

School Hatch Project - # 1

from 2006 Accredited Emu Producer (AEP) class by Marian LaPlant, Fredonia, WI

Getting started with your first school hatching project can be very easy. Your child, grandchild or neighbor's child can be a great place to start. Begin by talking to their teacher or school administrator. Working with a 6th or 7th grade science or biology teacher seems to produce excellent results. This age group is usually studying reproduction and emu egg hatching is an excellent tool for a teacher to use to emphasize this focus.

A local school is a great place to start your inquiries. An emu hatch project offers many opportunities to teach a variety of "old skills" to students in a new and interesting way. There is an advantage to having your first project close to your home. You will find yourself going to the school frequently to address temperature and humidity problems. Questions always arise about your eggs and there will be many other issues you will need to clarify.

You may also be asked to speak to the students and conduct a question & answer session. You will become much more involved as the project continues.

NOTE: Be sure to keep a record of all the days you are at the school and record your mileage for tax purposes.

Education of the class instructor is mandatory. You must make sure everyone involved understands this is a 52 day project. Be sure to tie your hatch date to National Emu Week (N.E.W.). You want a successful hatch which will be of interest to all teachers at the school along with other students and their parents. Often the instructor doing the hatch project will find not only his students but, teachers, parents and students from different classes in his room before the day begins. There will also be classroom visitors during breaks, lunch hour and at the end of each day. Excitement will continue to mount as the hatch day approaches!

Of course, you will be looking for great press releases. Usually schools have a newspaper that allows the community to know what monthly activities are being conducted at the school. Let the school administrator and teacher know that you would like to have the "media person" take as many pictures as possible and have them included in this project. And, be sure to take pictures of your own.

Establish a good working relationship with the "media person" and ask if they would be willing to e-mail pictures to you for your use. Inform school administrators that you will be releasing information for press releases on the project to the local papers, Farm Bureau newsletters and agricultural representatives and would appreciate their cooperation with reporters.

You will also need to establish a relationship with reporters from the various publications. Get their names, e-mail address and phone numbers. Let them know about the projected hatch date, any egg decorating contests you may be holding and of course National Emu Week information. Be sure to include your farm tour details. Permission slips need to be signed by parents allowing their student to be included in these published pictures.

Ask if there is a locking display case where information on the hatch project can be displayed. Items to include in the display are: emu leather, leg skin, emu feather, feather cat toy, feather duster, egg shell jewelry and decorated and plain eggs. If possible, display an ostrich egg and rhea egg along with the emu eggs and label what they are. Include any items that will generate interest.

The school's art department may want to participate in an egg decorating contest. This contest could include these categories: painted, carved and jeweled. If adults will be competing in the contest, a separate category for children under 18 could be included. Entries can be displayed at the school.

You will need protection for the egg contest entries, too. If a locking display case is not available, go to a resale shop, Goodwill, Salvation Army or check the classified ads and local rummage sales to look for a large aquarium tank. The eggs can be place on a display counter and then the overturned aquarium tank can be place over the eggs for protection. Artist's name, city and category should be included and winners indicated alongside each egg.

You will get press coverage when the contest starts and press coverage when you announce the winners of your contest so, be sure to notify the press. Find three people who will be willing to judge your entered eggs before you start the contest.

Thing You Will Need

A set up of a G.Q.F. **Incubator and Hatcher** works well. Bring these into the classroom about two days before the project is to start. This gives the teacher time to understand and practice controlling temperature, humidity and rotation of shelves. The teacher and school need to know that someone will have to monitor the eggs and incubators through weekends and holidays. You may be asked to sign a statement stating you will not hold school administration responsible for any damage done to any of your equipment.

Bring a **heavy-duty extension cord**. The incubator will need to be set up on a stable table in an area with good air flow land in a "quiet" section of the room. You will need to furnish **a scale for weighing the eggs**, unless the school has a metric scale that can handle grams for the emu eggs. Supply **latex gloves** for students. These can be purchased at the dollar store and supply **a hand sanitizer** to be used when gloves are removed. Furnish **a spray bottle containing a small amount of bleach**. (If an egg goes "bad" in the incubator, instructions are to remove the bad egg and spray all shelves in the incubator with bleach water. Put a small amount of bleach in the water that flows into the pans inside the incubator. If you wrap the bottom tray of the incubator and hatcher in aluminum foil, it will make for a speedy clean up if necessary.) Be sure your eggs are not hatching on a Friday, weekend or when students have Easter or Spring Vacation.

Utilize the "Emu Farmer's Handbook", Volume 1 & 2, written and illustrated by Maria Minnaar. These books are an excellent resource for both teachers and students. Making a donation of these books to the school library is a wonderful way of thanking them for their participation in

your project. Students usually are required to do additional research on their own and these two books are of great value to everyone. They are available from Emu Today & Tomorrow.

In the early years of the emu industry several VHS video tapes were made that show excellent hatching video. These include MacDonald Bird Farm, Raising Emus & Rheas and AlphabetZoup's Emu Industry Promotional Video DVDs. These videos can be made available to be used at the teacher's discretion. Most teachers choose to use portions of at least one of these videos. Some really good video can be found on YouTube if you take the time to search for them.

Students should weigh eggs daily until about one week before the hatch date. They should be required to enter date, egg weight, incubator temperature and humidity on charts. Realize that students are in the classroom at least seven hours a day. Some may have colds. Room temperatures and humidity will vary from evening, when no students are present, to daytime when twenty-five or more can be in the classroom. This will affect humidity and temperature much more than when hatching at the farm. You need to be more concerned about temperature than humidity. Tape information on incubator operation and the incubation of emu eggs to the outside of the incubator as a constant reference point for both instructor and students.

The students and instructor turned eggs manually twice a day, first in one direction and then back the next time making sure they were not always turned in the same direction. Shelves were rotated top to bottom, middle to top and bottom to middle. Students were instructed to check water in holding pail at the top of the incubator and smell inside the unit before any charting was started. Teach them the saying, "The air should smell like pool, NOT poo !"

Teach students about "rocking and rolling" eggs. Place an egg on a flat, level surface outside the incubator and watch the excitement as it starts to move. Tap eggs with a large nail or metal knitting needle to encourage motion. This may also help to determine if an egg is fertile or infertile. Even if an egg sounds "hollow" or infertile, mark it with an X and leave it in the incubator unless it develops an odor or begins to "weep." whistle often and have students listen for the chick's response. You'll soon find many fantastic student whistlers in the class.

About four days before the hatch date, eggs are transferred to the hatcher. Have students place each egg on a level surface. Wherever the egg quits rolling and settles, that is how each egg is placed in the hatcher. You'll soon find that students are just like emu farmers and will want to try to help the chick out of the shell. This will be especially true if the chick has been trying to hatch for more than four or five hours. It is a great time to explain how the chick needs to absorb the yolk sack so it does not develop a yolk infection. You can also explain how breaking off pieces of the shell can rupture a blood vessel and cause the chick to bleed to death, therefore maintain a strict "hands off" policy.

As the hatch date approaches, bring in the hatcher and a small playpen with net sides to hold the chicks. You will need a heat lamp to hang over the playpen to keep the chicks warm. If at all possible, hang the heat lamp from the ceiling or a solid support system. A rope or other system should be used so that the heat lamp can be raised or lowered as needed. Bring a thermometer to place in the playpen to monitor the temperature. Indoor/outdoor carpeting

makes a good floor for the bottom of the playpen and towels can be pinned to the sides to prevent drafts.

As chicks hatch and dry off, paint iodine on their navels and move them to the playpen. Maintain a strict "hand off" policy so that no one handles the chicks. You will find that parents, teachers and students, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, will come to see the newly hatched chicks.

Now that your chicks are hatching you need to contact the same reporters that you developed a relationship with at the beginning of your project. Remind the reporters about your egg decorating contest, when it closes and where eggs will be displayed. If you are having a farm tour during National Emu Week you will need to make sure that all reporters know the chicks will be on display during your tour. Be sure to include this information in everything you furnish to all media.

After 24 hours in the hatcher, the chicks will need a large cardboard box with a non-skid mat, and a heat lamp until they are taken back to the farm. Only leave the chicks at school for two or three days so that they are back at the farm before they really start to poop.

At the end of your hatch project, you will receive thank you notes from the students. Place them on display at your Open House, farm tour, Farmers Market, fair booth or store front. The chicks will generate a lot of attention and allow you to enter into discussions about new hatch projects and emu information in general. You will be amazed at what students learned from this project. Sometimes you will also be amazed at what they didn't learn or misunderstood.

Now that your project is completed you will have collected a volume of pictures that can be used in a collage and displayed at your booth or store front. Teachers, parents and students will remember you whenever they see you and will always ask about the emus. This generates fantastic publicity for your farm tour, National Emu Week and your egg decorating contest for years to come.

Look into sponsoring a hatching project at your local school. Besides all of the benefits already mentioned, the school system is paying for the electricity to run your incubator and hatcher!
