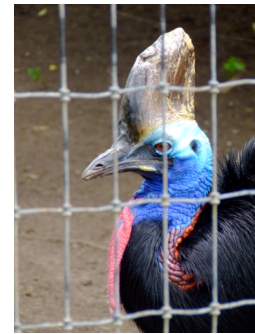


SOUTHERN CASSOWARY

(Australian / Double-wattle)

CASUARIIFORMES
Family: Casuariidae
Genus: Casuarius
Species: casuarius



K Chadbourne Collection

Range: New Guinea & NE Australia

Habitat: Rain forests and savanna woodland from lowlands to 3000m (9842')

Niche: Only group of large flightless birds adapted to living in rain forests.

Wild diet: Fruits, leaves, insects, eggs, small mammals and nesting birds

Zoo diet:

Life Span: (Wild) 12 - 19 years

(Captivity) 18 - 40 years

Sexual dimorphism: F are larger more brightly colored and have larger casques than M

Location in SF Zoo: South end of Australian Walkabout

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

This is the largest of the 3 species (Bennett's and One-wattle) found in this region. The Cassowary is a huge, flightless, three-toed terrestrial bird with long neck and legs. The protuberance on the top of the head is known as a casque or helmet. It has a center of very tough elastic, foam-like substance and grows slowly throughout the bird's life. It may be used as a shovel to search for food in the leaf litter of the forest floor and may be an indication of dominance and age. Wattles are found on only two of the three species. Wattles are folds of skin that hang from the bird's neck either on the side or front and along with the head and part of the neck, are unfeathered and brightly colored in different shades of red, blue, purple, yellow and white. These colors can change with the bird's mood. The black plumage is extremely hard and coarse to protect the bird from thorns and sharp leaves. Legs and feet are robust and powerful with stout claws on its outer toes while the inner claw is long and dagger-like.

Weight: M c. 75 lbs F up to 128 lbs
Height: up to 6'

STATUS & CONSERVATION

The main threat is loss of rain forest habitat. Chicks suffer heavy predation by feral pigs that seem to be having serious on the Australian populations. In New Guinea, feathers are used for ceremonial headdresses and the increase in price in native markets has intensified hunting pressure, contributing towards an annual high mortality rate. Trade in New Guinea of cassowaries with SE Asia has been going on for at least 500 years and can be very lucrative. Not only for economic importance, the bird has ritual and ceremonial significance.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Outside of the breeding season it is thought they are usually silent. Typical threat call is a rumbling sound. Other vocalizations include hisses, whistles, low rumbling growls, bill clapping, loud roars during fights. When male is with chicks he keeps in touch with a coughing contact call. Very little is known about behavior. Generally solitary except during breeding season when it becomes territorial. Most active occurs during early morning and late afternoon as well as moonlit nights. Usually shy, it can become quite aggressive during breeding, especially when accompanied by chicks, and also when cornered.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Birds tend to breed during the dry season (June - October) when fruit is most plentiful. Males use a stretch display to appear larger, arching its body upward and bristling up the feathers towards the rump. Females appear to be dominant and a male will run away at first signs of a threat from the female. Males mate only with a single female but once laying is over the female will go off searching for another male. She usually lays 2 or 3 clutches during one breeding cycle. Males make the nest "scrap" in the ground lined with grass and leaves well camouflaged in the rain forest. Like emus and rheas the male remains in charge of the eggs and chicks. The chicks are precocial, able to walk and feed themselves within a few hours after hatching. Male and chicks leave the nest after about 2 days. He then remains with them for about 9 months, protecting them against mammals, birds of prey and large reptiles. Chicks have a coat of down striped buffish yellow and brown or black. The casque begins to appear at 3 - 6 months and keeps growing. After leaving the parent chicks probably remain together for some time. Adult size is reached between 1 - 2 years but complete adult plumage is not reached until age 3.

Incubation: 49 - 56 days	Sexual Maturity: M - 2.5 yrs / F - 3.5 yrs
# of eggs: 3 - 5 elliptical pale to dark green	Weight at birth:

MISCELLANEOUS

- ◆ Cassowary is derived from the Malayan *kesuari* word for this bird.
- ◆ The first photograph of a nest in the wild was not made until September 1984.
- ◆ The remiges or flight feathers are reduced to long corneous (horn-like) spines.
- ◆ Primary quills are used for nose pins and earrings; claws of inner toes for arrow tips and long bones are made into daggers, spoons or scrapers.

Sources:

Last Revision 12/95

Handbook of the Birds of the World, Vol. 1

Fact card

Latin Names Explained ©1995 Facts on File by A. F. Gotch