

Saving a species

Push to create a safe haven for cassowaries

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THE Daintree's endangered cassowaries – under threat from pigs, dogs, cars and crocodiles – may have been thrown a lifeline, with plans for a new research and breeding facility in the world's oldest rainforest.

Douglas Shire Council has ordered a feasibility study into how to protect the dwindling population of the iconic flightless bird, a popular tourist drawcard, in the jungles of far-north Queensland.

Every year, hundreds of southern cassowaries – a throwback to the dinosaur era – are killed or injured, and baby chicks orphaned.

Today, it is estimated as few as 1500 birds still survive in the wild in Australia.

"We're firmly dedicated to protecting our cassowaries," Douglas Mayor Julia Leu said.

"I think it is time we at least look at the feasibility of building one (a cassowary facility) in the Daintree Rainforest," she said.

Two privately run cassowary hospitals, and rehabilitation centres operate further south at Lake Barrine on the Tablelands and Garners Beach at Mission Beach.

Tourist bus operators have been blamed in part for their role in feeding the birds along the road into



ENDANGERED: Cassowaries.

Cape Tribulation, leading to car strikes, a new council survey found.

But 90 per cent of locals surveyed believe that wild pigs are the biggest predator

and suggest a "bounty on killing pigs", "pig baiting with contraceptives instead of toxins", and a boosted trapping program in a bid to control their population.

In the Daintree region, 6000 feral pigs have been trapped in the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics area over the past 12 years.

Some locals also told of concerns about rogue pig hunting dogs chasing and killing chicks and juvenile cassowaries.

Last year, a camera captured video footage of a monster crocodile walking across the Cape Tribulation Road with an adult cassowary in its jaws.