



Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

Struthio camelus on Crete / Ostrich Farm at Episkopi
Crete spiny mouse (*Acomys minous*)



To the best of our knowledge there are 3 Ostrich-Farms on Crete. One of them operates, next to the farm for the production of ostrich products, also a tavern where you can taste dishes (around the Strauss) in addition to a visit of the farm (or purchasing products).

The farm is located southeast of Heraklion and is the best reached over the 'Old Road' (Iraklion - Agios Nikolaos). In Vathianos Kambos then turn in a southerly direction towards Episkopi, from here the route leads over Anopoli, Agios Ioannis and Stamni for about 4 miles up to the ostrich farm, which is located between Stamni and Episkoi (turn-off is right of the street over a path between 2 buildings). There is also a clear sign at the junction left of the road (see fig. right); smaller signs accompany also the described route.



The haunt of the Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*) in the wild (Eastern and southern Africa) are savannas, open bush land and sand areas with sparser vegetation in coastal areas and mountain regions; the latter are also in Crete, so best conditions for a breeding. The size (males) of ostrich can be up to 3 m, the weight up to 150 kg. As flightless ratite, ostriches reach a top speed of 70 km/h. five subspecies are distinguished based on bodily frame differences inside the principal form. Arabian Ostrich (*Struthio camelus syriacus*), North-African Ostrich (*Struthio camelus rothschildi*), Sonali Ostrich (*Struthio camelus molybdophanes*), Massai Ostrich (*Struthio camelus massaicus*) and the South-African Ostrich (*Struthio camelus australis*).



The figure left shows the installation of the Ostrich Farm Park in Episkopi; right the interior of the tavern. **Pictures:** U. Kluge (08.05.2005)

The breeding season of the ostriches is wavering; to prepare a breed, the males built multiple nest hollows, which it paws into the ground. If a female has found after the courtship display, she selects one of the nest hollows after mating. At an interval of 2 days, the female lays 8-12 eggs. The up to 16 cm large eggs (longitudinal axis dimension) can reach a weight of 1.5 kg. An ostrich cock usually has up to 3 "supporting hens" in addition to the main hen. They are tolerated by the main hen and lay sometimes also 4-6 eggs in the same nest, whereby a clutch can have up to 30 eggs.

The breeding season begins after all the eggs are laid and averages about 6 weeks. The young hatch at the same time and are typical Precocial. Ostrich female reach sexual maturity at the age of 2 years.



The ostrich breeding requires a significant amount of time, much tact and in particular specialist skills. This applies in particular to the rearing of chicks and juveniles. Also the slaughter, manufacturing and marketing of the products requires a high skill. The products of the breeding are multifarious, e.g. Ostrich meat ¹⁾ (Steak, Schnitzel, Goulash), also smoked, sausage, eggs, eggnog, empty eggs for artisan craftwork, feathers (for feather duster), cream (Cosmetics) and last but not least Ostrich-Leather (see image above right)

¹⁾ Ostrich meat is extremely low in cholesterol and has valuable unsaturated solid acids. Therefore some data: fat 1.2%, protein 22%, cholesterol 38 mg/100g; 440 kj./100g, 105 kcal./100g. Compared to the beef meat it is darker, extremely tender and thus a real alternative.

Crete-spiny mouse (*Acomys minous*)

The **Crete spiny mouse** belongs to the species of spiny mice within the family of long tail mice (Muridae). It lives, as its name says, on Crete only (endemic); also the scientific name "*minous*" indicates that. The spiny mouse prefers rocky tundra areas as habitat and is about as large as a House mouse. The animals reach a length of 9-13 cm, live in packs and are crepuscular and nocturnal. They are dark-brown in colour and have **no sting** as their name suggest. But they have spiny mouse typical rough bristle hair on their back (where the name resulted in) which offer a level of protection. The Crete spiny mouse has remarkably large and high-standing ears and an oblongness face, that taper off to the nose. The weight of the animals varies between 30 and 70 grams. The food is mostly vegan, but also insects, snails and other animal food is eaten. Crete spiny mouse come, in contrast to other spiny mice, with eyes closed to the world and are not quite as strong Precocial like other spiny mice. The 1 - 5 cubs are able to walk from birth; suckle is only 6 days and then the young's are independent. Sexual maturity is committed after 2-3 months.



The figure show the Crete spiny mouse and in the details pane, the coarse spiny hair