Shur-Gain Ratite Feeding Program

Ostriches
Emus
Rheas
What is a Ratite?

Emus, ostriches and rheas are all members of the ratite family. These birds are tall, unable to fly and have a flat keel less breastbone.

The ostrich originates from the arid regions of the African continent and is the largest of these birds. It is the only ratite with two toes. An adult male can weigh as much as 180 kg, reach a height of 2.5 metres and live as long as 75 years. Ostriches breed and lay their eggs from late spring to early fall. After the first year of lay, females can produce from 30 to 120 eggs per year.

The emu is a native of Australia. It can grow to 1.5 metres in height, weigh up to 70 kg and live as long as 30 years. Emus have three toes. They breed and lay eggs during the winter months. Emus breed as a single pair and lay 20-40 green eggs, which weigh around 500 grams each. The eggs hatch after 48-52 days of incubation.

Rheas, native to South America, are the smallest of this group growing to a height of 1.5 metres and weighing up to 35 kg.

Ratites are of interest to a number of operations starting up in Ontario. These operations are concentrating on building up breeding stocks and are working to develop a market for the high quality meat, hides and feathers. In addition the oil can be used in the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industries.

Nutritional Requirements.

There is a temptation to feed these relatively expensive birds very concentrated, nutrient dense diets. Our advice: Don’t do it! Ratites are susceptible to developing severe leg deformities if fed incorrectly. Their legs are very long in relation to their body size. The incidence of leg deformities seems to be highest among rapidly growing young chick fed a high protein, high-energy diet. A slight reduction of early growth rate is recommended to control leg deformities. It is also very important to control body condition in growing birds to prevent overconditioning. Excess fat deposition at this time can reduce reproductive performance.

Shur-Gain has reviewed the most current research from around the world and had formulated a program, which is designed to specifically meet the needs of emus, ostriches and rheas.
Shur-Gain Ratite Starter Ration for Emus, Ostriches and Rheas:

This ration is designed to be fed as the sole feed from hatch to 8 weeks of age. Encourage chicks to consume feed early. Once the chick starts to eat the others will follow by imitation.

1. Do not place newly hatched chicks on litter as they will begin to consume the litter and may suffer from an intestinal blockage.
2. It is important to provide a good source of clean fresh water at all times.
3. Chicks require a warm draft-free environment with temperatures of 27 to 33 degrees Celsius for the first 10 days. The temperature can be reduced gradually to 20 degrees Celsius by 8 weeks of age.
4. Avoid feeding birds any leafy material such as lettuce or spinach. These feeds are low in nutrient density and some contain oxalic acid, which may inhibit calcium absorption and contribute to leg deformities. Our objective is to control growth rate to produce a bird with a sound skeletal structure.
5. At 4 weeks of age, some producers recommend that you begin restricting feed intake. Feed the birds twice daily an amount that they will clean up within 30 minutes of feeding.
6. Ensure they all chicks have access to ample exercise.
7. Do not provide a free choice calcium source at this time.

Shur-Gain Ratite Grower/Maintenance Ration for Emus, Ostriches and Rheas:

This ration is designed to be fed to growing birds from 8 weeks of age to maturity and to be used as a maintenance diet for adult non-breeding birds. Feed enough of this feed twice daily so that it is consumed within 20 minutes. Ensure that there is clean fresh water available at all times and that all growing birds have ample exercise.

Shur-Gain Ratite Breeder Ration for Emus, Ostriches and Rheas:

This ration is designed to be fed to breeding birds beginning one month prior to the breeding season. Feed enough of this feed twice daily so that it is all cleaned up within 30 minutes or feed to body condition. Ensure that clean fresh water is available at all times.

Shur-Gain ratite feeds are designed and manufactured to supply optimum levels of energy, essential amino acids, fibre, minerals and vitamins using quality ingredients such as chelated minerals and whey powders.
Continually monitor birds at all stages of their life. At the first signs of any
disease such as intestinal impaction, diarrhea or internal and external parasites
obtain professional assistance promptly. During periods of stress, add Citadel
Vitamin B Complex and Citadel Electrolytes to the drinking water.

**Shur-Gain Ratite Feed Specifications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ratite Starter Ration</th>
<th>Ratite Grower/Maintenance Ration</th>
<th>Ratite Breeder Ration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Crude Protein %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fat % (min.)</td>
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<td>Crude Fibre % (max.)</td>
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<td>Phosphorus %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vitamin E IU/kg</td>
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P.H. Peacock
Ontario Formulation Manager