

Kids Korner

Guess Who Is New On The Farm

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

Carol and Pete Heth raise 17 emu on their farm in Columbia. They have fallen in love with the long-legged birds that can grow six-feet tall. Although emu have wings, they cannot fly. They are part of the ratite family.

Carol said that the family began raising emu two years ago when they invested some money in the birds as a college fund for their children, Alysa, 18; Patrick, 16; and Katie, 13.

The family also raise sheep, chickens, and a refugee pot-bellied pig on the farm. The family considered raising buffalo, but that would have required getting rid of the sheep.

After talking with several folks who raise emu and visiting several farms, the Heths purchased their first emu pair, Amos and Ann.

"Emu have a great personality and are fun and interesting," Carol said. "They are just like any other animal. The more time you spend with them, the more responsive they become."

Amos is known to lay his head on Carol and fall asleep.

Generally, people purchase emu in pairs. A pair may have 20 to 40 chicks in one breeding season.

Females lay three eggs every three days. In the wild, after a female lays an egg, the male sits on the eggs and raises the chicks. Typically, a female will have three different mates each year.

The Heths choose a mate for each one, but sometimes the birds are very choosy and will reject a potential mate.

Because the eggs need to be kept at 97.5 degrees, the embryos will not survive in local temperatures, so breeders put the newly-laid eggs in incubators.

The eggs are sturdy and thick-shelled with a dark green color.

Eggs range in size, with females normally laying larger eggs each season. The size of the egg is not an indication of the size of the chick,

which is about the size of a light-bulb at birth.

It takes 52 days in the incubator before the chicks are ready to hatch. If the electric goes off only 30 minutes is allowed to elapse or the egg will not survive non-incubated temperatures. The Heths have an alarm that sounds when the electric goes off so that they can switch to a generator to keep the incubator running.

"Before the unhatched chick is born, the Heths whistle close to the shell and the chick will peep back.

"When the chicks hatch, it's hard to believe that such a large chick can fit inside the egg shell," Carol said.

The chicks are kept warm under a heat lamp and like to snuggle against a stuffed animal when it's time to sleep. An emu chick grows very fast. At three months old, it is about 3½ -feet tall.

After the brown and yellow chicks hatch, they soon act like spoiled kids. They follow family members and even the dog around.

"Gretchen, the dog, looks like the Pied Piper as she walks around the barnyard with all the chicks following in single file," Carol said.

Generally the birds seem to be curious about noises and will follow a person mowing the grass around the lawn, but some birds are fearful of new noises and people if the chicks haven't been pampered individually when growing up.

"Even after the chicks are grown, they think they are people instead of birds," Carol said. "If we sit on the patio they will come and sit with us."

Emus begin laying eggs between 18 months and three years. They will lay for 25 years and live to be about 30 years old.

A microchip is inserted in each chick at birth for security reasons. The chicks are fed specially-formulated pellets.

Emu are structured similar to turkey and chicken but taste more like beef. The meat is a very lean (97 percent fat free) red meat. It is



Carol Heth shows the prizes that will be given to winners in the emu coloring contest. First prize is a stuffed emu, second prize is a book, and third is a hollow emu egg.

higher in protein, vitamin C, and iron than beef, and lower in cholesterol than chicken.

The meat contains no chemical additives or preservatives. An opportunity to taste emu will be given at the State Farm Show.

Also, a taste comparison will be held at the Farm Show on Wednesday, when local celebrities will be served both beef and emu and asked to determine which is which.

Currently, emu meat that is sold

commercially is imported from Australia, but Texas will begin slaughtering it next year. The Pennsylvania Emu chapter is working to get USDA approval to slaughter emu meat in this state.

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EMU COLORING CONTEST RULES

Age groups: 1- 5 years old
6-12 years old

1st Prize: Cuddly Stuffed Emu Animal

2nd Prize: "Edward the Emu" story book

3rd Prize: Emu Eggshell

Rules:

- All entries must be submitted on original newspaper entry form.
- Please include name, age, address, and phone number.

- Paints, crayons, and colored markers may be used.

- All entries should be submitted at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Eastern Regional Emu Chapter Booth in the second floor of the Northeast Building (Family Center). Or, mail to College Fund Emu Farm, 4338 Fairview Rd., Columbia, PA 17512.

- All entries will be displayed at the E.R.E.C. Booth.

- Deadline for the entry to reach the booth is Wednesday, January 11, at 4 p.m.

- Judging will be done on Wednesday, January 11, at 4 p.m. Winners will be notified by January 15, 1995.

