Emu. It's hilarious, as it highlights the emu's most well-known characteristic – its ability to run fast. Check it out on YouTube. It's worth a listen. Click here [Old Man Emu](#)

If you have a question or comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back

to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 146 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

- Play additive = something which is added in
- Play anti-inflammatory = something which reduced swelling
- Play arthritis = a disease of the joints
- Play aspects = characteristics
- Play average height = (here) the height which most birds are
- Play beneficial = when something is good for you (it has a benefit)
- Play breeding behaviour = how animals do things when they are having babies
- Play characteristic = feature, something always seen on a thing, person, animal or plant
- Play claimed = when someone says something, but is not yet proven
- Play coat of arms = a drawing to represent a family, region or country
- Play common = is often seen
- Play confuse = (here) to think one thing is something else, when it's not
- Play consumption = when animals or human eat or use something

- Play decoration = to make something look nice or pretty
- Play dedication = when someone sticks to their task, without giving up
- Play defecate = to pass solid waste (i.e. to go to the toilet)
- Play emphasizing = to make something more obvious, clearer
- Play familiar = to know something or someone well
- Play feathers = the covering on birds
- Play females = the opposite of males (e.g. women)
- Play flightless = cannot fly
- Play gradually = slowly
- Play grazing = eating grass and plants
- Play hatched = when chicks break out of their eggs
- Play high country = land up in the mountains
- Play highlights = brings to your attention, points out something
- Play hilarious = very, very funny
- Play in contrast = when something is quite different from something else
- Play incubating = sitting on birds' eggs so they can hatch as chicks
- Play inhabit = to live in
- Play initially = at first
- Play joint = wrist, ankle or knee
- Play major = the most important
- Play male = the opposite of female (e.g. men)
- Play marketing purposes = to help sell something
- Play moisturizer = something which softens the skin
- Play neck = that part of the body which joins the shoulders to the head
- Play not to my taste = I don't like it
- Play open plain country = land without too many trees
- Play paddocks = fields, a space where farm animals are kept
- Play period = a length of time
- Play prefer = like
- Play previously = earlier
- Play products = things that are made to be sold

- Play recognizable = when many people can easily see something
- Play references = when a thing or person is talked about, or sung about, or written about
- Play remain = stay
- Play remedy = a cure (it makes a disease go away)
- Play seldom = not very often
- Play shaggy = to look a little messy, untidy
- Play shampoo = used to wash your hair
- Play slightly = a little bit
- Play soother = something which eases pain or discomfort
- Play sparse = very thin
- Play subsequently = as a result of
- Play symbol = a picture or object which makes you think of something else
- Play typical = something that is often seen
- Play unexpectedly = not what you would expect
- Play unique = there is nothing else like this
- Play uniqueness = the way that something is unique
- Play unusual = strange
- Play weigh = how heavy you are