Facts About the Emu

by "HOSTILE"

There is only one specie of emu found in Australia. The reason why this big flightless bird has survived in large numbers so long is not due to its intelligence, for its small flat head contains but little brains in comparison to the size of the bird, but rather to its power of diges ing almost anything at all in the line of food. Excelled only by the ostrich, our emu is the second largest bird in the world. A kick from the hard horny foot of a full-grown emu would have the effect of rendering a smaller assailant hors-de-combat. The dingoes are extremely fond of emu flesh, but it is only when a pack is desparately in need of food that they will tackle a full-grown emu.

In point of speed and endurance an emu can almost outrun anything in the bush. On one occasion while driving a motor vehicle, I suddenly came upon some emus on a narrow scrub road thickly bordered with tall prickly pear. Being in a reckless mood I decided to give the birds a chase to test their speed. Unable to leave the road I sure made those fowls scratch gravel, and they gave a fine exhibition of running. With the car travelling at over 30 m.p.h. they were able to hold their own just in front for a considerable distance. The food of the emu consists of many kinds of berries and fruit that grow in the bush, also young herbage and tender shoots of grass.

The emu is the easiest of any wild game to shoot on account of its stupidity and inveterate curiosity. This big bird of ours has been accused ot spreading pricklypear, and naturally they should be regarded as the worst spreaders of the pest. Years back the emus were shot on sight on many Queensland runs and a bonus offered for their heads. However, this state of



Catholic children recently confirmed at Cobargo . . Front ... John Stewart, Yvonne Stewart, Stanley Andy. Back... Cecil Coombes, Shirley Andy, Norman Coombes, and Veronica Andy.

affairs did not become general, for many station owners recognised that the shooting of emus would not mean the control of the pear, as it is spread by many other agents, therefore the emus on such places were unmolested. A buggy seems in some way to often upset the balance or the emu's feeble brain. I have on several occasions been driving quietly along, when a bird would come dashing out of the scrub close past the horses, then turn and come tearing past on the other side. The emu would keep up this crazy performance till the horses were in a state of panic, and on one occasion it caused them to bolt.

The young emu, when newly hatched, is very pretty indeed, being of a light grey in colour and with black stripes running along their bodies. It is amazing how these young birds with their apparently conspicuous markings seem to instantly "melt" into herbage and grass and disappear as quickly as a fleeing snake. The nest of the emu is generally placed among thick herbage or small bushes, and consists of a large bed of leaves



and broken-up grass gathered from near at hand. The eggs are the most beautiful of any of our large birds

except, perhaps, those of the hawk family. The eggs are of a lustrous dark green and are much sought after for carving purposes, and great numbers were formerly sent to Sydney from South Queensland, and the Riverina districts of N.S.W., where the emus at that period were very plentiful.

It takes about eight weeks' incubating to hatch the eggs, and this duty I believe the male takes on himself. During the night the hen visits the nest to lay the eggs, but takes no part in the rearing of the brood. The emu lays her eggs but once a year and the breeding season is in the winter months. The average number of eggs to a nest would be from eight to ten, but occasionally sixteen to eighteen can be found. Emu meat is an excellent food, according to some bush dwellers. The eggs, too, when fresh make delicious omelettes, and are also unrivalled for cake making. Their weight is considerable, being from 18 to 22 ounces for the largest egg. A remarkable fact in connection with the emu is that it is a good swimmer, if the occasion arises, crossing a lagoon or river without trouble. However, I am of the opinion that unless severely pressed an emu never ventures into the water.