

BREEDING THE EXOTIC / *The emu, ostrich and rhea are being raised in Ontario for their feathers, meat and hides. Boosters of the species say they could turn out to be as marketable as the chicken*

Farmers find business is for the birds

BY NICHOLAS IONIDES
Special to The Globe and Mail
Toronto

NORTH Americans are familiar with the chicken and the turkey, but farmers throughout the continent have recently started breeding more exotic flightless birds like the emu, ostrich and rhea.

It's being done with such great success that farmers say these birds — in particular the emu — could be the next chicken.

And just about everything is being done with them.

The three members of the ratite species are being used for their feathers, hides and meat. An emu also generates an oil which is being used for medicinal and cosmetic purposes, according to the farmers.

They also predict in five to 10 years we'll all be eating emu burgers and emu steaks.

"The meat is a red meat that is low in cholesterol and fat, low in calories and is high in quality and texture," said Robert Hunter, a farmer who raises the birds. "It also tastes better than beef."

The emu weighs up to 70 kilograms and takes two years to mature. Its boosters say it is much gentler than the ostrich, which can be a fierce adversary with kicks and pecks with its strong legs and beak.

Mr. Hunter said emus will be sold only for breeding purposes for the next few years, but when the market for breeding stock is filled commercial production and sale will begin.

A breeding pair of ostriches sells for \$50,000, and a chick for about \$4,000. A breeding pair of emus sells for about \$25,000 and a chick for about \$2,500. A rhea chick, much smaller than the ostrich and the emu, sells for about \$250.

"It's obviously too expensive to use them for their meat right now, but give it some time and as more people get into the business the prices will go down," said Mr. Hunter.

And the market for the exotic birds is already growing at an incredible pace, he says. The industry is not even 10 years old in North America and about five years old in Canada, but Mr. Hunter says it has been doubling every year for the past five years.

He was at an annual convention of ratite farmers in New Orleans two weeks ago, and there were about 1,200 people there. The first convention, four years ago, had just 50 people, he says, and next year more than 2,500 are expected.

"It's really nice to be in an industry in North America which is good right now, and this is just booming,"

Mr. Hunter owns Robert Hunter Farms Ltd. near Brooklin, northeast of Toronto. He breeds all three of the exotic birds, and is considered Canada's largest ratite breeder.

"If you are fortunate enough to have land you can make money on these birds," he said.

Mr. Hunter started breeding the birds about five years ago, when he realized traditional farming just wasn't profitable enough.

He did some research and said he found the perfect product. "When



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we started we didn't know it would work," he said. "Now we know it does, and it's working very well."

So well, in fact, that he said his birds are producing more in Ontario than they are in their native environments. He said he gets calls every day from people who want to know more about the industry and his demand is so great that he has had to say no to potential buyers.

He's had the most success with emus, which are from Australia. They are cold-weather breeders and Canada's longer winter is perfect for them.

Mr. Hunter said emus are much easier to manage than his ostriches, because they are more gentle and are slightly smaller than their seven-foot-tall ostrich cousins.

"You could never do this to an ostrich," Mr. Hunter said while petting one of his more than 100 emus. "An ostrich could really hurt you."

He said an ostrich produces 30 per cent more eggs than an emu, but he prefers raising emus. A good emu can lay as many as 50 eggs in the winter breeding season.

They take 52 days to hatch, and

Mr. Hunter incubates them.

"I don't know of anyone else in North America who has emus incubating in July," he said.

He has also had success breeding ostriches and rheas.

The birds are reproducing so well that the Ministry of Natural Resources says it can't keep track of how many there are in Ontario. The latest numbers, which are already out of date, have about 2,000 of these ratites in Canada. The bulk are in Ontario — about 1,700.

Ray Stefanski, senior ecologist of agricultural ecosystems and senior biologist of captive wildlife for the Ontario ministry, said it is a new industry, and farmers have to respect the changes the birds are experiencing.

"Any time you bring a species of animals from their native habitat into a new ecosystem you have to watch out for them," he said.

"There's been a lot of mistakes made in the past with other species so we've got to be careful. There are potential risks, especially with diseases."

Mr. Hunter said he has seen no ab-

normal disease problems with his birds, but agrees that farmers have to be careful.

"You can make money very easily on these birds but you have to know what you are doing. You don't just order an ostrich today and have it laying \$4,000 chicks tomorrow. It takes work."

The ministry is developing legislation to make sure the birds are properly cared for, and Mr. Stefanski has been working with farmers of the birds for about six months.

Only British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have legislation to protect the testing and marketing of the birds. He said Ontario will have legislation by the end of the year, even though there have been no problems up to now.

But he said he does foresee a boom in the industry, and the ministry is preparing for it by enacting legislation now to protect the birds.

"This is not just a fad," said John Mitchell, the second-largest emu farmer in Ontario and president of a new association of ratite farmers. "We're building a whole new industry here. The potential is just unbelievable."



TORONTO LIVE

COMPILED BY DONALD GRANT

Sinai team performs 200th transplant A Mount Sinai Hospital orthopedic transplant team led by Dr. Allan Gross has performed its 200th fresh bone and cartilage transplant. The internationally renowned team replaced the lower outside portion of the right knee (lateral tibial plateau) of Linda Chorko of Stoney Creek, who fell on ice two years ago. The hospital's bone bank — the largest Canadian repository of donated bone, annually providing more than 200 shipments of bones to hospitals across North America — worked with the Multiple Organ Retrieval Exchange to find suitable donor tissue.

12 kilos of heroin seized Sheriff Mustapha, 32, of Toronto and Joyce Asante, 36, of Connecticut were charged yesterday in Bangkok with trafficking about 12 kilograms of heroin. The two, arrested on Thursday by Thai police, would face life imprisonment if convicted. Ken Kelly, an RCMP officer who has been working with Thai police for six weeks, said at a news conference in Bangkok that he believed the heroin was destined for Toronto.

Camaro eludes police Ontario police forces were on the lookout yesterday for an orange Camaro that eluded police on Thursday after a 42-kilometre chase in the Toronto region. The car — the same make as the one sought in the sex slaying of St. Catharines teen-ager Kristen French — disappeared in the east-end Toronto suburb of Scarborough after being pursued by the RCMP, Ontario Provincial Police and Metropolitan Toronto Police. An RCMP constable first chased the car, freshly painted orange and containing two men, at Pearson Airport and followed it on Highway 401 to Scarborough.

Safety act violated P. Construction Ltd. of Oshawa was fined \$100,000 yesterday in Kitchener for violating the Occupational Health and Safety Act in connection with an accident at the Toyota plant in Cambridge in April of 1991. Jose Martin, a 54-year-old welder with the firm, was critically injured when an improperly supported beam fell, throwing him about 3½ metres to the ground. He has not been able to return to work.

Two arrested in TTC robberies Two men have been arrested as investigations continue into robberies that have plagued the Toronto Transit Commission since March. There have been 16 robberies of fare collectors at subway stations, with several of the victims suffering injuries that required medical treatment. A closed-circuit television system is being installed in all collectors' booths.

Strike ends in 90 minutes Customers of the 113 A&P grocery stores in Ontario probably don't realize it, but there was a strike yesterday. It lasted 90 minutes, until a tentative settlement was reached between the chain and Local 175 of the United Food and Commercial International Union. The major issues were pensions, job security and wages. The 9,802 union members are to vote on the deal at ratification meetings on Monday.

Did you know? In Dr. William Kitchiner's *The Cook's Oracle*, the printer in 1818 left the letter "t" off harricot, so a recipe became Harrico mutton soup: "Divide a large neck of mutton into two parts, put in scrag end [the part toward the head] into stewpan, with four large turnips and two carrots, a large onion cut in two, and a gallon of water; let it stew gently over a very slow fire for two hours, till the mutton is done well enough, but not till it's boiled to rags; then bruise two of the turnips, and one of the carrots through a cullender and put them into the soup, to thicken it; cut the other part of the mutton into chops, fry them just to brown them, put into soup and stew them very gently till the chops are tender; cut the other turnips and carrots into shapes and put them into soup just before you take it up. Send it up in a soup-tureen or dish."



COURT DOCKET

Manslaughter conviction After deliberating for four days, an Ontario Court jury convicted Ronald Arthur Cooney of manslaughter in the slaying of a 51-year-old Toronto salesman in February of 1991. Tried on a charge of first-degree murder, Mr. Cooney, 29, denied any role in the killing of Norman John Cardwell, but admitted he had used the dead man's credit card. He said the card was given to him by a friend, Darryl Marsh, who had admitted to the killing and has since died. Mr. Cooney was arrested in March of 1991 after an acquaintance told police of a barroom conversation in Belleville in which Mr. Cooney told of shooting a man. He is to be sentenced on Sept. 25.

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Violence panel loses support

National women's groups say protest involves inadequate representation of visible minorities

BY LILA SARICK

The Globe and Mail

A decision by four national women's groups to withdraw their support of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women will diminish the panel's credibility, especially among visible-minority women, a spokeswoman for the National Action Committee on the Status of Women said yesterday.

"In terms of racial-minority women, they might come up with recommendations which might work for white middle-class women," said Sunera Thobani, co-chairwoman of the NAC's violence committee. "They're not going to be able to include the experiences of women in the front-line work against violence against women."

"We have to hold it in check and see what they come out with, but because minority women haven't been involved the likelihood of being reflected in the recommendations is very slight."

The panel, which was given a \$10-million budget by the federal government in August of 1991 and 15 months to prepare an action plan on violence against women, had been criticized for being unrepresentative. The nine-person panel includes one racial-minority member and an aboriginal member.

The panel travelled to 139 com-

munities last winter and met with about 4,000 people. Groups such as the NAC criticized the tour because women were given only a few minutes each to speak and interpreters were not available for women who spoke neither French nor English.

Earlier this summer, the panel offered groups representing visible-minority, immigrant, disabled and black women positions as special advisers. Panel co-chairwoman Pat Marshall has said that, with a final report due in December, it is too late to add new members to the panel.

Mary Collins, the federal minister for the status of women, was not available for comment yesterday, but press secretary Sandra Buckler said the minister continues to support the panel and hopes the groups will reconsider their action.

The special-adviser positions were rejected as being too limited and devalued as tokenism by the groups last week.

The Disabled Women's Network of Canada, the Congress of Black Women and the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres are joining the NAC in withdrawing support of the panel. The NAC is made up of 550 women's groups, representing close to three million women.

The National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority

Women also rejected the offer and is expected to join the protest when the group's president returns to Canada, Ms. Thobani said.

Despite the NAC's decision, the panel is "still committed to making sure this report is inclusive," Ms. Marshall said yesterday.

She criticized the NAC and other groups for missing "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to create a national plan to end violence against women.

"NAC and other groups have to be accountable to women in Canada," she said. "This is where we need women's unity working to change systems where women don't have power. I can understand it's an easy way for NAC to deal with issues it's been under fire for... to target something outside and build solidarity within, but it certainly has a cost."

Although the NAC originally supported the panel, in an unusual show of unity at the group's general meeting last month, delegates voted unanimously to withdraw their support if substantial changes weren't made to the panel.

"The women's groups were so effective, that's why we have this panel," Ms. Thobani said. "If this panel wants to hold the women's groups for ransom, it's not going to work."

Impaired driver who injured two gets 9-month sentence

The Globe and Mail

TORONTO — A Brampton man was sentenced to nine months in jail yesterday after pleading guilty to impaired driving causing bodily harm.

The sentence imposed on Howard

Biggs, 42, by Madam Justice Nola Garton was based on a joint submission by Crown and defence lawyers.

The court was told breath analysis showed Mr. Biggs, who had a previous conviction for impaired driving,

had more than twice the legal level of alcohol in his blood when his car swerved into oncoming traffic on Finch Avenue West near Islington Avenue on Dec. 22, 1989, colliding with two cars. The drivers of both were seriously injured.