

SOUTHERN CASSOWARIES

Casuarius casuarius johnsonii

As tall as a person (up to 2m) with a high helmet on its head (casque), a vivid blue neck & long drooping red wattles & amber eyes. The Southern Cassowary (like emus) is a ratite - a large flightless bird. Each heavy, well-muscled leg has 3 toes, with the inside toe bearing a large dagger-shaped claw (up to 120 mm long) used for scratching & fighting other birds.

DISTRIBUTION & HABITAT

Found only in the tropical rainforests of north-east Queensland, Papua New Guinea & some surrounding islands. Usually solitary animals, Cassowaries live primarily in rainforests, they also use woodlands, melaleuca swamps, mangroves & even beaches. Cassowaries are territorial & contact between adults generally only occurs during mating.

DIET

Cassowaries eat over 150 different rainforest tree & plant seeds and fruit, some which only re-propagate after being eaten by the Cassowary. They are an essential part of the rainforest seed dispersal & germination process. They will also eat small vertebrates, invertebrates, fungi, carrion & plants.

LIFE EXPECTANCY & BREEDING

The average life span of a Cassowary in the wild is thought to be around 35- 40 years, but in captivity they have been known to live to up to 60 years. From May to November, pairs of Cassowaries court briefly, mate and then separate. Females lay between 3 to 5 large, olive-green eggs, generally between June &



October. Eggs are incubated by the male for about 50 days, who alone guards the eggs & raises the chicks. Juveniles begin to fend for themselves from about 8 to 18 months of age, when they are chased away by the male.

CONSERVATION STATUS

VULNERABLE (IUCN Red List of Threatened Species) | Listed as **ENDANGERED** nationally in Australia (EPBC).

