

CAPE PARROT NEWSLETTER



Cape Parrot Big Birding Day May 2013

The annual Cape Parrot Big Birding Day (CPBBD) will be on the 4 and 5th May 2013. Please diarise this. This is a wonderful way to assist in a conservation effort and often gets volunteers out to places they would rarely visit. Each year a group of students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal assist in monitoring the forests around Ingeli in southern KwaZulu-Natal. The forests here are typical of those where the Cape Parrots occur. The importance of the annual CPBBD is highlighted in several ways. Firstly, it gives population trends and numbers. Secondly, observers report illegal hunting, cutting down of forest, and capture of parrots. Thirdly, it gives important distribution data for the Cape parrot.

CAPE PARROT *(Poicephalus robustus)*

The Cape Parrot is a short-tailed moderately large bird with a very large beak used to crack all sorts of hard nuts and fruit kernels, especially those of African yellowwood trees



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Cape Parrot Big Birding Day

May 2013

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A list of co-ordinators for the different areas for CPBBD is in Appendix 1.

This is the sixteenth Cape Parrot Big Birding Day (CPBBD) to be on the afternoon of the 4th and morning of the 5th May 2013.

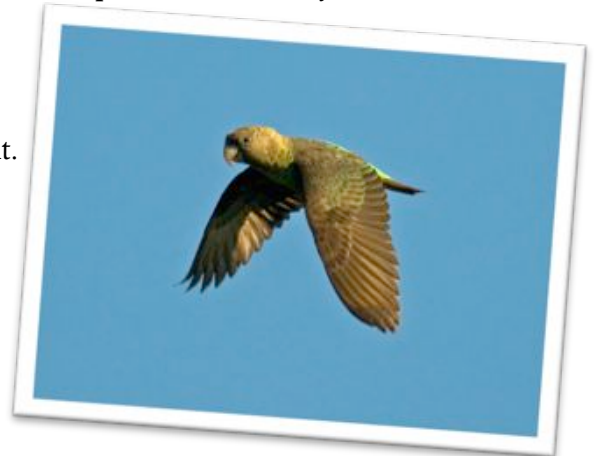
Remember even a nil count is as important as any of the others. As the numbers of birds are low, this census is extremely important in highlighting their plight. Cape Parrots are usually active in the early morning (around sunrise especially so you need to get out there before day break) and late afternoon until dark. This year the count is particularly important to determine if the effects of the beak and feather disease are wide spread and if numbers have declined.

Cape Parrots make inter-forest movements and because of their distinct piercing call while flying are easy to spot on these inter-forest flights. Cape Parrots at a distance can be confused with African Olive (Rameron) Pigeons. However, Cape Parrots usually call in flight thereby making this sort of identification virtually impossible. Please note from which compass direction birds arrive or depart from a locality so that we can avoid over counting.

If you are fortunate to observe Cape Parrots close by, please try and identify numbers of males, females and/or juveniles present. Juveniles should be active in juvenile flocks at this time of the year.

All adult birds have orange on the shoulder (bend of wing) and ankles (tibia), while females have orange on the forehead.

Males usually lack orange on the forehead, but there are



exceptions where a small amount of orange is present, usually only visible at very close quarters. Juveniles have orange only on the forehead, and absence of orange on the ankles and wing. The head and neck are also slightly darker in juveniles and these birds often solicit food from their parents.

For the experienced "parroter" the bill is slightly smaller in juveniles and first year birds.

If you observe Cape Parrots feeding, please try and identify the tree species. If the birds are active near your post and you are able to watch the behaviour of the birds, please record these including types of calls, allopreening behaviour, aggressive behaviour, wing displays and anything else you may find interesting or unusual eg. birds with yellow feathers or "bald".

Under the heading "other comments" you may wish to make comments about the day and whether you would be interested in participating in future "Parrot Days".

If you have any queries or wish to get further information about the day please do not hesitate to contact me. Although the primary interest is Cape Parrots, I hope you will get out there and enjoy yourself in what can be viewed as a Forest Conservation Day.

a.



b.



Figure 1. Ingeli forest mosaic in southern KwaZulu-Natal.



Places to Stay and See Cape Parrots

Some of you may be needing accommodation for CPBBDD. Also many ask where they can visit and stay to see parrots. Each newsletter we will try to highlight some possibilities. If your guest house is close to a place where visitors can see Cape Parrots and you would like it highlighted in the newsletter, please contact us. Below are some suggestions:

- ✦ Self catering cottage called "Nibelheim" in Hogsback where you see Parrots in the garden most days when the apple trees are fruiting. Contact Graham & Michele Russell, ph 0459621084, cell:0823746583, www.nibelheim.co.za; email: gandm@procomp.co.za
- ✦ In Creighton KwaZulu-Natal, the guest house run by Malcolm and Gail Gemmell is recommended. Malcolm has been a stalwart in organising and co-ordinating the CPBBDD in the greater Creighton area and runs Button birding (see www.buttonbirding.com for details).
- ✦ Self catering cottage caled "Owl cottage" that sleeps 6 right in the kloof at Magoebaskloof. Flocks of 30+ Cape Parrots feeding on pecans especially in February. Website www.owlcottage.co.za, or contact Phil And Tig Warne, Haenertsburg, A.44.2 on R71 Magoebaskloof; Tig 082 853 9950
- ✦ In Bulwer KwaZulu-Natal, there is the excellent Marutswa Board Walk close to the village. (See www.treeroutes.co.za/project-marutswa-forest-boardwalk-bulwer). There are bird guides who know the parrots and other forest specials. There are several B&Bs in Bulwer. In addition the nearby Ashtonvale Guest Farm, run by Carol and Russell Hill who have co-ordinated the CPBBDD in the Bulwer area the past 14 years, is also recommended. (www.ashtonvaleguestfarm.co.za).
- ✦ Granny Mouse House in the Hogsback. For more information, please see the website <http://www.grannymousehouse.co.za> or contact Ingrid email: ingi@iafrica.com; 0459621259 or 0832611144.
- ✦ In the Amatole region there are a number of B&Bs in Stutterheim and Hogsback and Shire Eco Lodge on the forest edge run by Rob Scott is recommended (see www.shire.co.za).
- ✦ Khululeka Retreat at the Ntafufu River mouth on the Wild Coast. For more information, please see the website: www.khululeka.co.za or contact Armin von Lengeling email: stay@khululeka.co.za; 27 (0)72 194 3644
- ✦ Wild Coast- Drifters has 5 little basic lodges along the Wild Coast between Mkambati and Port St Johns. They are at Msikaba, Port Grosvenor, Luphatana, Manteku and Ntafufu. All have extensive indigenous forests around them and Cape Parrots sighted at all sites from time to time. Self catering. Bookings can be made through Belinda@drifters.co.za

(If you have a place to stay where Cape Parrots can be seen and want it highlighted, please send details to downs@ukzn.ac.za)

Genetics PhD Study

As part of a genetic study on Cape Parrots, we would be grateful if you find any Cape Parrot feathers to put them in an envelope with the locality details and send it to me for our PhD student Riël Coetzer.

Riël's research topic title is the 'Systematics and Phylogeography of the Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*)'. He is being supervised by Dr. Sandi Willows-Munro, with Prof. Mike Perrin and Prof. Colleen Downs as co-supervisors.

The importance of this research cannot be underestimated. The Cape Parrot is the only endemic parrot species in South Africa. There is some debate surrounding the species status of the Cape Parrot.



It was suggested by Clancey (1997) that the Cape Parrot should be viewed as a distinct species, namely *Poicephalus robustus*, distinct from *P. fuscicollis*, which comprises of two subspecies, namely the Grey-headed Parrot *P.f. suahelicus* and the Brown-necked Parrot *P.f. fuscicollis*. This was based on plumage and morphological evidence. Understanding the taxonomy of this group of parrots is increasingly important, given that current estimates suggest that there are only about 1000-1500 Cape Parrot individuals in the wild. Wirminghaus *et al.* (1999, 2000) reported on several factors which likely play a role in the decline of these endemic parrot populations. These include decreasing food and nesting sites, deforestation of natural forests, the removal of wild birds for the caged bird trade, low breeding success, and the prevalence of psittacine beak and feather disease.

Cape Parrots are currently listed as critically endangered under South African legislation (Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2007).

Examination of the species status of Cape Parrots is thus required to better protect these parrots, as it will be easier to enforce conservation and to control legal and illegal trade.

Riël will examine the taxonomy of the Cape Parrot using molecular techniques.



Multilocus data for the three currently recognised subspecies of *Poicephalus robustus* will be examined in light of previously published behavioural, ecological and morphological data to clarify the taxonomic status of the Cape Parrot.

The microsatellite data will also be used in a phylogeographic study to determine the genetic status (Races / subspecies) of the parrot populations in South Africa. In particular, the data will be used in coalescent modelling to determine the relationship between the Eastern Cape population and the Kwa-Zulu Natal populations. The genetic integrity of the northern Limpopo population will also be examined in this study.

For the individual identification of each captive 'Cape' parrot a DNA database will be compiled using a set of microsatellite markers, which have previously been identified in Cape Parrots (Pillay *et al.*, 2010). It will then be possible to detect whether a traded bird is the offspring of a legal breeding pair, thus establishing the legality of the trade.

Samples will be sourced from a variety of museums (UK, Germany and RSA), with blood dot samples from private live collections (locally and abroad), and from field-based sampling. Appropriate ethical clearance and sampling permits will be acquired prior to collection. DNA extraction, amplification and sequencing will follow general molecular biology protocols. Data will be analysed using a combination of phylogenetic, phylogeographic and forensic techniques. The results will be published in peer-reviewed high impact journals.

Cape Parrots in Captivity

Reminder: Shaun Wilkinson, the Cape Parrot Studbook Keeper, based at Monte Casino Bird Gardens in Johannesburg (email: shaun@montebg.co.za) is currently busy with a comprehensive update to the studbook. Owners of Cape Parrots are requested to update him on all chicks produced, transfers or deaths to keep the studbook up to date.

The Cape Parrot is listed as a Threatened or Protected Species (TOPS) under the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004.



As of 1st Feb 2008 all holders of Cape Parrots need to be registered and in possession of TOPS permits. Cape Parrots may not be moved anywhere within or out of the Republic of South Africa without written authorization from both Provincial and National Nature Conservation authorities. Provincial EXPORT & IMPORT permits strictly apply to the movement of Cape Parrots within the county.



VIII International Parrot Convention

22~25 September 2014

The VIII International parrot Convention will take place from the 22nd to 25th September 2014 at Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife, Spain. William Horsfield has been invited as a speaker and will contribute his expertise to the programme at this convention.

REMINDER: New Parrot Book

A new book "The biology, Ecology and Conservation of Parrots from Africa, Madagascar and the Mascarene Islands" by Prof MR Perrin has recently been published by Wits University Press. The focus is African parrots. It covers a range of topics including the biology, ecology and conservation of parrots. The book is dedicated to the late Olaf Wirminghaus who started his PhD on Cape Parrots under the supervision of Prof Perrin. The book is available from leading bookstores or Wits University Press.



Cape Parrot Distribution

Remember to go to the SABAP2 website to record your Cape Parrot observations and so improve the distribution map for the species (see http://sabap2.adu.org.za/spp_summary.php?Spp=4132). It is evident that many localities where Cape Parrots occur in the former Transkei have not been atlased. Perhaps if you are holidaying in this area over the next few months and see the parrots you could contribute your sightings. Birders are encouraged to submit observations of birds, particularly Cape Parrots, as the accuracy and precision of the distribution maps relies on observers submitting their observations.



CONTACT DETAILS

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CAPE Parrot Newsletter Editor:
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Saturday May 4th (pm) and Sunday May 5th (am)

Join us in our annual evening and morning Cape Parrot count to help save one of South Africa's most endangered birds

Contact: Prof Colleen T. Downs

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University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg

Tel: 033-2605127/04 (w),

033-3860947 (h),

0829202026

Email: downs@ukzn.ac.za

Appendix 1.
Contact persons for Cape Parrot Big Birding Day 2013
4th & 5th May 2012

Area	Name	Tel	Email
Overall co-ordinator	Colleen Downs	033 260 5127; 0829202026	downs@ukzn.ac.za
Karkloof	John and Jenny Robinson	033-5029090/ 082-4433805	tomrob@mweb.co.za
Midlands conservancies: Dargle/ Nottingham Rd/ Balgowan	Nikki Brighton	033 234 4289 083 473 3074	cowfriend@telkomsa.net
Byrne Valley	Malcolm Anderson	033 2122744 082 5723455	mmanderson@mweb.co.za
Boston	Barbara & Glyn Bullock	033 997 1783; 0843049842; 0843529864	grbullock@telkomsa.net
Bulwer	Russell Hill	0741267274 082 9239649	carolhill@futurenet.co.za
Creighton / Donnybrook	Malcolm Gemmell	039 8331029 082 7895000	info@buttonbirding.com
Ngeli	Colleen Downs	See above	
Mpur/Glengarry	Andy Ruffle	039 695 0829; 0728933794	andy_ruffle@yahoo.co.uk
Alfred Nzo Region, namely: Ntsiswa, Gomo, Bulembu, Tonti, Amanzinyama and Xhama Forest	Dean Ricketts	0824325104	Dean.Ricketts@deaet.ecape.gov.za
Mthatha Langeni / Matiwane Ngcobo	Gary Harvey Bertus Bouwer	083 452 0883; 043-740 2993 (w) 082 856 3982; 043-726 0513 (w)	vanessa@starsec.net gary@starsec.net / starsec@mweb.co.za bertus@starsec.net
Hogsback	Graham Russell	045 9621084 0823746583	gandm@procomp.co.za
Stutterheim	Neill Harvey Donald Kemp	043-6832384 073 4272 119, 043-683 1661	alliedin@eci.co.za donald@barkaybirds.co.za
Wild Coast (Port St Johns)	Kathryn Costello	047 5641240	outspan@wildcoast.co.za
Mbotyi	Wendy Ayliffe Taz Moola	039-2537200/01	info@mbotyi.co.za
KWT/Alice	Gertie Griffith Peter Mather- Pike	043 7352195 043 7403566 0829248514	gerken@intekom.com pamp@supafeeds.co.za
Limpopo Province	David Letsoalo	0835684678	info@krm.co.za