

Irwin in bird's corner

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BOB Irwin is the face of Australia's koala and hairy-nose wombat conservation campaigns, and now he is fighting to save the endangered cassowary.

The father of Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin won hearts when he made a special trip to the Far North this week to nationally launch a land buyback scheme for Mission Beach, south of Cairns.

Mr Irwin is urging Australians to donate money to Rainforest Rescue for voluntary rainforest block buybacks, and he has called on the State and Federal governments to match whatever money is raised.

"The best estimate is we have 1000 cassowaries left in North Queensland ... and in Mission Beach the population may now be as low as 40," he told a crowd of supporters yesterday.

"These birds are in danger of extinction and we need to act right now to preserve their habitat.

"We want every single (rainforest) block that can be purchased by the public and government."

Rainforest Rescue's Kelvin Davies said his not-for-profit organisation had previously sunk \$600,000 worth of donations into land purchases for nature refuges in the Daintree.

"We can keep writing letters to



You'll be right: Wildlife warrior Bob Irwin is urging people to save the cassowary by donating money for land buybacks. Picture: JULIE LIGHTFOOT

politicians but we can also take a lead for the government to follow," he told the crowd of his joint campaign with Mr Irwin and Mission Beach conservation group C4.

The local organisation has estimated about 40 per cent of its town's

essential cassowary habitat remains unprotected. Mr Davies said valuable land was already on the market.

"We won't be coercing anyone to sell," he said. "But we are on the lookout for rainforest properties and while one or two properties won't

solve the problem we do hope it will demonstrate to all levels of government that people want this."

Donations were already trickling in after a launch on the group's website, rainforestrescue.org.au, late on Wednesday, he said.