

Buyback plan to save birds

By JOHN ANDERSEN

A LEADING North Queensland conservationist says that the construction of a sewerage pipeline between Mission Beach and Tully in 2005 has inadvertently become a sinister threat to cassowary survival in the region.

Liz Gallie, a founding member of Mission Beach conservation outfit C4, said the transition from septic to sewerage systems at South Mission Beach, Wongaling and North Mission Beach had opened the doors to large-scale housing developments.

She said cassowaries were the first and major victims of the clearing of lowland rainforest and the construction of housing estates.

Ms Gallie's claim was backed up yesterday by Bob Irwin, father of the late Steve Irwin and grandfather of child eco-warrior, Bindi Irwin.

Mr Irwin, who has taken to making public announcements on important conservation matters since the death of his son Steve in 2006, said urgent action was needed to save the cassowary.

Mr Irwin Snr was at Mission Beach yesterday to lend support to C4 and Mullumbimby-based conservation organisation Rainforest Rescue in their bid to buy back



Conservationist Bob Irwin at Mission Beach

land in order to preserve cassowary habitat.

Mr Irwin said serious thought had to be put into planning for the area.

"You have to keep in mind that Mission Beach's cassowary numbers are down to 40 adults. This is very, very sad," he said.

"This is my first visit to the Mission Beach area for years and I can't believe the amount of land development that has taken place.

"I'm not against progress, but it has to be planned properly. A lot of thought has to go into it. We have to take steps now to protect cassowaries.

"We have to convince the state and federal governments about

the seriousness of what is happening.

"We have to plan for the cassowary so that it has a future."

Mr Irwin said he had a face-to-face encounter with a cassowary at Mission Beach yesterday morning.

"It was an amazing experience to be in the rainforest and to see a cassowary up close. I'd recommend it to anyone," he said.

Ms Gallie said the construction of the sewerage pipeline from Mission Beach to Tully had opened the floodgates to development.

"When it was just septic systems you couldn't have the scale of development that is happening now," she said.

"Just about anything is fair game for developers now at Mission Beach. Now that there's sewerage it's open slather," she said.

"The place is being compromised and the bar for development here now is just getting lower. We are at a time now when we know we have to protect the area," she said.

Ms Gallie said increased housing meant more roads, more fences, loss of habitat and more dogs.

She said C4 recognised the need



UNDER THREAT . . . a cassowary and chicks at Mission Beach. The species is under threat from development Photo: LIZ GALLIE

for a master plan for development at Mission Beach.

She said moves to turn Mission Beach into a year-round tourism hub would only serve to promote negative development proposals and that the area would be better off pursuing a six-month tourism

cycle.

"We should follow a seasonal tourism cycle like the snow towns in the south.

"Everyone here says that they don't want another Port Douglas or another Noosa, but that's the way we're heading."