

# Emus left starving in India

Leisa Scott

TENS of thousands of Australia's iconic bird, the emu, have been abandoned in India, many left to starve to death, after the collapse of emu farms.

Masterminds of emu farming scams have been arrested, one emu farmer has been murdered and emu meat products such as biryani are selling cheap after a get-rich-quick scheme started to fall apart in August last year.

S. Chinny Krishna, the chairman of Blue Cross, one of the subcontinent's leading animal rights organisations, estimates 75,000 emus have been abandoned in the southern province of Tamil Nadu, and that 10,000 died of starvation.

Mr Krishna said there were about 200 emu farms in Tamil Nadu, 1000 throughout India and up to 550,000 emus in the country.

Mr Krishna said via email: "There were starving birds everywhere; hundreds were turned loose."

Emu farming, which largely failed in Australia by the 2000s, has been promoted in several countries, with mixed results. Australia does not trade emus for farming but other countries trade between themselves or use zoo stock to breed birds for farming.

A spokesman for the Australian Government's environment department said it was aware of the situation in India but could not intervene.

Indian newspapers have run photographs of emus being captured by villagers to be killed for food.

The Tamil Nadu government is now attempting to feed about 12,000 emus and is reported to be working on a plan to auction the birds.

However, the cost of emu

meat has plummeted, with *The Times of India* saying the once-expensive meat was now the cheapest and ensured that "emu biryani is the main course at social events like marriages and birthdays".

Gagan Singh Bedi, the secretary of the Tamil Nadu government's animal husbandry unit, has not answered requests from *The Courier-Mail* for comment.

Emu farming was heavily promoted in Tamil Nadu in 2006, with Tamil actors engaged by entrepreneur M.S. Guru to promote the industry.

He sold chicks to farmers, or sought investors, with the promise of big returns. But, there were no long-term markets and the scheme - copied by other alleged scammers - started to unravel when monthly returns dried up.



**GRIM OUTCOME:** More than 200 emu farms across India, like this one at Perundurai, have been abandoned by farmers.



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