

# The CASSOWARY

The cassowary is a very large flightless bird related to the emu, the ostrich and the (extinct) moa. There are three types of cassowary. The one found in Australia is called the Southern Cassowary.

This is normally a very shy bird which lives alone and likes to stay hidden in the thick tropical rainforests and swamps of north-eastern Australia. It enjoys living in a warm climate where there are many different kinds of food. It will set up an area for feeding and defend this territory against other cassowaries. Because of this cassowaries need large areas of rainforest to spread out in. They roost on the ground when they sleep.

Cassowary mostly eat fruit that has fallen to the forest floor. They will also eat many other things such as flowers, insects, frogs, birds, fish, rats and mice. They will travel up to six kilometres a day looking for food.

A cassowary is an impressive sight. It has an unusual high, curved, horny ridge on top of its head, which can look a bit like a helmet. The skin of its head and long neck is mainly bright blue with bright orange, pink and purple patches. At the front of the neck, there are two long, drooping red pieces of skin (wattles). The rest of its large body is covered with long, thin, glossy black feathers that look a bit like hair. It can be as tall as two metres. This bird runs very fast, can jump high and swim well. Its wings are small and weak and not very useful for anything. It has strong legs with three huge claws on each foot. The middle claw is much longer than the others and is extremely sharp.

It is known as one of the world's most dangerous birds. If a cassowary is approached it will normally stand its ground rather than run away. If it feels cornered it will become very aggressive. It hisses, stretches tall and ruffles its feathers. The next step is to attack, running and leaping into the air feet first, slashing with its vicious claws. The middle claw on each foot can slash through metal so it can do a lot of damage when it attacks this way.

At nesting time, the female lays several large green eggs into a nest of leaves hidden deep in the forest. In contrast to most other birds, it is the male who makes the nest, sits on the eggs and cares for the chicks when they hatch. Protected by him, they stay around the nest for about nine months. After that the father chases them away and they have to find their own territory to live in.

Adult birds have no natural enemies although wild pigs can destroy their nests and eggs and also eat the food that the cassowaries



eat. But it is contact with man that has caused most of the problems. The cassowary has lost almost 80% of its habitat because so much of the forest has been cleared. Roads through the forest split up the bird's territories and many are killed crossing roads. Also people living close by their habitats often own dogs which chase and kill young cassowary.

## Headings and Trigger words

Use this column to write down a heading and trigger words to summarise each paragraph. (see CSI Stage 5B for more details)

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## Set 3:2 ACTIVITIES

### REMEMBERING - What are the facts

1. Where do cassowaries sleep at night?
2. What is different about the cassowary's feathers?
3. Write three questions like the ones above and the answers.

**You must be able to find the answers in the report.**

### UNDERSTANDING - Show that you understand the information

4. Draw a picture, or a diagram, to show how a cassowary behaves when it feels threatened.  
**Include labels to explain what is happening in your drawings.**
5. Choose one paragraph from the report. Decide on a heading for that paragraph. Write down some 'trigger words' (words that trigger the information in your head). Use the heading and trigger words to rewrite the paragraph in your own words.

### APPLYING - Using the information in another way

6. **Cassowary Poster**  
Make a colourful poster for a wildlife park advertising this amazing bird.  
**A poster should have an eye-catching title, information in bullet points, and illustrations.**
7. **A Day in the Life of a Cassowary**  
Use the information in the report to describe a day in the life of a cassowary. You can do this by writing a story, a poem or rap, a diary entry, or a comic strip with speech bubbles and captions. Try to include as many facts about the cassowary as you can.

### ANALYSING - Identifying the features that help the cassowary survive

8. **Information Web**  
List all the physical features and behaviours of the cassowary mentioned in the report. Brainstorm ways in which these features and behaviours help the animal to survive. Present this information as an INFORMATION WEB.

Example : **CASSOWARY** → claws like daggers → can defend itself

### EVALUATING - Making judgments

9. **Danger Rating** - Using the information in the report, make a decision about how AT RISK this species is. Include risks from predators and MAN.  
**1 = very secure, little threat from predators and man**  
**10 = very high danger from predators and man - easy prey**  
Give reasons for your rating using information from the report or your own ideas.
10. **Checking the Information** - It is important to check whether the facts are accurate.
  - Do an internet search on the cassowary (or look for resources in the library).
  - Make a list of at least two sources of information.
  - Tick off or highlight information in the report that agrees with what you have found.
  - Decide on the percentage of information that you have been able to check.  
10% = 1 or 2 facts ----- 50% = half the information ----- 100% = all the information

### CREATING - Coming up with new ideas

11. **Cassowary Upgrade - making life easier**
  - Make some changes so that cassowaries don't get run over by cars on the roads that have been built through their habitat
  - Redesign the cassowary's nest so that pigs can't get at their eggs

**Remember to include diagrams, labels, and descriptions to explain your interesting ideas.**