

# Old man emu

BY ROSEMARY ANN OGILVIE



extraordinary: in 14 days, the emu oil had eliminated inflammation related to joint swelling and bone abrasion caused by cartilage loss. Further, the 'patients' no longer experienced pain in their joints and bones.

Dr Paul Smith, Dr Margaret Craig-Schmidt, and Amanda Brown identified the constituents of emu oil in 1994 when they conducted an industry-funded analysis at Auburn University. The analysis revealed that the oil contains around 70 per cent unsaturated fatty acids. Monounsaturated oleic acid is the major fatty acid (41 to 42 per cent). Also present are two other essential fatty acids important to human health: linoleic acid (20 per cent), and alpha-linolenic acid (one to two per cent), as well as natural forms of the antioxidant vitamins A and E.

The oil's power to ease arthritis symptoms is attributed to the substantial oleic acid content, which exerts local anti-inflammatory effects, and also to its linolenic acid, a substance known to ease muscle aches and joint pain.

After conducting the fatty-acid analysis, Dr Craig-Schmidt commented that a diet rich in monounsaturated fatty acids such as oleic acid would tend to beneficially lower blood cholesterol, while the polyunsaturated linoleic and alpha linolenic fats would reduce it even further. The findings, she concluded, show that the properties of emu oil are consistent with recommendations for a heart-healthy diet.

In addition to helping reduce cholesterol and guarding against heart disease, emu oil capsules may help relieve a variety of aches and pains; improve peripheral circulation; and according to some reports, have the potential to balance blood sugar in insulin-dependent diabetics.

A single product that can help prevent wrinkles, and ease the pain of rheumatism and osteoarthritis, alleviate the discomfort of eczema and psoriasis, speed wound healing, guard against cardiovascular disease and even help balance blood sugar levels. Without any side effects? As far-fetched as it may sound, scientific research conducted during the past decade indicates that the oil from the flightless bird that decorates our coat of arms may indeed do all these things - and more.

The Aborigines discovered the healing properties of emu oil forty thousand years ago, using it to treat aching joints, skin conditions and open wounds. They passed their knowledge on to European settlers, and the oil

remained a first-aid staple - especially among country folk - until last century, when the proliferation of quick-fix drugs saw the ancient remedy all but disappear.

In 1993, arthritis researchers Dr Peter Ghosh at the Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney, and Dr Michael Whitehouse at the University of Adelaide, collaborated on an experimental study to determine whether emu oil indeed lived up to its folk reputation as an anti-inflammatory agent with the power to alleviate arthritic pain.

Over a three-month period, the doctors used a formulation of emu oil combined with a transdermal transporter on rats. Results were