



## The Southern Cassowary - (*Casuarius casuarius johnsonii*)

### Our Big Bird under threat

- *The world's third largest bird, one of Australia's largest land animals, is under threat of extinction in north Queensland.*
- *Scientists believe only 1200 – 1500 cassowaries survive in the wild in Australia.*
- *The cassowary is listed as endangered under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.*
- *Cassowaries are a key stone species which means they are vital for seed dispersal in the rainforest. Over 150 rainforest plants rely on them, especially for dispersing the seeds of large-fruit species.*

### What is a cassowary?

- *Cassowaries are ratites, flightless birds closely related to the emu, ostrich, kiwi, and some extinct species.*
- *The Australian sub species is the Southern Cassowary, found in three populations on the coast of Far North Queensland. The most vulnerable, is located on the wet tropical coast between Townsville and Cooktown.*

### Cassowary facts

- *The name cassowary comes from two Papuan words, 'kasu' meaning horned and 'weri' meaning head, referring to the prominent casque on its head.*
- *An adult cassowary can stand up to two metres tall.*
- *The average weight is 38kg for males and 47kg for females.*
- *Cassowaries can live for 30 to 40 years in the wild.*
- *It is estimated cassowaries require about 75 hectares of quality home range forest per bird.*

- *Cassowaries are generally solitary birds, coming together only to mate during the breeding season which starts around May / June.*
- *The female bird lays several clutches of 3 – 5 eggs, by different fathers.*
- *The male cassowary is solely responsible for incubating the eggs and raising the young. They sit on the nest for 50 days until the eggs hatch.*
- *The father teaches the chicks how to forage and by nine months they become independent.*
- *The chick's striped appearance soon fades to brown before their distinctive adult colouring starts to develop. They mature at about three years.*
- *Male birds can be aggressive in defending their chicks. In the wild cassowaries are generally shy and avoid contact with humans.*
- *Never feed wild cassowaries.*

### **Threats:**

- *Habitat loss, road deaths and attacks by dogs.*
- *More than 80 % of its prime habitat, coastal lowland rainforest, has been cleared over the last 100 years.*
- *Nearly a quarter of the remaining cassowary habitat has poor conservation protection.*