

# San Francisco

June 2012

THE TALK

OSTRICHES

## Cutest science lesson ever



A baby ostrich walks into a museum. No, that's not the setup to a joke; it's one of the preparations for "Earthquake," an exhibition opening May 26 at the California Academy of Sciences. The show will host a flock of ostrich chicks, tucked in between a 25-foot-wide model of Earth and a jouncing Loma Prieta simulator. **The birds can't predict the next earthquake, but they can tell us something about why earthquakes happen.** The flightless forebears of the ostrich lived about 150 million years ago, when the continents of the southern hemisphere were still joined. As the land mass fractured and slowly drifted apart, the proto-ostrich family was dispersed around the globe and evolved into different species, such as the Australian emu and the South American rhea. The ostrich diaspora is "a validation of plate tectonic theory," says Helen Taylor, an Academy spokesperson—and a charming coda to the exhibition downstairs on animal mating and reproduction. ■ BEN CHRISTOPHER