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## Emus & Cassowaries

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In Australia, there are two birds that could compete for the title of the world's second-largest bird. Both birds stand around 6 feet tall. Both weigh about 130 pounds. Both birds - emus and cassowaries - are strong contenders to stand behind ostriches and be named the second largest bird on Earth. Just like ostriches, emus and cassowaries are also flightless. Their wings are too small to carry their heavy weights into the sky. But emus and cassowaries swim well, run fast (more than 30 miles per hour), and jump high (5 feet)!



Despite many similarities, there are several faint differences between emus and cassowaries. First is the cassowaries' gray helmets (called "casques"). These horn-like but soft and spongy crests are wedge-shaped and grow to be about 7 inches long. We cannot be sure what their casques are for. Some scientists think that casques protect cassowaries' heads from getting scratched and bumped when they run through dense tropical forests. Others disagree. They point out that if this were true, then cassowaries would hatch with casques on their heads. Instead, the birds grow them when they are close to the adulthood. Some scientists believe that cassowaries use their casques to communicate with other birds. Casques may also indicate that the birds are adults. They may also be used as weapons against their enemies.

Wattles mark the second major difference between emus and cassowaries. Emus have no wattles. Two out of three cassowary species do. The cassowary that lives in Australia has two wattles dangling from its throat. This makes it easy to tell if the bird that you see in Australia is an emu or a cassowary. The southern cassowary (or the double-wattled cassowary) lives in both Australia and New Guinea. The northern cassowary (or the single-wattled cassowary) and the dwarf cassowary live only in New Guinea.

Aside from casques and wattles, emus and cassowaries live in different environments and eat different foods. Emus live in Australian grasslands. They mainly feed on grasses, roots, seeds, fruits, or other vegetation. Because emus often intrude on farmlands to look for food, Australian farmers dislike them. They consider these feathery giants to be pests! Cassowaries prefer to live in rain forests and love to eat fruits that have fallen to the ground. Both emus and cassowaries also eat insects and other small animals.

The last difference between emus and cassowaries is their feet. Both emus and cassowaries have three sharp claws on each of their long and muscular feet. But cassowaries' inner claws are about 4 inches long, straight, and knife-like. When threatened, both emus and cassowaries will not hesitate to kick their enemies. Cassowaries' dagger-like inner claws can inflict serious wounds and can prove to be deadly!

So which bird wins the title of the world's second-largest bird? If you mean the second-heaviest bird, then the cassowary wins. If you mean the second-tallest bird, then the emu takes the prize.

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## Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which of the following is the world's largest bird?
- A. the ostrich
  - B. the cassowary
  - C. the emu
  - D. the rhea
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Which of the following two birds compete for the title of the world's second largest bird?
- A. the emu and the cassowary
  - B. the ostrich and the rhea
  - C. the cassowary and the rhea
  - D. the ostrich and the emu
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. All three species of the cassowary can be found in both Australia and New Guinea.
- A. true
  - B. false
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Which of the following about emus is true?
- A. Emus have casques on the top of their heads.
  - B. Emus have two wattles hanging at their throats.
  - C. Farmers in Australia consider emus to be pests.
  - D. Emus have a single wattle hanging at their throats.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which of the following about cassowaries is true?
- A. Cassowaries' inner toes have long, straight, knife-like claws.
  - B. The dwarf cassowary is also known as the single-wattled cassowary.
  - C. The northern cassowary is the only cassowary species that lives in Australia.
  - D. Cassowaries mainly feed on insects and small animals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Cassowaries can do all the following, except \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. run
  - B. swim
  - C. jump
  - D. fly
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What do scientists think the purposes of cassowaries' casques are? (Please choose two of the best answers.)
- A. to protect their heads
  - B. to indicate their adult age
  - C. to indicate male or female
  - D. to attack their prey
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Where can you find emus?
- A. grasslands in Australia
  - B. rain forests in Australia
  - C. deserts in Australia
  - D. mountains in Australia

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. What is emus' and cassowaries' self-defense strategy?
- A. They pretend to be dead.
  - B. They bark.
  - C. They kick.
  - D. They climb.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Which of the following about emus and cassowaries is **not** true?
- A. Both emus and cassowaries can jump more than 5 feet high.
  - B. Both emus and cassowaries can run at a speed of more than 30 miles per hour.
  - C. Both emus and cassowaries eat insects and small animals.
  - D. Both emus and cassowaries are considered to be pests.

