

FRUITS AND SEEDS FROM FAECES OF DWARF CASSOWARY
CASUARIUS BENNETTI FROM 3260 M ON ENGLISH PEAKS,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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INTRODUCTION

In response to Andrew Mack's request for information on the biology of cassowaries (Mack 1990) I analysed two faecal samples from Lake Omha, English Peaks, in Oro Province, Papua New Guinea (c. 8° 45'S, 147° 29'E, PNG Topographic Survey 1:100,000 Sheet 8380). The samples were collected during short field trips to a site at 3620 m in the Owen Stanley Mountains, where Beehler and co-workers have been studying the feeding biology of Macgregor's Bird of Paradise.

Cassowaries are large, flightless birds whose diet consists almost exclusively of fruits (Crome 1975; Mack 1990; Pratt 1983; Stocker & Irvine 1983). Three species occur in Papua New Guinea but only the Dwarf Cassowary occurs at such a high elevation (Beehler *et al.* 1986).

The faecal samples were lumps of semi-digested plant material in which seeds and partially digested fruits were clearly visible, and there was only a small amount of leaf material. One of the lumps measured 8 x 6 cm, and thus was unlikely to be the droppings of any other animal.

The vegetation at this altitude is a mosaic of forest and subalpine grassland. The forest canopy at c. 10 m is dominated by the gymnosperm *Dacrycarpus compactus* (Podocarpaceae), which has short, needle-like leaves, and small angiosperm trees including *Rapanèa* spp. (Myrsinaceae) are also abundant. The open areas of grasses and sedges, with small herbs and some tree ferns (*Cyathea* spp.), have patches of dwarf woody shrubs, such as *Eurya brassii*, *Coprosma divergens*, and *Styphelia suaveolens*, up to c. 30 cm high. Around the forest edge are numerous shrubs such as *Dimorphanthera macbainii* and *D. amplifolium*, *Symplocos cochinchinensis*, *Decatoca spenseri*, and *Rhododendron* spp. from c. 1-3 m high. Many of the small woody plants have small fleshy fruits that are attractive to small frugivorous birds. Vegetation and flora of this type are described and illustrated by Coode & Stevens (1972).

METHODS

Sample 1 was collected by M.J.G. Hopkins from open grassland in April 1988, and was in two lumps which were analysed together. Sample 2 was collected by Keith Harris from forest edge in Oct-Nov 1988.