

Handling Ratites and Administration of Medications to Poultry

Our topics for this week are

- Ostrich and emu handling techniques
- Administering injectable and oral medications to poultry

Handling Ratites

Ratites should be herded into a small collection pen for capture. An approach to an adult ratite should always be from behind it. Ratites could strike forward with their toes.

If a chick weighs less than 12 lb., the handler should support the whole body. If it weighs 12 to 30 lb., the handler should put his hand around the bird's body, pick it up, and allow the legs to dangle.

Juveniles are 4 to 12 months old. They should be moved to a small collection pen with solid walls or caught with portable panels that have been covered with plastic or plywood. A T-shaped or V-shaped long handled push pole is helpful in directing and sorting ratites. High topped leather boots and leather chaps can provide some protection against a forward kick. Juveniles may be moved by being loosely held in front of their chest with one arm and the other arm behind its rump and walking beside it.

Plywood or plastic shields can be used in a manner similar to hog panels to move ratites, but an adult ostrich can still knock a handler with a shield down with a kick. Moveable squeeze chutes can be constructed that are designed like a large notebook binder.

Putting a hood over a ratite's head will make them more manageable. Commercial ratite hoods can be used, or a light weight sleeve or sock with the toe cut out will suffice. Non-aggressive ostriches can be lured by grain in a bucket and hooded by grasping its beak with a hand that has a hood everted over the hand. The hood is rolled off the hand and over the ostrich's head. Hoods should cover the eyes and about 1/3 down the neck, but not cover the nostrils. After allowing the bird to raise its head, if it tolerates the hood, it may be able to be led without incident. Large ostriches should be led by 3 handlers, one on each wing, and one to gently push the bird forward and guide it.

Eight foot long neck crooks can be used on ostriches just below the head to get their head down below the level of their back, preventing them from striking forward. The ostrich will pull back when its head is restrained. So, an assistant is needed to keep the bird from backing up while its head is being held down. The first handler, while keeping the crook on the bird's neck, must move forward to place a hood.

An emu's or rhea's head or neck should not be grasped nor should they be hooded because they do not tolerate handling of their head as well as ostriches. Emus have thin, fragile skin. Their head and neck have little muscle or soft tissue protection from injury and their trachea can be easily collapsed. Emus and rheas are approached from behind and grasped around their wings, lifted up, and tipped back slightly, or they can be slowly pushed toward the ground and straddled while holding their neck.

Level loading bays to transport vehicles are recommended because ratites are reluctant to walk up inclines. Transport vehicles should provide enough room for the bird's head when it is

standing. Narrow alley stocks should be built to restrain ostriches for exam and treatment. They are calmer in subdued lighting.

HANDLING FOR COMMON MEDICAL PROCEDURES

Injections

Intramuscular

A handler holds small poultry by both legs with one hand and an index finger between the legs and the other hand holds both wings at their base. The injection is given by another person into the pectoral muscle of the chest. Ratites are held in the same manner as for venipuncture for IM injections into the pectoral muscles or thigh muscles.

Subcutaneous

Subcutaneous injections are given to poultry in the wing web at the base of the wings.

Administration of Oral Medications

Most vaccines and medications for flocks are administered in the drinking water or by aerosol and do not involve handling or restraint.

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Neck crooks and hoods aid in handling ostriches.**
- 2. Solid portable panels are the safest method to move and separate ratites.**

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.