

Cape Parrot Newsletter

Number 2 - February 2007



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A Word from the Editor

Happy new year to you all, here is the second Cape Parrot newsletter.

This month I have included a variety of topics some related directly to the Cape Parrot, others are more distantly related in varying degrees. Any contributions to the next newsletter would be very welcome - especially current items relating to Cape Parrots. Wishing you all the best for 2007.

Tee

You can now download this and previous newsletters from the web site: www.ukzn.ac.za/Biology/CPNewsletter905.aspx

Header Photo: CPBBD 2001

The header photo shows a flock of Cape Parrots at sunrise with the city of Umtata in the background.

In the photo on the right another flock of Cape parrots seen from this observation point near Umtata.

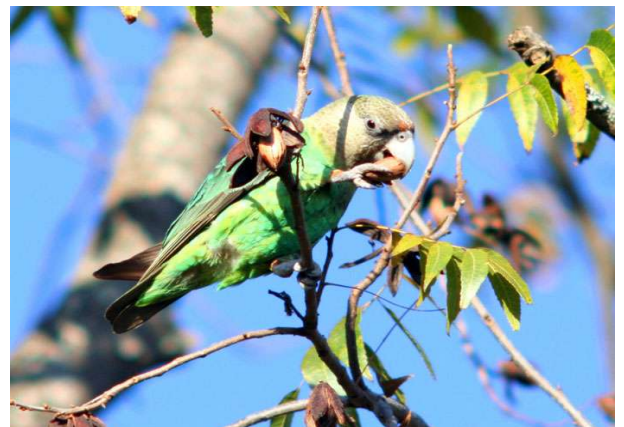
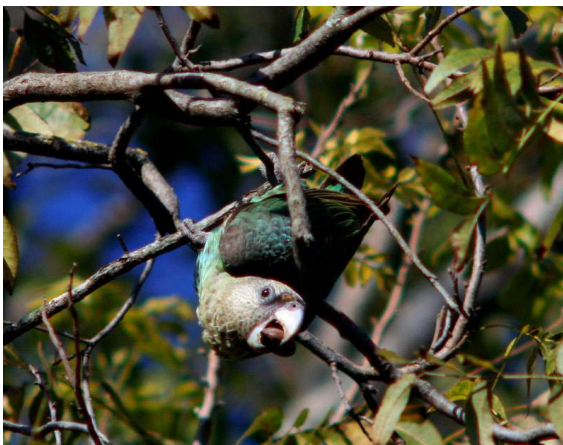
These photo were taken during the 2001 Cape Parrot Big Birding Day by Louise Warburton, the CPWG co-ordinator at that time.

It is the 10th CPBBD on the 5th and 6th May this year why not get involved. See the details of how later in the newsletter. .



Wild Cape Parrot's eating Pecan Nuts: CPWG / Steve Burton

Below are a couple of photos taken by Steve Burton recently whilst he was checking on reported sightings of Cape Parrots on behalf of the Cape Parrot Working Group. These birds were feeding on pecan nuts in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.



For any further information contact Colleen Downs: Downs@ukzn.ac.za

Get involved and help count Cape Parrots on its 10th Anniversary!

The next Cape Parrot Big Birding Day in 2007 will be the 10th year the CPBBD has taken place.

It will be held on the Saturday afternoon of the 5th May and the morning of the Sunday 6th May.

Overall Co-ordinator: Colleen Downs Downs@ukzn.ac.za

Contact details for the co-ordinators for the different observation areas are:

Area	Name	Tel	Email
Overall co-ordinator	Prof. Colleen Downs	033 260 5127 0829202026	downs@ukzn.ac.za
Zululand (Nkandla & Qudeni)	Pat Brenchley	035 474 2629 082 654 3549	pat.brenchley@sugar.org.za
Newcastle (Ncandu)	Tony Roberts	034 2125585 082 8217779	trtours@dundeeukzn.co.za
Karkloof	Caroline Goble	033 3304590 0721399057	triandra@nitrosoft.co.za
Dargle/ Nottingham Rd/ Balgowan	Adam Robinson	033 2344484 0726146081	adamjnr@mweb.co.za
Byrne Valley	Malcolm Anderson	033 2122744 082 5723455	mmanderson@mweb.co.za
Boston	Barbara & Glyn Bullock	033 997 1783	
Bulwer	Russell Hill	039 8320053	carolhill@futurenet.co.za
Creighton/Donnybrook	Malcolm Gemmell	039 8331029 082 7895000	buttonbirding@futurenet.co.za
Weza/ Glengarry	Bongani Dzidla Colleen Downs	039 5530411 0720394679	
Mpur/Glengarry	Louis Marx Christie Potgeiter Stuart Charlton Dan Dekker	039 6821468 039 553 0401 083 662 1423 039 7479050	jeanmarx@cybertrade.co.za christiep@hansmerensky.co.za stuartc@hansmerensky.co.za dekkerd@xsinet.co.za
Kokstad	Pat Lowry	039 7273844	lowry@kznwildlife.com
Mthatha Langeni / Matiwane Ngcobo	Gary Harvey	0834520883, 0436422791h, 0406350283w	indwesec@mweb.co.za
Hogsback	Ingrid Luyt	045-962-1259	ingi@iafrica.com
Stutterheim	Neill Harvey	043-6832384	alliedin@eci.co.za
Wild Coast (Port St Johns)	Kathryn Costello	047 5641240	outspan@wildcoast.co.za
Mbotyi	John Duff	039 253 8822	foodtour@iafrica.com
KWT/Alice	Gertie Griffith Peter Mather-Pike	043 7352195 043 7403566 0829248514	gerken@intekom.com petcher@freemail.absa.co.za
Northern Province	David Letsoala Cathy Dzerefos Kobus Pienaar Coenraad van Zyl	083 568 4678 015 2762704 083 7462239 015 2765003 082 809 8875 082 801 0014 / 015 733 0444	info@krm.co.za cathy@dzerefos.com pienaarAJ@ledet.gov.za Coenraadvz@TelkomSA.net

Request for Information on Cape Parrot Illegal Activity: EKZNW

Illegal trade, in any species of wildlife, often goes under the guise of legitimate trade. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife are wanting to put together a jigsaw puzzle of all activities, both legal and illegal, that surround the Cape Parrot - both in captivity and the wild. This will enable them to obtain a clear overall picture of what is occurring, and to detect where illegal activities might creep into the picture. They are keen to obtain any information about the capture, sale or possession of Cape Parrots related to illegal activities or activities that perhaps appear unusual or suspicious.

Any questions or reports of incidents can be made (anonymously if that is preferred) to either Rod Potter at 082 772 8343 or Gerhard Oosthuizen 072 132 6220.

The Cape Parrot Working Group will be having a executive committee meeting on the 8th March to discuss a number of issues. Should anyone have issues that they feel should be discussed at this meeting by the committee please could you provide details to the CPWG Chairman Mike Perrin on email address: CapeParrot@ukzn.ac.za An CPWG annual general meeting, to which all stakeholders will be invited, is to be arranged for later in the year.

3rd Generation Captive Breeding of Cape Parrots: William Horsfield

The breeding season for the captive birds has been a long one with different pairs going down over an extended period. While 1st F3 chicks are on the perch the second clutch from the same pair are about to leave the nest, having been raised entirely by the parents which were both handraised.

Another two pairs have just laid clutches of 4 eggs each and these chicks should be weaned in the next 16 weeks. Only the female Cape Parrot incubates the eggs although the male often keeps her company in the next box and both parents feed the chicks once they are hatched.



Like other Poicephalus, very young Cape chicks often lie flat on their backs when being fed by the female.

Once they have left the nest the parents continue to feed them for another 2-3 weeks after which they are independent and eat on their own. Young birds have varying amounts of colour on the forehead and it is common for the young male birds to have more colour than the females which is interesting because adult male birds have no colour on the head whatsoever. Only the adult females have the typical coral pink crown on the head although this does vary from bird to bird. Some adult females have only a few coloured feathers on the forehead and there are cases of adult females with no colour whatsoever on the head so this makes it possible to confuse them with adult males.



Juvenile birds do not have any orange coloured feathers on the bend of the wing or above the feet on the legs and as such are easy to distinguish from adults. There is an abundance of hawthorn at the moment (pyracantha) and the Capes love these small juicy orange berries.

Contact: William Horsfield Email: amazona@iafrica.com

Website: www.amazona.co.za/news/capes.htm

Photos taken by William Horsfield: Cape Parrots bred at the Amazona Endangered Parrot Breeding Facility



Cape Parrots at Magoebaskloof - Craig Symes

The taxonomic classification of the Cape Parrot has been in question for some time and the recent split of Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus* from the Greyheaded Parrot *P. fuscicollis* has lacked genetic support. The respective species are morphologically different, have different colourations, utilise different habitats and have allopatric ranges; however genetic data are required to support this split. Ongoing research has attempted to generate an interpretation from a wide range of genetic samples throughout the range of each taxon. This project, under the wing of the Cape Parrot Working Group, has been co-ordinated Prof Mike Perrin and Prof Colleen Downs at UKZN, and Prof Paulette Bloomer at the University of Pretoria.

Preliminary genetic investigations have been made but further samples of blood/tissue are still required from birds originating from known locations in order to complete this work. Whilst breeders have been able to provide some samples to assist towards this initiative more samples are required especially from birds known to have originated in the wild from specific locations. In particular, it is required that the relationship of *Poicephalus robustus* occurring in the Magoebaskloof with *Poicephalus fuscicollis suahelicus* in the north-eastern lowveld be investigated.

The Magoebaskloof population of Cape Parrots, estimated at c. 100 birds is geographically closer to the Greyheaded Parrots than it's conspecifics occurring c. 650 km further south in KwaZulu-Natal. During my MSc study of the

Greyheaded Parrot in 1999-2000 blood samples were collected from Greyheaded Parrots in the northern Kruger NP and Makuya Park. Therefore, the collection of blood from Magoebaskloof birds would hopefully clarify any queries concerning the relationships of *Poicephalus robustus* taxa.

In April 2006, to assist supply samples towards this project I travelled to Woodbush forest in the Magoebaskloof, Limpopo and collected blood samples from two wild birds. From morphometrics and particularly colouration I was able to confirm the birds as *P. robustus* as opposed to *P. fuscicollis suahelicus*.



Cape Parrot caught for blood samples and morphometrics



Craig releases Cape Parrot

As with all wild samples taken by the CPWG, Molecular Diagnostic Services (MDS) kindly checked the samples for PBFDV (both birds were negative) and also sexed the birds. I had also been able to sex the young birds correctly from their colouring, which was confirmed by MDS. In addition to supplying samples to Paulette, I have also lodged blood samples with the Wildlife Biological Resource Centre in Johannesburg so they are available for researchers into the future.

Rob & Debbie Morris and family, and Tig & Phil Warne are thanked for assistance during bird capture in the Magoebaskloof, and Darren Pietersen (UP) for fieldwork assistance during bird capture.

Craig Symes contact details: craig.symes@zoology.up.ac.za

Cape Parrot Studbook: Shaun Wilkinson

A few more details about the Cape Parrot studbook. There are currently around 170 Cape Parrots listed in the Cape Parrot Studbook, with details from more birds awaited. Hopefully there will also be an increase with this years chicks. The majority of these birds are in South Africa mainly held by private individuals and aviculturalists, but also include birds maintained in 3 South African Institutions. There are also 30 birds held in an European Institution who details are held within the studbook. If you have any questions or wish to add your birds details to the studbook please contact Shaun Wilkinson the studbook holder.

Contact: Shaun Wilkinson at the Umgeni River Bird Park: (031) 579 4600, Email: urbpmark@iafrica.com

Cape Parrot DNA Bank: Tee Taylor

As a result of my research with the Darwin Initiative DNA project I have recently been able to send a batch of duplicate Cape Parrot blood samples (>60 *robustus*, 10 *fuscicollis* & 9 *suahelicus*) to the Wildlife Biological Resources Centre (WBRC) in Pretoria. The WBRC is an organisation that aims to keep a DNA bank for endangered species over the long term future. This will provide a future safe resource to any other researchers wishing to work on the conservation of the species. DNA can be obtained from a variety of sample types (e.g. blood, tissue, feathers). If one of your birds has a blood sample taken for medical reasons consider asking the vet to take a second sample so that you can send it to the DNA Bank.

The WBRC are also interested in receiving biological samples from other endangered species. If you would like to know more about the potential for adding samples from your own Cape Parrots to this DNA bank please contact the Wildlife Biological Resource Centre: Tel: (012) 3055840 or Email: info@wbrc.org.za

EU to Ban Import of Wild Caught Birds

In Europe the temporary ban on importing wild caught birds is to be made permanent in July. This ban was originally part of the measures to prevent the spread of the H5N1 virus but following this there was a campaign by many animal welfare charities to make the ban permanent. There will also be tighter controls on the import of captive bred birds. Prior to the ban it is estimated that 60% of the 1.7 million wild birds that entered the EU each year in trade died in transit. The news article can be found at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6253543.stm>

This will not really affect the Cape Parrot as international trade in wild caught Cape Parrots has not occurred recently, and the ban does not affect captive bred birds. Hopefully it will not lead to the increased laundering of other species to try to circumvent these regulations, such as is thought to occur to some extent with the African Grey Parrot through South Africa. With laundering birds are imported into a country as wild caught, spend some time in that country, and are then fraudulently exported as 'captive bred'.

Poicephalus fuscicollis Studbook & Genetics

Although not Cape Parrots in the strictest sense the following information may be of interest.

Peter Welcke, who breeds Kuhl's and Reichenow's Greyheaded, has provided details of the website for the German Poicephalus Studbook: www.poicephalus.info



Peter has also informed me that the following article will be appearing shortly (July 2007) in Papageien. The paper details the use of genetic differences to determine the two subspecies of the Grey-headed Parrot *Poicephalus fuscicollis* (*P. f. fuscicollis* and *P. f. suahelicus*). The markers used determine the history of the maternal line. It is unfortunate that it is still difficult for us to determine hybrids as this is a technique that would be useful with many species.

Pfeiffer I & P Welcke (2007) *Untersuchungen zur molekulargenetischen Unterartidentifizierung am Beispiel des Graukopfpapageis Poicephalus fuscicollis*. Papageien 20 (7).

Web Sites of Interest:

I have included a few web sites that may be of interest (please let me know of others):

The Cape Parrot Working Group Web Site: www.cpwg.unp.ac.za
and the new email address is CapeParrot@ukzn.ac.za

The Cape Parrot has featured on several **50/50 TV programmes** here are some of the links
(2000) www.5050.co.za/inserts.asp?ID=4721 (Feb 2002) www.5050.co.za/inserts.asp?ID=2415
(May 2002) www.5050.co.za/inserts.asp?ID=2542 (Nov 2002) www.5050.co.za/inserts.asp?ID=4594

Thor's Cape Parrot website run by Craig Harris in the US: www.caeparrot.org

Scott Lewis has several links to Cape Parrot articles <http://www.oldworldaviaries.com/info.html> & <http://www.wingscentral.org/aps/faqcapes.aspx>

Global Climate Change

There have been several reports recently in respect of global climate change. They provide insight from a variety of angles, biodiversity, birds economics, I suppose in the hope that somewhere down the line they will find something that actually is sufficiently valuable to us that we are finally triggered to do something about it. How little I, or man in general, is doing to combat this has been bugging my mind a lot recently.

Global climate change: effect on birds: the WWF recently published a report on this. http://www.panda.org/news_facts/publications/index.cfm?uNewsID=86520

One of the things reported was that species in mountain habitats are likely to suffer the effects of global warming requiring them to move either to higher altitudes or polewards if they are reliant on a specific temperature. Whilst the Cape Parrot unlike many species can fly, it relies upon South African afro-montane habitats to provide it with a suitable habitat, the other species that it co-exists with and relies on may not be able to shift in response to these changes and in turn this may increase the Cape Parrots vulnerability.

There was also another report on the **economic effects climate change**:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm

This suggests that if worldwide action is not taken immediately it will result in the equivalent of between 5-20% of GDP being lost each year, if immediate action is taken this could be limited to 1%.

In the recent newsletter of the South African Crane Working Group '**Grus Grapevine**', Leon commented on development plans that will impact on important Crane habitat through the loss of grasslands in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal to mining for coal or conversion to bio-diesel crops. Then in the **Ground Hornbill Newsletter** LD included a piece by John McKinnon on his view of the '**Honest State of Biodiversity**' (full version: <http://home.pacbell.net/mjvande/scb5.htm>). As I am currently searching for money and a topic to research for when my current project ends, I felt more guilt as I read the second paragraph:

The world is in a terrible state. The situation is worse than most ecologists' worst nightmares. The biosphere is literally collapsing ecologically and world leaders are completely unconcerned, unwilling to do anything to help (e.g. Kyoto Protocol) and totally engrossed in quite trivial games trying to make other people love them by threatening them with bombs and rockets (War on Terror)...

Conservationists have been totally ineffective. We have failed to prove our argument and cannot even show success when someone does give us some real money to play with. If we thought there was anyone out there who could do the job better, we ought to commit hari-kiri. At the very least, we should put on a public display of self-flagellation. We fail because we are so narrowly focussed on our own little projects or species interests that we fail to see the big picture. We completely underestimate the scale of the problems. We confidently ride on our horses, rattling our sabres and charge into battle against a column of tanks. We doggedly pursue a totally flawed logic and methodology. We fail to learn from our mistakes. We winge at how little money we are given and we fail to forge powerful alliances with any forces big enough to make any real difference.

One of the problems we face as conservationists or researchers when searching for funding is that we generally need to gear our work to what the funders are interested in (if we don't someone else gets the grant) and then we try to include the things that matter to us within the overall project. It can be a bit of a Catch 22.

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