

Cassowary tracking devices to be explored near Mission Beach after 20 birds killed by cars in 2015

By [Isobel Roe](#) 21 Dec 2015, Mon

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-21/tracking-devices-planned-for-cassowary-population-by-main-roads/7043258>



Photo: The speed limit along the road was lowered from 100 kilometres per hour to 80kph, to allow drivers more time to see the birds. (Supplied: Jeff Larson)

Cassowary conservationists in far north Queensland are marking 2015 as one of the worst years on record for road deaths of the endangered birds.

It has been estimated about 4,000 of the birds remain in the wild, with 300 of those in the Mission Beach area, on the aptly named Cassowary Coast.

The Queensland Government announced it would begin to investigate the use of tracking devices on the birds after more than 20 deaths were recorded this year.

Many of the deaths were on Tully-Mission Beach Road — a winding, scenic connection between Mission Beach and Tully where cassowaries cross daily, often with several chicks in tow.

Conservationist Liz Gallie said the state's Main Roads Department had been uncooperative until a surge in community calls for assistance.

"I don't think anyone knows what can be done here, but it certainly is a main road and [the Department of Main Roads] are the ones that can do something," she said.

"It's got to be something that's going to manage the traffic or alter the environment on this corner to allow the cassowaries to safely cross - something has to change."

The speed limit along the road was lowered from 100 kilometres per hour to 80 kilometres per hour to allow drivers more time to see the birds.

Dozens of 'cassowary crossing' warning signs call for motorists to slow down and beware, but Ms Gallie said they appeared not to work.

"I think that there's driver complacency - the road environment is one that makes people think that they can go faster," she said.

Cassowary Coast Mayor Bill Shannon said local drivers were more to blame.

"I do think the worst offenders are the locals that are familiar with the roads and not the tourists," he said.

"It already is down to 80 [kilometres an hour], to bring it down [to] 60, you'll probably find that it would be very poorly received by the people going about their daily business."

Photo: Dozens of 'cassowary crossing' warning signs call for motorists to slow down and beware. Supplied: Liz Gallie



'Every bird has a value'

Tully-based vet Graham Lauridsen is charged with the care of cassowaries that are hit by cars.

He works at the State Government-owned Garners Beach cassowary rehabilitation centre, as well as caring for the birds at his own veterinary surgery.

Dr Lauridsen said most birds that fell victim to car strikes did not survive.

"Probably more so we are unable to save them - often because they've been hit at high impact and they're reported as being dead already," he said.

He said the increasing death toll of the birds was concerning.

"They're a threatened species so every one has a value," he said.

"This time of year is when a lot of chicks are on the road and crossing the road, and people just are not aware that they're going to be there.

"When people hit them it's not their fault - no-one means to run them over obviously - but they step out on the road when people aren't ready and the damage is done."



Photo: [Dr Lauridsen said most birds that fell victim to car strikes did not survive. \(Supplied: Mission Beach Cassowaries\)](#)

Adapting technology could take time: Main Roads

The Department of Main Roads said it would start to investigate the adaptation of technology used for koalas near a rail line in south-east Queensland that could suit cassowaries in far north Queensland.

The technology, called Intelligent Transport System, attaches a tracking device to an animal that alerts a nearby road sign when the animal is nearby.

The sign would then change to alert oncoming traffic that an animal may be near the road.

In a statement, the department said the investigation into whether the technology could be adapted from koalas to cassowaries would take some time.

"Main Roads will continue to update local cassowary conservation groups as this investigation proceeds," the statement said.

"We appreciate the work done by the community to help keep this iconic bird safe - cassowary protection is a challenging issue.

"We are listening to the community to find a balance between network needs and the delivery of real conservation benefits for cassowaries."