Feathered, But Not Ready for Takeoff

by Guy Bellernti

When you hear the word bird I bet one of the first things you think of is flying. But did you know there are almost 40 different birds that can't fly?

Most scientists believe flightless birds had ancestors that did fly, however, over time they developed alternatives to flying. Penguins, with wings more like flippers, are fast swimmers. And long-legged ostriches, are fast runners.

Some birds may have become flightless because they live on islands or other places where they have few predators. New Zealand, for example, has more flightless birds than any other country. Six are different kinds of penguins. New Zealand also is home to the small kiwi, two kinds of non-flying ducks and the heaviest parrot in the world, the endangered kakapo.

Near New Zealand is Australia, a country that has two other famous flightless birds. These are the large and fast running emus and cassowaries.

What is the largest living flightless bird? If you said ostrich, you're right. In fact, the ostrich is the largest living bird, flightless or not. Some even weigh over 300 pounds. But ostriches live in Africa, where lions, leopards, cheetahs and hyenas live, so how do they survive? Well, ostriches can run over 40 miles an hour, faster than any other bird and most other animals, as well. They also have long, sharp claws on feet that kick with tremendous strength.

A kiwi is flightless a bird from New Zealand. It is about the size of a chicken and has hair-like feathers covering its body.

They can't fly, but penguins are perhaps the best swimmers of the bird family. They use their wings as flippers to steer themselves underwater.

If you were to enter a foot race against an ostrich, you wouldn't win. An ostrich can sprint over 43 miles per hour!
Ostriches are ratites. Ratites are birds with a reduced keel or no keel at all on their breastbone. The keel part of the breastbone is what anchors the muscles needed for wing movement. No keel means no flying. Other large ratites include emus, cassowaries and the rheas of South America. All of them have sharp claws and run at fast speeds. And like many other flightless birds they have solid bones, instead of the lightweight hollow bones of flying birds.

Perhaps one of the more unusual-looking flightless birds was the Dodo bird. The dodo lived on the island of Mauritius, off the coast of Africa. It was discovered in the year 1602. Early settlers found that the Dodo was not afraid of humans, which made it easy to hunt. It wasn’t long before all the dodos on the island had been killed by hunters. Unfortunately, by the year 1680 this bird was gone from the world forever.

The largest and heaviest bird of all time is also extinct. The flightless elephant bird of Madagascar. It stood nearly 10 feet tall and weighed as much as three large ostriches. This bird has been extinct since the year 1700.

Even though they cannot fly, all flightless birds do have feathers. In fact, some have feathers all over their body. While other birds soar through the air, flightless birds thrive by walking, running, and even swimming.

About the Author

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1. Where do emus and cassowaries live?
   a. New Zealand
   b. Africa
   c. Austria
   d. Australia

2. How are an emu's bones different from a seagull's bones?

3. According to the article, what are two ways an ostrich can protect itself?

4. About how much would a full-grown elephant bird weigh?
   a. 100 pounds
   b. 300 pounds
   c. 900 pounds
   d. 1,200 pounds

5. How do penguins use their wings?

6. About how long ago did the dodo bird become extinct?
   a. 90 years ago
   b. 130 years ago
   c. 230 years ago
   d. 330 years ago
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Vocabulary Activity

Fill in the missing letters to create a word from the article. Then, write the full word on the line. Be sure you spell each word correctly.

1. ___ n ___ u ___
   clue: Antarctic bird

2. ___ d ___ e d
   clue: in danger of becoming extinct

3. ___ p ___ s
   clue: paddle-like limbs for swimming

4. ___ g ___ l ___
   clue: not able to fly

5. ___ s ___ e d
   clue: found for the first time

6. ___ i ___
   clue: help

7. ___ o ___ o___
   clue: unfilled, not solid inside
Silly Laws

Many states have some silly laws. Usually, these laws were made in the past for a good reason. Over time, the need for the laws changed. Now the laws seem silly. For example, don’t let a donkey sleep in your bathtub in Arizona. You might have to pay a fine. Don’t whistle underwater in Vermont. You might get put in jail!

Read the paragraph. Answer the questions. Then write a Cause and an Effect on each map.

1. What could happen if you whistle underwater in Vermont?

2. What might cause you to pay a fine in Arizona?

Don’t fish from a camel in Idaho! It’s against the law. Make a cause-and-effect map for this law.
Let's visit a village in Malaysia. Malaysia is a country in Asia. The village, called a kampong, is in a hot, wet jungle. The kampong has no electricity. There is no air conditioning in any of the buildings. People keep their homes cool and dry by building their houses on stilts. Air can blow around the houses.

Read the paragraph. Answer the questions. Then write a cause and effect on each map.

1. Why do people in the kampong need to cool their houses?
2. Why doesn't the kampong have air conditioning?
3. What is the effect of building houses on stilts?

Find Malaysia on a world map.
Marty Doyle collected thousands of books. One day, he ran out of room for them. Mr. Doyle took some of the books to the restaurant that he owned. He gave a free book to each diner. As a result, the restaurant soon became famous as a place to eat and read. Other people began giving their extra books to the restaurant, too.

Read the paragraph. Answer the questions.
1. What was Mr. Doyle’s problem? ________________________________________________
2. How did he solve it? __________________________________________________________
3. What two things happened to the restaurant after that? __________________________

Use your answers to complete the cause-and-effect map.

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Cause | First Effect | Other Effects
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Draw a picture showing what mealtime at Mr. Doyle’s restaurant might look like.
Fool the Birds

A woman in Virginia had a problem. Birds ate all the seeds she carefully planted. The woman put brown belts along the newly planted rows in her garden. Just as she had hoped, the birds thought the belts were snakes! As a result, the birds stayed out of the garden. The woman’s plants grew in peace.

Read the paragraph. Then complete the cause-and-effect map.

What conclusions can you make about birds and snakes?
Easy Street

What is each house worth? **Count** the money in each house on Easy Street. **Write** the amount on the line below it.

Example:

$2.40

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Compound Word Practice

A compound word is a word made up of two smaller words that are joined together.

The words **out** and **side** can be joined together to make the compound word **outside**.

Part 1: Circle the compound word in each sentence.

1. The girls were playing softball at Veteran’s Park.
2. Amelia bought some balloons for Samuel’s birthday.
3. Will somebody please help me clean the dining room?
4. Susan made some delicious cupcakes.
5. Dominic got a sunburn when he was swimming in the pool.

Part 2: Circle the compound word in each group.

6. building sunglasses computer jumped
7. happiness thunder snowflake puppy
8. peanut butter picture coloring
9. cooked monkey dragonfly plastic
10. bumble bee singer mailbox shirts

Part 3: Complete each sentence with a compound word.

11. When I wake up in the morning, I use a ________________ to clean my teeth.
12. For breakfast, I love to eat ________________ with maple syrup.