

NORTHERN CASSOWARY

Casuaris unappendiculatus

Critical —
Endangered —
Vulnerable C1



This species is classified as Vulnerable on the basis of an estimated small, declining population. However, there are few data and basic research may lead to reclassification.

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION The Northern Cassowary is restricted to the northern lowlands of New Guinea (Papua [formerly Irian Jaya], **Indonesia**, and **Papua New Guinea**). Its distribution west to the Vogelkop is poorly known, but it occurs on Yapen, Batanta and Salawati islands (Coates 1985, Eastwood 1996, B. M. Beehler *in litt.* 2000). This entire region is seldom visited and the species is generally scarce and often shy, but there are recent records from Batanta and Salawati although several recent surveys in Papua have failed to find it (Eastwood 1996, K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999). It is usually less common where hunted (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999) but large areas of its range are remote with few hunters. Beyond these scattered records, there are no data on population or trends.

ECOLOGY The species is poorly known but it is presumed to be similar in ecology to Southern Cassowary *C. casuaris*: it inhabits lowland forest, including swamp forest, to 700 m (Coates 1985, Beehler *et al.* 1986).

THREATS All cassowaries *Casuaris* are heavily hunted close to populated areas and this species may be particularly vulnerable as it has a preference for river floodplains which are highly populated (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 2000). As well as constituting a major food source for subsistence communities, it has a major cultural importance, including use as gifts in pay-back ceremonies, the feathers and bones as decoration and the bones as tools (Coates 1985, Beehler *et al.* 1986, K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999). Chicks captured on hunts are reared in villages for trade and consumption; there is no breeding of domesticated birds (I. Burrows *in litt.* 1994). The species can probably survive in selectively logged forest, but logging roads open up previously inaccessible forests to hunting (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999). Although cassowaries appear to survive in some hunted areas, this is dependent on the local culture and the availability of alternative meat sources and weapons (Beehler 1985, K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999).

MEASURES TAKEN None is known.

MEASURES PROPOSED • Survey distribution of this and *C. casuaris* in Vogelkop. • Research and quantify the effects of hunting. • Research and quantify the effects of logging. • Survey extensive areas through discussion with local hunters. • Develop a repeatable monitoring technique in protected areas. • Monitor populations in protected areas. • Campaign for non-hunting protected areas in Papua New Guinea such as the April-Saulemei or Ramu lowlands. • Use this species as a figurehead for establishing ecotourism-funded protected areas. • Liaise with Australian research and action on *C. casuaris*.