Crooked beak in a 14-month-old ostrich (*Struthio camelus*) hen

Reported is a crooked beak in a grower ostrich hen aged 14 months on an ostrich farm in Poland (Ferma Strusi Stypułów, 67-120 Kożuchów; 51°43'N, 15°33'E; July 2005). The torso, legs, wings and neck had normal dimensions. Both nostrils appeared anatomically normal and were located in the forward position on the beak. The upper and lower mandibles were aligned from the midpoint, 6 cm and 6.5 cm to the right and left, respectively (Fig. I). Observations on the hen during feeding showed that it did not efficiently scoop up feed, much of it sliding out of the right side of her mouth. This also happened during drinking which could potentially add to heat-stress. The bird would, therefore, spend longer periods feeding and drinking than normal. This could potentially lower egg productivity due to inadequate nutrition. Sufficient quantities of calcium (2.0–3.5 %) need to be included in the breeder ration to maintain a lay of about 55 eggs per breeding season[1]. The bird weighed 68 kg, a value considerably lower than the body weight of hens of the same age with normal beaks (91.3 (mean) ± 5.01 (SD) kg)[3]. The bird would not be useful for slaughter given a low meat mass.

Fig. 1: **Crooked beak in an ostrich** (*Struthio camelus*) **grower.**

Crooked beaks were observed in some ostrich chicks on the farm. Cooper and Horbańczuk[2] have associated this with a combined vitamin D_3 and selenium deficiency. Vitamin D and folic acid deficiencies are responsible for deformed beaks particularly of the upper mandible, as suggested in the current case. Clearly the farm has a problem with unbalanced nutrition, which needs correcting to avoid further losses. Additionally, according to Huchzermeyer[5] and Horbańczuk[4], the incidence of crooked beak could also be a genetic defect. In such cases, it is advisable to eliminate breeders which produce chicks with crooked beaks. If fed pellets, such birds may only be designated for slaughter.

References

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