mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Why don’t people eat ostrich eggs?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hi, it's Doug! I have here in my hands, the egg of an ostrich. This is the actual egg with the yolk inside and everything. Just for comparison, here's an egg you might be more familiar with, a chicken egg. Now if we were to break open this ostrich egg, how much yolk do you think is inside of there? How big of an omelet could we make? Well, maybe you'll find out today. Someone named Connor has a question about eggs. Let's give him a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Doug!

- Hi, Connor!

- I have a question for you. Why don't people eat ostrich eggs?

- Ooh, that's a great question.

Ostriches lay the biggest eggs in the world. Seems like it'd make a lot of sense to eat ostrich eggs instead of chicken eggs. Now maybe you're thinking, well wait a second, wouldn't an ostrich egg have a baby ostrich inside of it? The answer is, not necessarily. Chicken eggs work the same way. Definitely, an egg could have a baby chick growing inside if the egg has been fertilized by a rooster, a male chicken. But as long as roosters are kept away, female chickens will lay eggs that just contain yolk. No baby chick grows inside. This same thing is true for an ostrich. In fact, there are even a few places in the United States where farmers keep ostriches

on their farms, just to collect eggs from the female ostriches that lay them. A few years ago I actually bought one of the ostrich eggs from an ostrich farm. I wanted to celebrate the fact that the company I work for, Mystery, had grown to be 10 people. I thought how fun would it be to have a big breakfast with everyone at Mystery, only instead of making eggs from a bunch of chicken eggs, I'd use one big egg, an ostrich egg to feed everybody. Well, I went to crack open the ostrich egg and that's when I found out one reason why ostrich eggs probably aren't that popular. It turns out the shell on an ostrich egg is really thick, way thicker than a chicken egg. It's so thick and so tough that to get one open you have to use a drill like you see this guy doing here. But once you do get it open, there's so much yolk inside of there. A single ostrich egg contains about the same amount of yolk as 25 chicken eggs. That means if you were to drill open an ostrich egg you could make an omelet big enough to feed 12 people, just one egg. That day I made one at Mystery, we definitely all had enough food to go around for everyone. Whenever I tell this story, lots of people ask me, “What did it taste like?” Honestly, I don't think I could tell any difference in taste between ostrich egg and chicken egg. Okay, so ostrich eggs are huge but pretty hard to get open. Most people don't want to start their morning by having to get out a drill to make their breakfast. But what other kinds of eggs have people tried eating before? Ostriches are the largest birds in the world so it might not be surprising that their eggs are the biggest of any egg, laid by any animal, on Earth. But that hasn't always been true. There were once birds even bigger than ostriches like this, called the elephant bird. It lived on the island of Madagascar. Sadly elephant birds went extinct—there's not a single one of them left on Earth. Scientists think it was probably because they were all hunted by people. But all of this only happened in the last 1,000 years. They didn't go extinct millions of years ago like the dinosaurs did. And so that means, people have been able to find a few examples of actual elephant bird eggs still around, eggs that never hatched. Are you ready for this? These aren't

fossils that turned to stone. These are actual eggs. If the elephant bird were still alive it would hold the record for having the largest eggs laid by any animal on Earth. If you think an ostrich egg is big, take a look at this side-by-side comparison of an elephant bird egg with an ostrich egg. Now, remember I told you an ostrich egg is equal to about 25 chicken eggs. How many chicken eggs do you think a single elephant bird egg would equal?

VIDEO 2

Well, no one has eaten an elephant bird egg, based on its size alone we can guess that one elephant bird egg would be equal to 125 chicken eggs. With that, you could make an omelet the size of a couch. And probably 1,000 years ago, people living on Madagascar actually might have eaten these for breakfast. But even today, people around the world do eat eggs of different kinds of birds. It's not just chickens and ostriches. Some people also eat duck eggs and geese eggs. These are said to have a different flavor from chicken eggs, more filling, and creamy tasting. Emus are a smaller Australian cousin of the ostrich, and more and more farmers are keeping emus around, as emu eggs might become popular. Check these out. Emus lay one of the most colorful, beautiful types of eggs in the world. And it's not even just birds that lay eggs. Here are some eggs you might have eaten and didn't even know you were eating eggs. Have you ever had sushi before? That's Japanese food. On some sushi rolls, you can order them with this stuff called Masago, this little orangish-pink stuff that's put on, almost like a topping. Each one of those little things is actually the egg of a small ocean fish. Fish eggs are eaten by lots of people all around the world. Unlike bird and reptile eggs, fish eggs don't have any shell and they're usually pretty small like this, which is why they're often used as topping on food. So in summary, ostriches lay the largest eggs of any animal on Earth, and people do eat ostrich eggs.

But most people find chicken eggs easier to deal with. Lots of animals lay eggs though, not even just birds. And people eat all kinds of these. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Connor, for asking it!