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## Commercial ostrich farming in Botswana

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According to the returns to the Department of Animal Health and Production in December 1996 there were only 10 registered ostrich farms in Botswana with a total of 4305 ostriches kept. Ostriches of all ages were kept and the juveniles, 3 to 12 months formed the largest group at 38.4% followed by the breeding birds at 31.6%. The farms were widely distributed throughout the country and Lobatse district had the highest number with three ostrich farms. Most of the farms had less than 200 birds and there was only one farm with more than 1000 ostriches.

### Introduction

The ostrich (*Struthio camelus*) is the largest living bird with an adult male standing at 2.5 m and may weigh up to 150 kg (Bruning & Dolensek, 1986). Domestication of ostriches was first attempted in the Cape Province of South Africa beginning in the 1860s (Huchzermeyer, 1994). Initially ostriches were kept for their feathers but are now kept for their meat and skins. There is a big demand for ostrich meat for it is low in fat and cholesterol (Shanawany, 1995). Commercial ostrich farming is currently found in South Africa, Israel, U.S.A., Australia, Canada, Zimbabwe and Namibia (Deeming & Ayres, 1994). Although Botswana has the highest number of wild ostriches, estimated by aerial surveying at 60,000 (Hallam, 1992), the ostrich industry has yet to be developed.

In this study the distribution of ostrich farms in Botswana with their flock composition is reported.

### Materials and methods

Information on ostrich farming was obtained from the Department of Animal Health and Production of the Ministry of Agriculture, Gaborone, Botswana. All ostrich farmers are legally obliged to submit annual reports to this department. The data were utilised in computing the number of ostrich farms and the distribution per district. The number of ostriches kept and the flock composition was also determined.

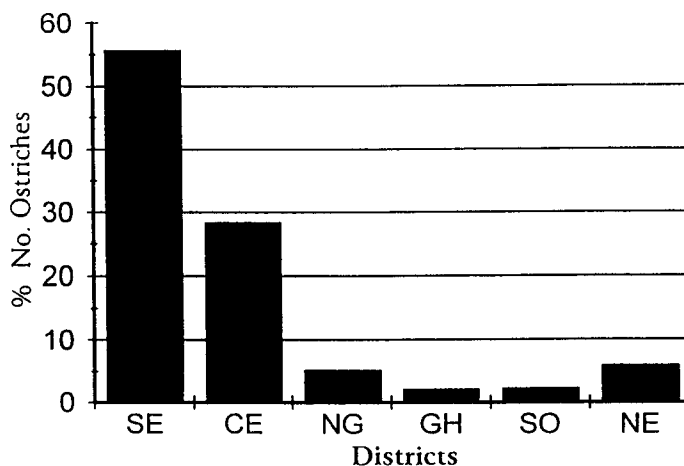
**Table 1** Ostrich farms

Farm No.	Breeding Birds		Growers	Juveniles	Chicks	Total
	Males	Females				
1.	52	182	0	309	365	908
2.	31	34	104	17	0	186
3.	42	58	0	139	27	266
4.	21	11	0	27	0	59
5.	69	73	42	38	10	232
6.	39	58	0	0	0	97
7.	0	0	0	102	0	102
8.	0	0	0	395	120	515
9.	125	124	0	334	469	1 052
10.	167	206	138	331	46	888
Total	546	746	284	1 692	1 037	4 305

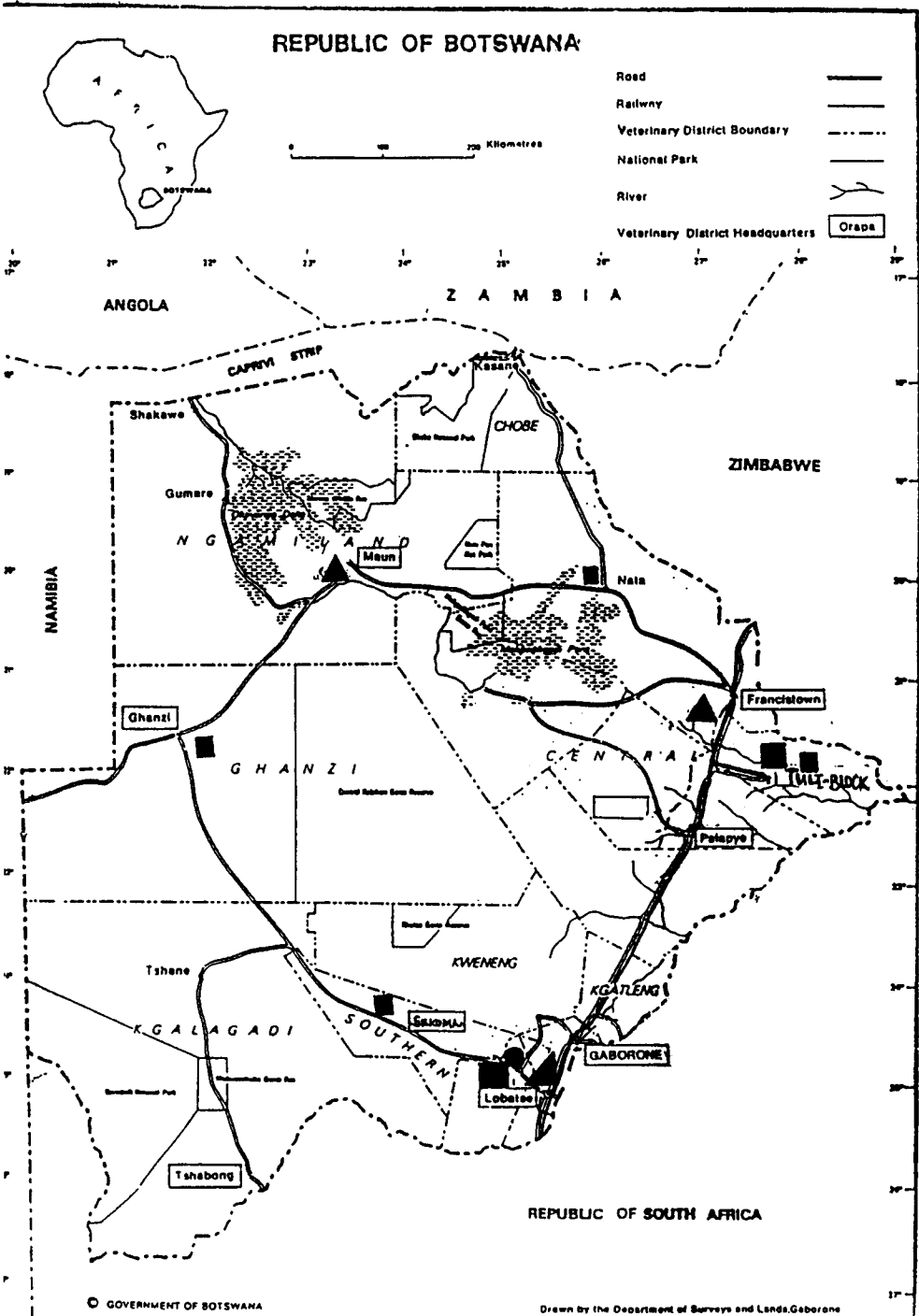
## Results

There were only 10 farms which were registered with the Department of Animal Health and Production of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1996. These farms had a total of 4305 ostriches (Table 1) with a mean of 430.5 ostriches per farm. Most of the farms (3) were found in the southeast district town of Lobatse (Figure 1). Whereas six farms had less than 300 birds there were four farms with more than 500 ostriches each. Only one farm had more than a thousand birds. Ostrich farms were found to be distributed all over the country (Figure 2).

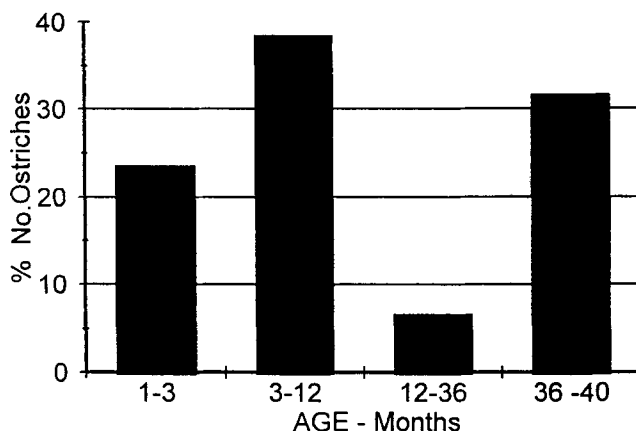
All ostrich age groups i.e. chicks, juveniles, growers and adults were kept on these farms. Juveniles (3 to 12 months) were the largest group (38.4%) followed by the breeding birds (31.6%) as



**Figure 1** Ostrich distribution in Botswana by district. Key: SE – southeast; CE – Central; NG – Ngamiland; SO – southern; NE – northeast.



**Figure 2** Ostrich population and farm distribution in Botswana. Small square = 0 –200; large triangle = 201 – 400; circle = 401 –600; small triangle = 601 – 800; medium triangle = 801 – 1000; large square = 1001 – 1200.



**Figure 3** Age composition of farmed ostriches.

shown in Figure 3. The chicks constituted 24.8% while the growers were the least at 6.5% of the flock sizes.

## Discussion

Ostrich farming is poorly developed in Botswana despite the fact that the climate is suitable for ostriches. South Africa which has the highest number of ostriches in captivity is the major exporter of ostrich leather, meat and feathers (Hallam, 1992).

Currently the ostrich industry in Botswana is mainly in the breeding phase with very little marketing taking place. Ostriches for slaughter are sold to South Africa owing to the lack of an ostrich abattoir in Botswana. Plans are underway to construct an ostrich abattoir in the country (Modisa, pers. comm.). A few breeding ostriches have been exported to Italy, Spain and China (Richards, pers. comm.).

Since there is a big demand for ostrich meat, commercial ostrich farming should be encouraged. The construction of an ostrich abattoir together with the securing of export markets will persuade more people to join this potentially lucrative farming. Probably farmers should keep three ostriches namely, one male and two females. The eggs should be collected, incubated and then returned to the farmer who would raise the chicks up to slaughter at 90 kg liveweight. Alternatively small holder farmers could raise ostriches from 3 months up to slaughter.

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