

Declining populations

Hundreds of animal **species** have disappeared since Europeans arrived in Australia in 1788. Many more animals are in danger of becoming **extinct**. It is natural for some species to become extinct over time. However, the number of Australian species is decreasing at an unusually high rate.

The Department of the Environment and Heritage lists 175 species of Australian animals as **endangered**. Another 197 species are listed as **vulnerable**.

Causes

Many things can cause an animal species to become extinct. The main threats to Australian species include:

- loss of **habitat** as land is cleared for farming, **urban development** and logging
- the spread of **introduced species**.

Protecting wildlife

Conservation groups are working with the government to protect Australia's wildlife. Education and raising public awareness of conservation are important parts of this process. These things encourage people to think about protecting **native** animals.

As individuals we can also help save wildlife. We can observe rules that protect native animals. We can even become wildlife volunteers or donate money to wildlife organisations.

The Indian Myna is an introduced species that competes with native animals for food and shelter.



Birds

Birds are **warm-blooded** and lay eggs. They have excellent sight and hearing. A bird has:

- a backbone
- a hard beak
- wings
- feathers.

Even birds that can't fly, such as the emu, still have wings.



Australian birds at risk

Around 800 different species of birds are found in Australia. Many of these are now at risk of becoming endangered or extinct. Since the arrival of Europeans much of the land in Australia has been cleared for towns or farms. This means there are fewer places for native birds to feed and shelter. Native birds must also compete for food and shelter with introduced bird species.

Reducing the risk

Many people are working hard to reduce the risk to native bird species. This involves:

- establishing **captive breeding** programs to boost wildlife populations
- changing laws to protect wildlife
- controlling **feral animals** that compete with native wildlife for food and shelter
- raising public awareness to encourage people to protect wildlife.



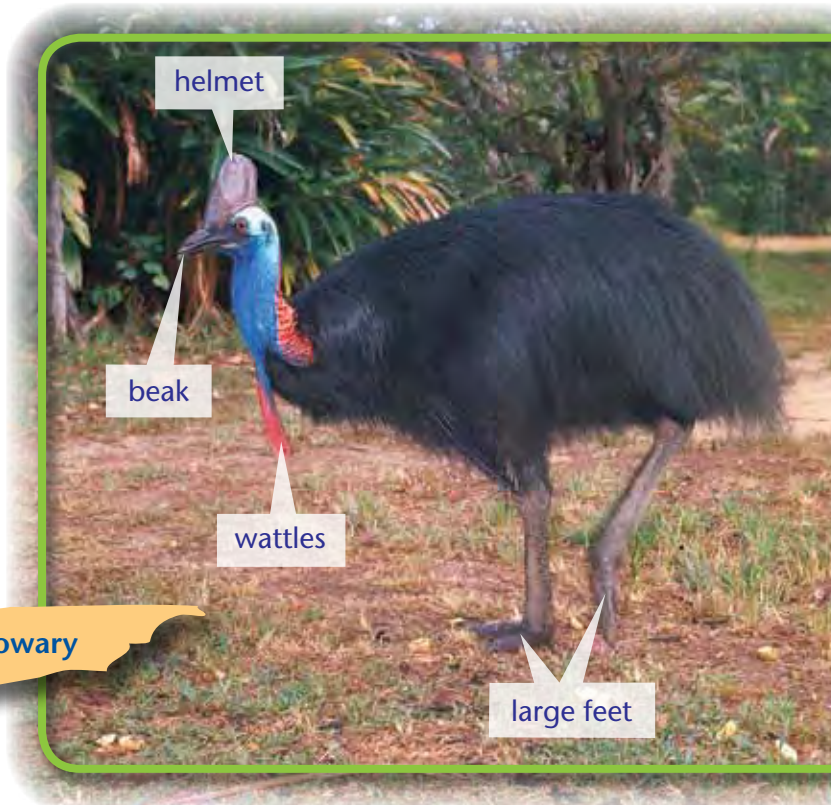
Native birds have to compete for nesting sites with introduced species like the European Starling.

Southern Cassowary

The Southern Cassowary cannot fly. Its most striking feature is the horn on its head, which looks like a helmet. This helmet helps protect the bird as it moves quickly through the **rainforest**.

Appearance

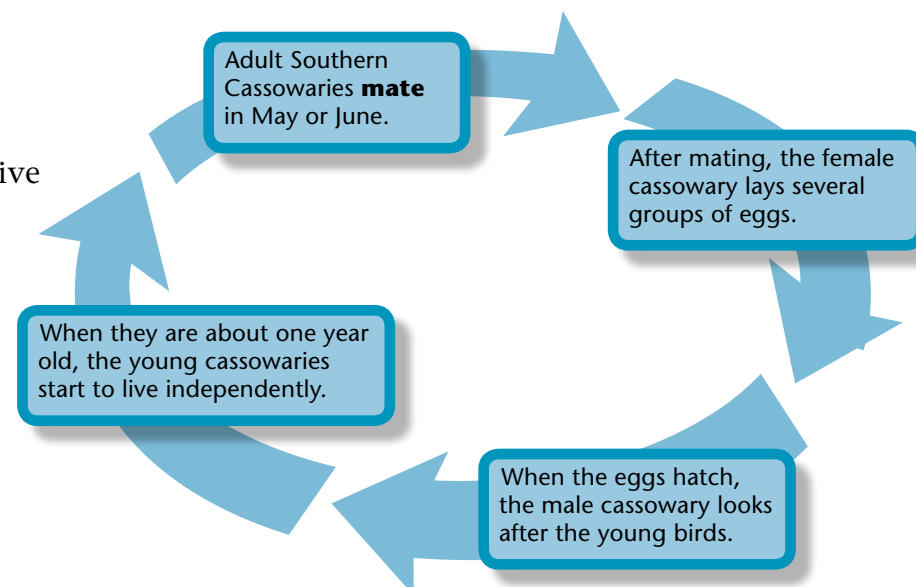
The Southern Cassowary is a colourful, majestic bird. It grows up to 1.8 metres in height and weighs up to 60 kilograms. Long pieces of skin hang down from its neck. These are called wattles. They vary in colour from pink to red.



A Southern Cassowary

Life cycle

The Southern Cassowary can live for up to 40 years.



Shelter and habitat

The Southern Cassowary lives in a rainforest habitat. The cassowary uses leaves and grass to make a nest on the forest floor. The rainforest trees provide the cassowary with a plentiful food supply.

Southern Cassowaries are also sometimes seen in open forested areas, sugarcane fields and even along beaches. These areas may provide food when the rainforest trees are not in fruit.



Rainforests provide food and shelter for the Southern Cassowary.

Food and feeding habits

Southern Cassowaries feed alone in the early morning and afternoon. They spend the middle of the day resting.

Cassowaries eat mainly fruit. They sometimes also eat:

- insects
- snails
- small animals, such as rats.

The Southern Cassowary eats fruits from about 150 different rainforest trees. The fruits are eaten whole, and often pass through the body of the cassowary almost undamaged.



Cassowaries have similar vision to humans. They use both eyes together and can see colours.

Distribution

The Southern Cassowary is found only in the Wet Tropics, a rainforest area of north Queensland. It is estimated there are fewer than 1500 cassowaries left in the wild in this area.

Threats

The greatest threat to the survival of the Southern Cassowary is the destruction of its habitat. It is also threatened by feral animals, which prey on young cassowaries and destroy the rainforest habitat. Threats from natural causes and human activity are listed below.

Natural causes	Human activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cyclones• disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• land clearing• traffic• logging• feral dogs• feral pigs

Cyclones

The Southern Cassowary's natural habitat is subject to cyclones. Severe cyclones cause food shortages as they destroy parts of the forest.

Land clearing

Clearing land for residential development and farming has removed much of the Southern Cassowary's habitat.



Distribution of the Southern Cassowary



Cyclones can destroy the forests that provide food for the Southern Cassowary.

Saving the Southern Cassowary

An active **recovery program** is important to the Southern Cassowary's survival.

This sign warns drivers to watch for Southern Cassowaries on the road.



- **Recovery plan**
- Aim
- To protect the Southern Cassowary's habitat. This will also help to protect other species of the rainforest.
- Action
- The Wet Tropics is now a World Heritage area. This means that it is protected against developments that are harmful to its plants and wildlife. The government and conservationists are encouraging landowners to replant native **vegetation**. Landowners are also urged to establish corridors to link isolated patches of rainforest with larger areas. These corridors are areas where farmers leave the trees and plants the cassowaries feed from. They give the cassowary a safe way to travel through its **territory**.
- Future
- The future of the Southern Cassowary depends on the cooperation of councils, conservation groups and landowners. The Australian Rainforest Foundation is creating a protected corridor along the Wet Tropics coast. This will help cassowaries find food and water during the dry season. It will also keep them safe from **predators** and road traffic.

Internet resources

To read more about saving the Southern Cassowary, go to the following websites:

http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/wildlife-ecosystems/wildlife/threatened_plants_and_animals/endangered/cassowary.html
<http://www.cassowaryconservation.asn.au>