

# Cape Parrot Newsletter

## UKZN Cape Parrot Adventure

The 19th annual Cape Parrot Big Birding Day (CPBBD) took place on 4th and 5th June this year. Every year a group of students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) assist in monitoring the forests around Ingeli in southern KZN which has the typical forests where Cape Parrots occur. This year was quite an adventure for the students. They set out from the Pietermaritzburg campus early Saturday morning to Ingeli. After setting up camp they divided into groups to cover the Ingeli and Mpsheni Forests. The road to the Mpsheni Forest is rough, unpredictable and dangerous when wet so for the past few years the UKZN group has not been able to monitor those forests on parrot day. This year the road was drivable and conditions good so they finally got up to the forests. Three 4x4 vehicles made the journey up the steep roads for the Saturday afternoon parrot count, which did not yield many significant sightings. However it all was too much for the oldest vehicle which broke down in the dark far from camp. Fortunately the local DEA forest rangers, who also participated in the count, were there to assist. A bit demoralized the students made their way up again for the count the next morning. Spirits were lifted during that morning count as everyone there had good sightings of parrots with some seeing groups of up to 31 parrots gathering and feeding! All in all the Mpsheni Forest is an important site to monitor during the Cape parrot counts and the UKZN students will continue to make an effort to get there each year.



UKZN student volunteers for Cape Parrot Big Birding Day 2016

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# Parrots at the PAOC

This year the 14th Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC) was held in Dakar, Senegal from 16 to 21 October 2016. The symposium on parrots “Advances in the ecology of parrots in Africa” included talks on, coastal island parrots, the beak and feather virus, supplementary feeding for breeding success of parakeets, a keynote talk on the wild bird trade, and the taxonomy and population counts of the Cape parrot. The following highlights the key points from some of the talks that may have an impact on Cape parrot conservation:

## Parrot trade in Africa

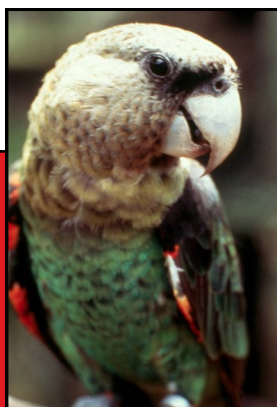
The parrot trade in Africa is one of the main threats to wild parrot populations. The keynote talk at PAOC this year focused on the situation of Grey parrots, which are the most common and highest traded parrots in Africa. The collapse of many of the wild Grey parrot populations has drawn attention to the framework regulating international trade. In the talk it was suggested that the detailed workings of the trade need to be investigated, from harvesting to shipments, to better understand how to create and implement effective trade policies.

## Beak and feather disease virus

Psittacine beak and feather disease (Pbfd) is caused by the Beak and feather disease virus (BFDV). It originated in the South Pacific in the 1970s and spread worldwide because of trade. The prevalence of the virus in wild parrot populations was investigated in Africa and Asia. One of the major concerns coupled with worldwide trade is the introduction of novel virus isolates to wild populations.

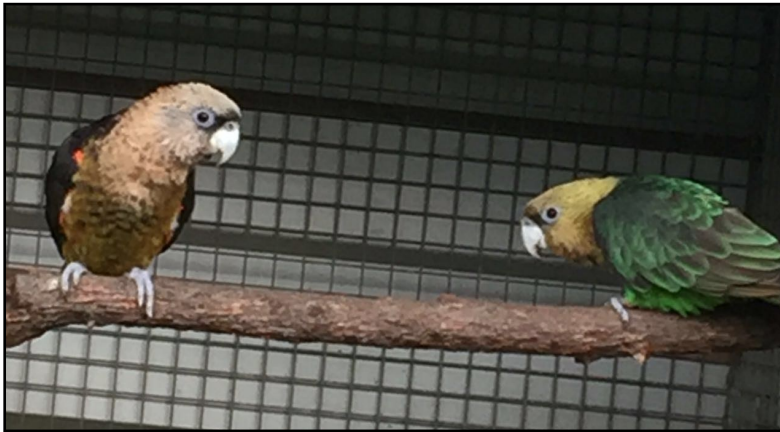
## Supplementary feeding to improve parakeet breeding

Supplementary feeding helps in the conservation of small bird populations and this was investigated for the Echo parakeet (*Psittacula eques*) which is endemic to Mauritius. They found that breeding success in the wild population was significantly improved in terms of hatch numbers and chick survival, with the use of supplementary feeding stations. The highlight of this study is the use of feeding stations as an important and effective conservation tool.



# Cape Parrot Photo gallery

Lennart Eriksson Hogsback



William Horsfield provided these photos documenting an unusual Cape parrot colour variation. This parrot appears more bronze on the breast and head and dark brown instead of green on the upper wings, but it still maintains its red shoulder patches.



# Cape Parrot Big Birding Day 2016

The CPBBD is usually held in April or May but this year it was much later than usual (4 - 5 June). The areas of South Africa covered by the count included the Eastern Cape, KZN and Limpopo Provinces where Cape Parrots occur. This year at least 283 volunteers were posted at 105 localities in the three provinces. Unfortunately as the CPBBD was held later than usual most Cape Parrots were seen feeding in the forests which may have led to some overcounting. From June-September the yellowwoods (*Podocarpus/ Afrocarpus* spp.) in the forests fruit. These fruits are sought after by the parrots and at one locality an observer saw 31 parrots feeding on the fruit. Usually when the CPBBD is held in April or May the Cape Parrots move between forests more and often fly to non-forest localities to feed on fruit of pecan nut trees (*Carya illinoensis*). This makes counting much easier and reduces the probability of repeatedly counting the same birds. Consequently in 2017 the count will be earlier in the year in the first weekend in May.

This year despite the poor weather on one of the days in many areas, at least 984 parrots were seen during the afternoon count while 1479 were seen the following morning. The maximum number of Cape Parrots counted was 460 in KZN, 441 in the former Transkei, 557 in the former Eastern Cape, and 41 in Limpopo Province. This suggests that there were at least 1499 in the wild on the CPBBD in 2016. This is likely underestimated as having the CPBBD later in the year seems to have had an impact on numbers counted. On the Sunday the parrots were observed at 64% of localities while there 52% were observed at localities on the Saturday. The localities where no parrots were observed are ones where the birds have been seen previously so they needed to be covered, although for observers nil counts are often very negative. Again several observers commented on how Pied (*Corvus albus*) and Cape/Black Crows (*C. capensis*) were disturbing the Cape Parrots. One group observed a Cape Parrot pair at a nest cavity.

**The next Cape Parrot Big Birding Day will be on 6 and 7<sup>th</sup> May 2017.**



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