

SOUTHERN CASSOWARY

Casuarius casuarius johnsonii

WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

Rainforests of NE Queensland. Also found in New Guinea and surrounding islands.

DIET

Fruit, carrion and small animals. Over 100 species of plants have been recorded in their diet.

WEIGHT

Females 60kg
Males 35kg

LENGTH

98-118 mm

LIFESPAN

41 years

There was however a specimen that died at 61+ years at Healesville Sanctuary.

AT WILD LIFE SYDNEY ZOO

- Our cassowary can be found in the Daintree Rainforest exhibit.
- We have a single male cassowary named "Princess".
- Princess was born in 1998. We are 98.99% sure that Princess is a male. When we received Princess in 2006 we were told we were getting a female cassowary, but the smaller size, lack of eggs and behaviour suggest otherwise. We had a feather sent off for DNA testing to determine the sex but the results proved inconclusive. The name Princess has stuck as it was used to condition him and he is quiet high maintenance and fussy.
- Changing his name would be too difficult as he responds to the name Princess during daily husbandry routines and enclosure cleans. It is also useful when we weigh him on a set of scales using target training.
- - In the wild, cassowaries love to swim and bathe - Princess does not. We have tried a number of ways to entice him into the pond but no luck. He does however enjoy a shower under the sprinklers on a hot day. Once the sprinklers are turned off he often can be seen sprinting around the exhibit and jumping in the air with excitement, followed by a preening session.

STATUS

Endangered

- less than 1500 est. in the wild



WILD FACTS

- The cassowary is from a group of large flightless birds known as the Ratites.
- The ratites lack a keel on their sternum that would normally allow the attachment of flight muscles. As such, even if they were to develop suitable wings and were lighter, they would be unable to fly.
- The cassowary can run up to speeds of 50 km/h and jump to a height of 1.5m.
- Breeds June – October to coincide with the maximum availability of fruit.
- Generally solitary, during breeding season females become more tolerant with males and form pairs that remain together for a few weeks. Males will dance around the females and emit a series of low "boos" to impress her. Once she has laid her eggs, she loses interest and leaves the male to incubate the eggs (47-54 days) and rear the chicks. The female may take a second male and lay a second clutch of eggs.
- Chicks plumage is stripey when born and fade by 3 months of age.
- Males defend chicks until 9 months of age before sending them off on their own.
- A 3.5 year old male has been recorded fertilizing eggs. In contrast, a male in an American zoo fertilized his first clutch at the age of 31.
- Cassowaries are solitary animals in the wild, normally only coming together to breed.

CONSERVATION AND EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE

- The cassowary is an important helper for the rainforest, dispersing the various fruits seeds and fertilizing them.
- There are over 150 species of plants' seeds that are too large to be eaten for dispersal that rely on the Cassowary.