

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Wild

MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

ISSUE

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Call to protect the cassowary

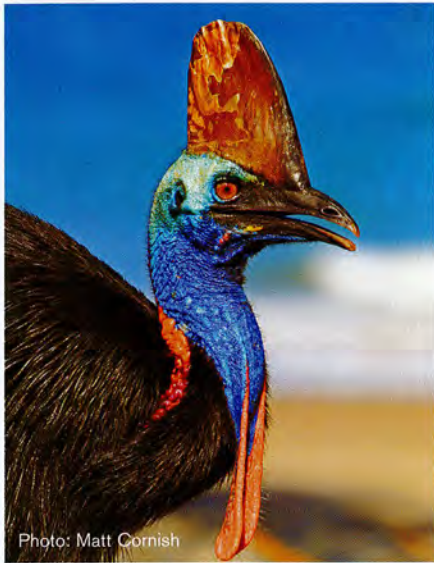


Photo: Matt Cornish

Land buy-back group Rainforest Rescue has launched a Save the Cassowary campaign in response to estimates by conservation scientists that there are fewer than 1,000 wild southern cassowaries left in Australia.

As part of the campaign, which seeks to raise awareness about the endangered bird's vital role in the Wet Tropics ecosystem, new signs have been added to cassowary enclosures in 20 zoos across Australia and cassowary-themed biodegradable cups are being sold in cafes. Together with the Girringun Aboriginal Corporation and councils in north Queensland, the Mullumbimby-based group also aims to destigmatise the bird once referred to as the

world's most dangerous and educate the public about its role in indigenous traditions.

Thought to have evolved around 80 million years ago, the cassowary is now restricted to pockets of the Daintree, Mission Beach and Cape York as a result of habitat destruction and fragmentation caused in part by extreme weather events. Around 60 birds have also been killed in traffic accidents in the past decade. Rainforest Rescue has secured permanent funding for the Garners Beach Cassowary Recovery Facility near Mission Beach, which rehabilitates and releases injured and orphaned birds, and is petitioning the Queensland government to lower the speed limit in the area from 80 to 40 kilometres per hour.

Jennifer Croes, Rainforest Rescue director of conservation, said: "We forget how privileged we are to have a living dinosaur in our backyard and it would be a tragedy if our kids didn't get to see this keystone species; there aren't many animals that can eat, disperse and propagate more than 238 rainforest plant species. "If we don't take action now, we'll have a dodo scenario on our hands," she added. Croes believes the cassowary has received "a bad rap" because of its intimidating size (up to two metres tall), large clawed feet and the dinosaur-like casque on its head, which are at odds with road signs depicting a "black chicken". Around 100 rainforest plant species are considered almost entirely reliant on the large flightless bird and its rapid digestive system. In addition to supporting public information

programs, funds raised through the campaign will be put into restoring wildlife corridors and bird tracking. Croes added: "This campaign has quickly become bigger than Ben Hur, but the plight of the cassowary needs to be heard at a national level because without it the future of the rainforest may be compromised."

While the southern cassowary is considered 'endangered' under Australia's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act, it is only deemed 'vulnerable' on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List because of its association with subspecies in Papua New Guinea. Croes said upgrading the conservation listing for the southern cassowary will be a priority as soon as more accurate data on the Australian population has been collected.



savethecassowary.org.au



Photo: Matt Cornish

Woodchips

Rodents vanquished on Macquarie

Macquarie Island has been declared free from pests after a seven-year campaign to eradicate rats, rabbits and mice costing around \$25 million. The world heritage-listed island south-east of Tasmania is the world's only breeding ground for royal penguins, and a vital nesting site for wandering and grey-headed albatrosses. At its worst, it was estimated around 150,000 rabbits roamed the island, reducing tussock cover for fledglings and causing landslides. The program included baiting as well as the use of hunting dogs, and is being hailed as the world's largest successful eradication project.

First national eucalypt day

Lake Mountain Resort near Marysville and philanthropic organisation The Dahl Trust

have christened March 23 as National Eucalypt Day with the opening of a new boardwalk through the regrowth forest that has sprung up since the 2009 bushfires.

Hero of the Blue Mountains dies

Pioneer bushwalker and wilderness campaigner Alex Colley (profiled in *Wild* issue 102) died in February aged 104. After joining the Sydney Bushwalkers Club in 1936, Colley went on to play a pivotal role in securing the NSW Wilderness Act and world heritage status for the Greater Blue Mountains. The last surviving member of the group known as the Tiger Walkers, Colley led first traverses across areas such as Morton National Park and the Wollemi and is remembered in the names of several remote spots. He worked as director of the

Colong Foundation for Wilderness for 40 years, leading the campaign to protect the Boyd Plateau, and continued to enjoy multi-day walks into his 80s. A celebration of Colley's life is to be held during the inaugural 21st Century Wilderness symposium at the University of Western Sydney on June 29.

Dingo confirmed as unique species

Research led by the University of Sydney has classified the dingo as a distinct member of the canid family, separate from wolves and dogs. Genetic data suggests dingoes lived in isolation from dogs in Australia for around 3,000 years, after originating in southern China. The study also proved dingoes can vary widely in coat colour, making it harder to distinguish them from crossbreeds.