

SOUTHERN CASSOWARY

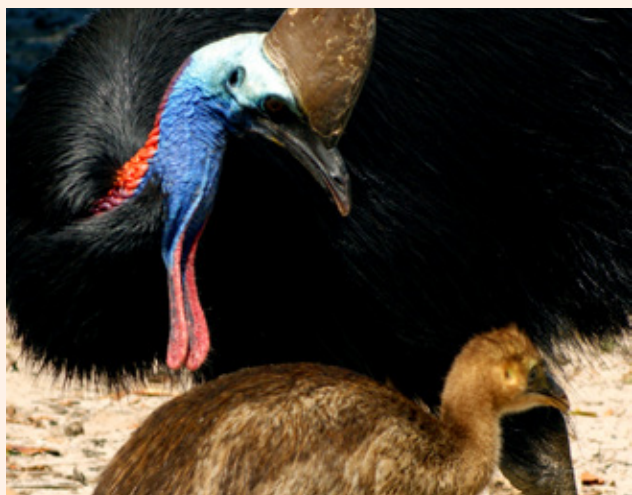
Endangered

Vulnerable

Critically Endangered

Extinct in the Wild

Extinct



Common name

Southern cassowary

Scientific name

Casuarius casuarius johnsonii

Habitat

Cassowaries require a variety of fruiting trees to provide a year-round food supply of fleshy fruits to eat. Although these trees are primarily in rainforest, cassowaries also inhabit woodlands, melaleuca swamps, mangroves and even beaches.

Habitat range/distribution

Cassowaries are found in Cape York and the Wet Tropics of north Queensland. In Cape York, they occur in two separate populations: a southern population in the rainforests of the McIlwraith and Iron ranges and a northern population in the less extensive rainforests north of Shelburne Bay. In the Wet Tropics, cassowaries are distributed widely from Cooktown to Paluma Range.

Description

Like the emu and ostrich, the southern cassowary is a large flightless bird with unusual feathers and other features that distinguish it from all other birds. The adult southern cassowary has a tall, brown casque (helmet) on top of its head, a vivid blue and purple neck, a glossy black plumage, long drooping red wattles and amber eyes.

Adult cassowaries can grow up to two metres tall. Females are slightly larger and can weigh up to 76kgs. Males can weigh up to 55kgs.

Importance

Cassowaries are important for maintaining the diversity of rainforest trees. They are one of only a few frugivores (fruit eaters) that can disperse large rainforest fruits, and the only one that can distribute them over long distances.

They swallow the fruit whole, digesting the pulp and passing the seeds in large piles of dung, distributing them over large areas throughout the rainforest. Some rainforest seeds require the cassowary's digestive process to help them germinate. Cassowary scats are large and often contain hundreds, if not thousands of seeds. The dung is a ready-made fertiliser and helps many kinds of seed to grow.

Key threats

Major threats to cassowary survival include habitat loss and changes, road accidents, dog attacks, human interactions, pigs, disease and natural catastrophic events.

Cassowary habitat, particularly in coastal areas, has been seriously reduced by land clearing for farming, urban settlement, and other development. Roads cut through cassowary territories, making it necessary for them to travel across them in search for food.

What is being done to help protect and conserve this species

The Queensland Government has mapped southern cassowary habitat which can be used when assessing future plans by state and local governments to protect southern cassowary habitat.

The Australian Government's recovery plan for the southern cassowary sets out actions to secure their long-term protection through improved habitat protection and enhancement, threat reduction and community engagement programs.

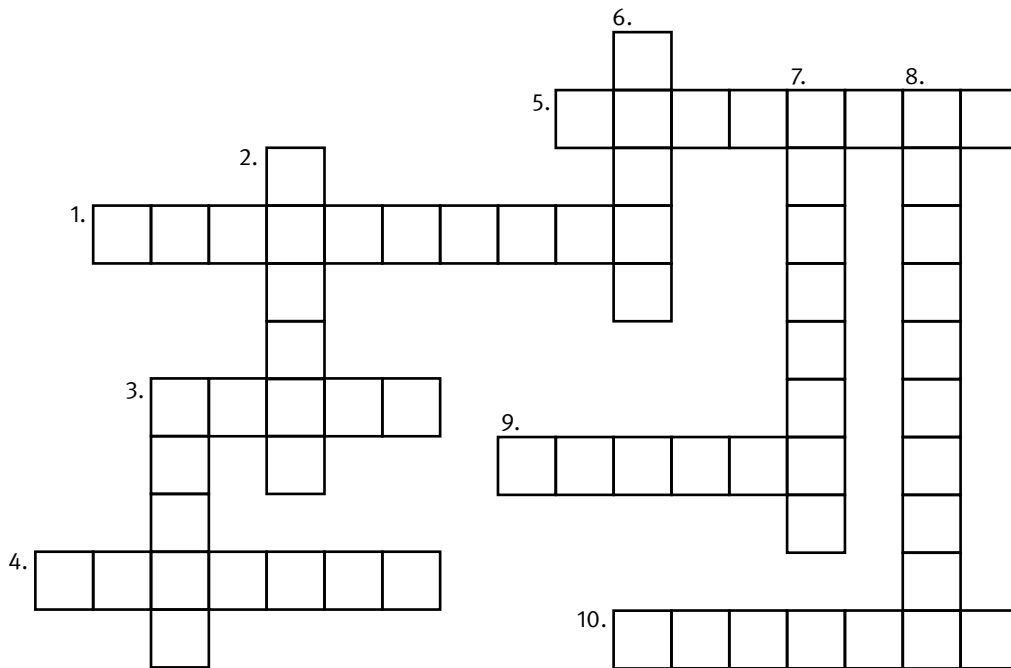
Become a cassowary champion

- Plant southern cassowary food plants.
- Be careful when driving. Slow down to avoid hitting animals and don't stop to watch them.
- Restrain your dog, especially when cassowaries are around.
- Let cassowaries find their own food. Feeding them can create a dependency on you and make cassowaries aggressive towards people.
- Talk to your friends and family about threats to cassowaries and what they can do to help.



The southern cassowary is Australia's heaviest flightless bird, while the Emu is the tallest!

CASSOWARY CROSSWORD



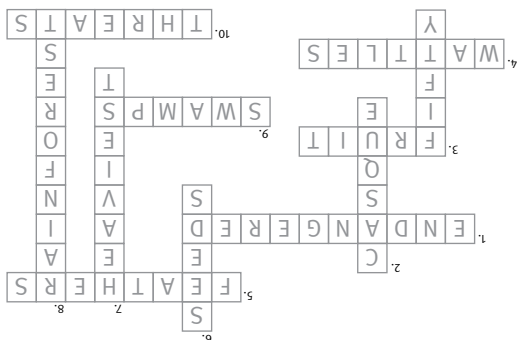
ACROSS

- Cassowary conservation status
- Cassowary food
- Cassowaries have long drooping red _____
- Cassowary plumage consists of long black _____
- Cassowaries inhabit rainforest, woodlands, melaleuca _____, mangroves and even beaches
- Road accidents, dog attacks, and disease are some of the _____ that cassowaries face

DOWN

- What is the brown 'helmet' on top of a cassowary's head called?
- How many days do father cassowaries stay with the eggs without leaving?
- Cassowary scats often contain hundreds, if not thousands of these
- The southern cassowary is Australia's _____ flightless bird
- Where the fleshy fruit trees that cassowaries like to eat are primarily found

Answers



The father cassowary guards and incubates the eggs without leaving the nest for 50 days! He raises the chicks until they're about eight to 18 months old.

