

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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SOUTHERN CASSOWARY

Casuaris casuaris

Critical —

Endangered —

Vulnerable **A1b,c,d,e**



This species is believed to have undergone a rapid decline of more than 20% in the last 30 years (= three generations) in Australia, and declines of a similar magnitude may have occurred elsewhere in its range. It is therefore classified as Vulnerable. However, the decline in Australia resulted from an extraordinary rate of habitat destruction which has virtually ceased, and further information from New Guinea, where large areas remain unaffected by hunting, may indicate that the species would be better listed as Near Threatened.

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION The Southern Cassowary is found in New Guinea (Papua [formerly Irian Jaya], **Indonesia** and **Papua New Guinea**), including the islands of Seram and Aru, and north-eastern **Australia**. It occurs throughout the lowlands of New Guinea, except for the northern watershed from the Vogelkop to the Huon Peninsula (Coates 1985, Beehler *et al.* 1986). In Papua and adjacent islands its status is unclear, but it may be commoner than in Papua New Guinea, where it has declined and is now absent in some locations, including remote areas (Coates 1985, K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999). In Australia, there are 14 subpopulations in the Cape York Peninsula south of Jardine river and in rainforests between Cooktown and Townsville, and the population is estimated at c.2,000 birds and declining (Garnett and Crowley 2000).

ECOLOGY It is a solitary and sedentary inhabitant of rainforest, occasionally using adjacent savanna forests, mangroves and fruit plantations (Marchant and Higgins 1990). Its diet largely comprises fallen fruit, although it is fairly indiscriminating (Garnett and Crowley 2000).

THREATS In Australia, it is threatened by continuing habitat fragmentation; the small subpopulations are susceptible to predation by dogs, road accidents, disease, hunting (for food, sport and to protect crops) and possibly predation by, and competition with, pigs (Garnett and Crowley 2000). In Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, it is heavily hunted close to populated areas, being of high cultural importance, and constituting a major food source for subsistence communities (Coates 1985, Beehler *et al.* 1986, K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999). However, although birds appear to be commoner in unpopulated areas (Beehler *et al.* 1994, Burrows 1995), they apparently survive in some hunted areas (Beehler 1985). Birds reared in captivity are invariably raised from eggs or chicks collected in the wild (I. Burrows *in litt.* 1994, T. Leary *in litt.* 2000).

MEASURES TAKEN In Australia, programmes have been aimed at community education, localised habitat management, protection and re-vegetation, management plans for populations and high-risk individuals, surveys, survey and translocation methods and habitat use; most remaining habitat is within protected areas (Westcott 1999, D. Westcott *in litt.* 1999, Garnett and Crowley 2000).

MEASURES PROPOSED *Indonesia and Papua New Guinea* • Monitor populations in protected areas. • Quantify the effects of hunting and logging. • Promote community-based hunting restrictions. *Australia* • Revise monitoring techniques. • Research population dynamics. • Study prevalence, causes and role of disease. • Prevent habitat clearance. • Implement traffic-calming measures at crossing hotspots. • Undertake dog and pig control in dense populations.