



Southern Cassowary

- Information Report -

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29/10/19

Why Our Enclosure Deserves To Win:

Our enclosure is the perfect place for 2-3 cassowaries to live as it is spacious and open. There are many trees in it, so the birds feel like they are in their natural habitat. We included a sand area, as cassowaries have been known to live on beaches. There is a pond for them to drink and bathe in, and there are fruit trees for them to eat from. The enclosure is lined with a high chicken wire fence, as they are very dangerous birds. Our enclosure has all of the things that a cassowary would need, therefore making it a great place for them to live.

Appearance

Southern Cassowaries can grow to about 2 meters tall and weigh up to 60 kilograms. Males and females are quite similar in appearance, but females are slightly bigger, stronger and more brighter than the males. Adult Southern Cassowaries have a tall brown 'helmet' on the top of their heads, and a vibrant blue and purple neck. The purpose of the 'helmet' is still unknown, but there are hypotheses that it indicates dominance, helps to keep the head warm, and aids in hearing the vibrations from other Southern Cassowaries. They have small wings, with 5-6 quills and a long claw in the top of the wing. Southern Cassowaries have three claws on each foot, with a blade-like nail reaching to about 120mm long!

Southern Cassowary chicks are different in appearance. They are striped brown and cream in pattern, after about 3-6 months the stripes fade to the sub-adult appearance. It takes up to 12-18 months after the first change for the birds to start beginning to take on adult characteristics. Maturity is reached after 3.5 years for females and 2.5 years for males.

Breeding

Southern Cassowary mating season is from early June to September. Females are known to mate with more than one male per season. Females lay three to five olive green eggs between June and October. Male Southern Cassowaries incubate the eggs for 50 days, and raise the chicks on their own. After approximately 9-18 months the chicks leave the males to fend for themselves.

Diet

Besides fruits, Southern Cassowaries diets consist of flowers, fungi, snails, insects, frogs, birds, fish, rats, mice, and carrion. Studies show that around 26 plants have been documented as part of the Southern Cassowaries diet. Southern Cassowaries play an important role in the ecology of rainforests. They are one of the only 4 seed-dispersing animals that can distribute seed of rainforest fruits over large distances. Adults consume an average of 2.9 kilograms of fruit per day (in captivity).

Habitat

Southern Cassowaries live primarily in lowland tropical rainforests, but they have been known to use other types of forest such as eucalyptus, mangrove, and tea tree forests. Some Southern Cassowaries have even been sighted on beaches.

Form of Defence

Cassowaries have two heavy, well-muscled legs. Each leg has three toes, with the inside toe bearing a large dagger-shaped claw that is used for defence. When the bird is protecting their chicks and is cornered, will kick out both feet at once and can injure or even kill wild dogs and humans.

Causes of Endangerment

Cassowaries are endangered because of industrial development, their habitats are being destroyed so that humans can build houses and factories.

Threats

- Loss, modification and fragmentation of habitat (serious reductions due to land clearing for farming, urban settlement and other development) in the Wet Tropics population on the Atherton Tableland and the coastal lowland and floodplains.
- Habitat degradation – invasion of weeds
- Vehicle strikes
- Dog attacks – juveniles and sub-adults most affected, particularly in areas of residential development or where pig hunting is common even within protected areas.
- Human interactions – hand-feeding cassowaries has many implications:
 - They may become dependent; when the food source is removed, they may starve
 - Hand-feeding near roads encourages them to return to areas where the likelihood of vehicle strikes is increased
 - Hand-feeding in urban areas makes them more susceptible to vehicle strikes and dog attacks
- Pigs – may compete with cassowaries for food, eat cassowary eggs and modify habitat, but the significance is not demonstrated.

