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INFORMATION SHEET

WILDLIFE PROGRAMME - SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS - M. C. DOWNES
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CASSOWARIES

In considering the ways in which the A.S.F. can improve the supply of cassowaries, or the methods of husbandry, it is essential to work from the premise that there is in fact an existing long established and operational industry. It may be little understood, but its methods are open to study and improvement.

The aim of the Department will be to safeguard this industry for the long term benefit of the people and the conservation of the cassowary populations. This can only be done using wildlife management principles.

It is most unlikely that there is a simple technological improvement, such as special food or medicine, which will revolutionise the growth or keeping of cassowaries.

It is not possible at the present time under existing conditions for cassowaries to be bred on commercial farms. The wild stocks will disappear from most areas, before the necessary experiments have solved the technical problems in running self sufficient breeding farms on the scale necessary to replace wild hunting.

Nor is it possible for a simple ban to be introduced and effectively restrict the hunting or killing of cassowaries, without other action. It is deceptively simple to recommend a Government law protecting cassowaries, but this will not save the industry nor the cassowaries, under the existing conditions in Papua New Guinea. This can only be achieved by harnessing the people's interest in preserving their own natural wildlife resources. Wise use under wildlife management becomes the most effective conservation measure. Any necessary laws will follow naturally from the people's efforts to manage the industry.

For these reasons it will be essential to concentrate on the ecological and socio-economic factors involved in the existing industry - the supply, the trading, and the consumption of cassowaries to find the means of safeguarding the industry.

The Department can apply wildlife management principles on the local, regional or national level. There is urgent need to rationalise the use of existing stocks, to stabilise the inflationary prices by assisting the supply, and to offset the deterioration in numbers in certain areas due to overhunting or destruction of habitat. In addition it will be necessary to harness the immense interest of the people in cassowaries in order to bring about the organisational changes in the industry necessary to cope with the rapidly changing circumstances of economic and social development.

1. Structure of the Industry

The industry is dependent on a balanced combination of areas with different functions.

Consumer Areas - are the more heavily populated districts with very few cassowaries in natural bushland, but a very high traditional demand, which is, in the main, increasing. Prices have risen in less than 2 years from \$250 per bird to over \$400. These areas overlap the following category or are in the same area.

In rearing Areas - the people are not cassowary hunters. They receive the young birds from very far away and have developed an intensive battery system and a definite expertise in rearing the cassowaries for the necessary 2-3 years. This activity is pronounced in the Mendi subdistrict. At present it is severely restricted by the short supply of young birds.

The natural Breeding areas, such as Lake Katubu, Erave, and beyond to the coastal habitat, are sparsely populated with people. Most supply areas are on the 'frontiers' of an expanding transport system. These have reasonable numbers of young birds, but it can be anticipated that current demands will exhaust any particular area in a few years. The supply will, by then, have moved on with the 'frontier'. By their undeveloped nature the Breeding Areas are unable to gain much advantage from their good supply, and have little commercial experience.

The Breeding Areas are linked with the Rearing Areas by the casual and sporadic system of part-time commercial traders, public servants and other visitors, who return to their home districts with purchased young birds in their luggage. Apart from being very cheap at their source and having a high monetary value in the Consumer Areas, the cassowaries have a very high status value, as gifts and for repayment of debts or favours in a complex relationship between the big-men.

Increased earnings, more sing-sings and cassowary races and increased sophistication in travel and trade, have accompanied economic development of the District. All these factors have resulted in 'burning out' one cassowary Breeding Area after the other in a process which is spreading across the land.

The cassowary industry in Papua New Guinea is following the classical pattern of commercial over-exploitation without wildlife management. A peak will be reached with a few years of plenty, high prices, and a few relatively rich operators, followed by exhausted wildlife stocks, relic numbers to be preserved only in parks, zoos or inaccessible country.

2. What can be done ?

The Department can greatly influence the situation over the next few years by encouraging the people to re-structure the industry, to cope with the deterioration caused by the developmental and social changes.

- (a) The supply of young birds should come, as far as possible, only from areas over which there is control of:-

- i) commercial hunting, particularly by outsiders
- ii) shotguns
- iii) habitat destruction

It is essential that Wildlife Management Areas be established as soon as possible in the Breeding Areas with Wildlife Committees organised to control hunting and to benefit from wildlife management and the supply of young birds as a commercial and conservation operation.

- (b) The young birds should be efficiently transported in adequate numbers to the Rearing areas. Apart from the obvious consideration of improving the economic operations it is essential that this key phase of the process be done by persons fully involved in the cassowary business and committed to the long term future of the industry. Having part-time middlemen with other jobs monopolising a key operation in the industry has greatly aggravated the bad effects of the poor supply and inflated prices. Initially this may have to be done by D.A.S.F. but it could soon be taken over by trained licenced cassowary buyers.

A change in this aspect will exactly parallel the changes necessary in the crocodile skin industry and in the export of fauna.

- (c) The rearing activities must be improved and given official recognition as a village industry to be assisted by the Government. These operations already have traditional status with the big-men and provide a significant cash turnover. There already exists a very widespread group of cassowary farmers; the basic skill and experience is represented in virtually every village in the Rearing Areas. A programme of practical assistance would be of immense interest to the village people.

In the immediate future this can be initiated by encouraging the building of good quality pens, followed by a large shipment of young birds from a Wildlife Management Area.

To initiate the pen construction Government assistance will be necessary to pay for materials for 2-3 demonstration pens in each village. The village would build the pens and those additional needed to house the young birds bought from the Department.

- (d) There is an urgent need to increase the skill and experience within the Department concerning the cassowary business. The allocation of a full time Wildlife Officer, Mr. Gabriel Aitsi, to the programme in February and the participation of the Southern Highlands District staff, at the several levels, constitutes an effective start to the programme.

The New Zealand Aid Project, under which the services of an experienced Wildlife Manager will be provided for six months, will enable practical development of the several projects.

Further practical consideration has to be given to the incorporation of the programme in the District operations particularly in village extension. The individual projects described below will assist in this process.

- (e) DASF Cassowary Station - Mendi

It is essential to have a wildlife station close to District Headquarters. It will have many functions, the more important of which are a demonstration for visitors and local farmers of wildlife management projects, experimental pens under close surveillance, and a training ground for DASF staff.

The requirements are a flat area for holding pens; close proximity to natural bush for breeding pens, and fertile garden plots for cassowary food.

The details of layout and construction will depend on the topography of the site; the proposed site at Kiburu appears suitable. In this situation holding pens for 200 - 500 birds would be built on the edge of flat land now cleared, and the breeding pens would consist of several acres of fenced in thick scrub.

- (f) DASF - Village Cassowary Project - Was

Mr. Aitsi, Wildlife Officer and Mr. Pusal, Livestock Officer, have collaborated with 6 men from the village of Was to build a battery of traditional cassowary rearing pens. Design, materials and labour were provided by the village men, while material and labour are funded by DASF.

This is essentially a DASF owned project, using lands and skills provided by the village. It will be stocked with birds by DASF to be fed and grown in the traditional way by village men while the feeding and growth is tabulated by the Wildlife Officer.

The project has created immense interest in the nearby villages.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

At the last sitting in April, the House of Assembly, amended the Fauna Act enabling the Government to proclaim Wildlife Management Areas for the management of species important to the people for purposes of cash income, food or customary usage.

The Wildlife Management Area may be under customary ownership. It should contain good numbers and quality of wildlife and may be in danger from over hunting or destruction of habitat. Assistance is being requested in many areas to preserve the wildlife from destruction to allow community use of the wildlife resource for traditional purposes, and to harvest a crop on a sustained yield basis.

A Wildlife Committee from the landowners is appointed under the Act, to advise the Minister for Agriculture and Stock on the management of the area and the rules to govern its use. These rules will be made law and offender taken to court.

Typical purposes for which Wildlife Management Areas are being established include:-

- (a) the preservation of extensive wildfowl egg grounds in New Britain.
- (b) the preservation of numerous wallabies, waterfowl and other wildlife in the trans-Fly area of Western Papua, and the regular harvest of deer meat for sale.
- (c) the development of the crocodile industry in the Angoram-Keram areas of the East Sepik District. One proposal for the Southern Highlands District is being actively worked on in the Ialibu Sub district. There is an urgent need for other much larger areas, particularly for cassowaries in natural areas of habitat in the less accessible sub districts.

(d) Proposed Siwi-Utame Wildlife Management Area .

The people in an area of forest near Ialibu have expressed concern about the use of shotguns on Birds of Paradise and Cassowary. The most effective way of achieving practical control of the over-killing of these birds is the establishment of a Wildlife Management Area.

If the people who own the land wish to, they may form a Wildlife Committee of about 12 persons, to represent the community in the area, and to recommend rules and management practises to the Minister for making into law.

The main features of the proposal were discussed at a meeting in ~~Prowi~~ on 3rd July. Those present were asked to take the story back to all the villages concerned, to discuss it and if in agreement, to signify to the Patrol Officer who would be visiting each village, who will represent them on the Wildlife Committee.

Another meeting is scheduled in August - with the Wildlife Committee. If they recommend a ban on shotguns, but that traditional hunting continue, this is possible under the Fauna Act.

The major advantage in this proposal is that any restrictions arise from the people's needs, rather than a law imposed without their participation or without their consent. This will make it practical for Wildlife Officers and other authorised Government staff to enforce the law.

Many practical difficulties over boundaries, actual rules, and developmental projects such as cassowary farming must be left until the Wildlife Committee is formed and has demonstrated that it speaks authoritatively on behalf of the people of the proposed Wildlife Management Area. It is impossible for the Minister or the Wildlife Section to proceed with the proposal if an authoritative Committee is not formed.