



STAY CLOSE ... a cassowary with young chicks. Male cassowaries are hard-working single parents

Let's hear it for doting dad

By JOHN ANDERSEN

IF there is one dad in the world who deserves a special mention for performance above and beyond the call of the duty, it is the male cassowary.

This is the view of veteran conservationist Margaret Thorsborne, who has campaigned long and hard for the cassowary and for all of the animals that inhabit North Queensland's wet tropical coast.

Speaking to the *Townsville Bulletin* from her rainforest home deep in the Edmund Kennedy National Park north of Cardwell, the 82-year-old veteran campaigner — after whom Hinchinbrook Island's world famous Thorsborne Trail is named — said that the male cassowary sits on the eggs after they are laid and then looks after the offspring after they hatch. So passionate is she about cassowary dads that last year she nominated them for Queensland Father of the Year.

They didn't get a guernsey, but that doesn't mean she's throttling back on her mission to have single fathers of the cassowary variety held up as a role model for all dads, human and otherwise.

Ms Thorsborne lives surrounded by paperbark swamps, fern gardens and rainforest. Her only neighbours are scrub turkeys, Torres Strait pigeons, mozzies, kookaburras, crocodiles, cassowaries and wallabies.

She has lived in her swamp and rainforest world since 1972 and in that time has become part of the landscape of this wet and wild part of the North.

She has seen the same male cassowary she calls Cass with chicks for the last eight years and she thinks he is the best



LEFT: Margaret Thorsborne at her rainforest home

dad in the land.

"He's had six lots of chicks that I know of. He looks after them for nine months and then they have to fend for themselves. They have to go off and find their own territory," she said.

In her submission for the cassowary to be named father of the year, she wrote, tongue in cheek, that: "(The male cassowary) is a fine North Queensland father and has excellence of character, residency, no problems with alcohol or drugs, nor has he any criminal convictions.

"He is a single parent and sits carefully and patiently for about seven weeks on large, lustrous green eggs laid by his partner, who takes no further responsibility."

She said that after the chicks hatched the male cassowary watched their every move and ensured they were fed and tutored in the art of survival.

"He is a most diligent father and for

the next nine long months has no leisure time for himself. He is the sole carer. Everything depends on him," she said.

Ms Thorsborne said the cassowaries that lived in the Edmund Kennedy National Park were reasonably safe compared with their cousins at Mission Beach, which were being run over by cars, attacked by domestic dogs, and shut out of their feeding grounds by subdivision fences.

She said habitat destruction was a major issue for cassowary survival at Mission Beach.

"They are safe here (Edmund Kennedy) but there is not as many here as there are at Mission Beach," she said.

Ms Thorsborne said she was concerned about the fate of chicks once they were weaned from their fathers at nine months of age.

"They are territorial birds and I don't know if there is enough room for all of them in the park," she said.