

Emu farming takes off in frigid Hokkaido town

ABASHIRI, Hokkaido (Kyodo) A venture firm set up by a professor and his students is raising about 400 emus, Australia's national bird, in Abashiri, trying to bring some money to a town known for its severe winters.

Toshihiro Watanabe of [Tokyo University](#) of Agriculture and his students started raising the emus in 2004 because the poultry is resistant to cold and doesn't require large farming facilities.

The northern Hokkaido town also has supported the new business, hoping the ostrichlike bird, which stands about 1.7 meters tall, will increase jobs and attract more tourists.

"We'd like to pitch (Abashiri) as a town of emus in addition to Abashiri Prison," a municipal official said. Abashiri is also known as the setting for a series of movies about inmates who try to break out of the prison during the harsh winters.

The flightless emu is the world's second-tallest bird.

An emu egg is about 10 times larger than a [chicken egg](#), and the bird's meat is rich in protein and low in fat.

"All you need to do is just provide food and water once a day. (Raising emus) is a really good side business," said Kenichi Nakajima, 45, who runs a construction company that is raising 30 emus in Abashiri.

The professor's venture, Tokyo Nodai Bioindustry, is raising emus to sell their meat and eggs as well as skin-care products made from fats taken from the poultry.

Local businesses have started selling sweets using emu eggs as an ingredient.

The municipal government has supported the poultry business by purchasing incubators with taxpayers' money and providing subsidies to buy immature emus.

One issue is making sure their meat and eggs keep coming on a consistent basis.

At least 1,000 emus are needed to ensure a stable supply, but the venture company still only has 400 birds because it sold too many eggs at an early stage, Tokyo Nodai Bioindustry said.



Caption: Meal ticket: An emu is kept in a pen in Abashiri, northern Hokkaido, where the local government is promoting the raising of the bird to increase jobs and attract tourists. KYODO PHOTO