

# Cape Parrot Newsletter

## Number 9 - February 2010



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*Research*

- ✦ Dr Graham Grieve is working with Prof Colleen Downs on a Cape Parrot habitat and foraging project in the E. Cape and KZN: a study that is running in parallel with an equivalent study in the Amatole region.
- ✦ Prof Mike Perrin has applied for a grant to the SA Biodiversity Initiative to further study the natural geographical variation and species status of the Cape Parrot, with Prof Pauline Bloomer at the University of Pretoria, Dr David Allan at the Durban Natural Science Museum and Dr Shernice Soobramoney. It was not funded but will be resubmitted.
- ✦ Kerry Pillay, who has been studying the individual molecular finger prints of Cape Parrots has published her results with Dr Tee Taylor.
- ✦ Prof Colleen Downs and Meyrick Bowker are completing a snag manuscript and another on distribution of Cape Parrots

*Cata Project - Daniel Marnewick.*

The project has progressed well and the biggest achievements are:

1. The Cata Cape Parrot Bird Trail has its first three trails completed with signage. Three community members have been trained as bird guides.
2. Through ongoing community awareness, school education programmes and the youth eco-club, the community now refer to themselves as Cape Parrot Custodians (Real Parrotroopers!).
3. Small nature based businesses have been established, i.e. grass brooms, walking sticks, food gardens, bead work and bird guides, linking in with the tourism development in the community.
4. A participatory Forest Management Committee has been established, albeit not very functional due to lack of capacity and support from DWAF (DAFF) and local forest companies. Unfortunately the former has led to a delay of a forest management plan

### *Cape Parrot Chick is now an Adult – Colleen Downs*

Those of you who know Malcolm Gemmell and his passion for birding, especially Cape Parrots and other KwaZulu-Natal midlands birds, will know how delighted and ecstatic he was when he spied a ring on a wild Cape Parrot male he was observing with his birding clients during September 2009. This male was soliciting the attention of a female Cape Parrot.

Why was this so exciting? Some of you may have heard or read about the Cape Parrot nest that a group of us from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg were monitoring in 2001. The nest had been found by Eduard Goosen and colleagues from Coleford Nature Reserve, KZN Wildlife. Craig Symes, Mark Brown, and Louise Warburton had been making observations and collecting data on the chicks' development. This was the first detailed study of Cape Parrot chick development in the wild and Don Guy filmed the research that was later shown on 50/50. It involved climbing up to the nest that was a cavity in a tree in the forest. Three chicks had hatched, two males and a female. Unfortunately it was found that the female had a broken beak. After much consultation with veterinarians, bird experts and nature conservation officials it was decided to remove the female chick from the nest and rear her in captivity as it was felt she would be unable to feed in the wild on her own.

I still remember my mother's horror when she heard that I had been travelling on the bumpy district roads around Creighton and traipsing up remote hills in forest to watch the nest and help the students. I was an 'older' mum and eight months pregnant with my first child who we later called Victoria.

In captivity the chick was later called Vicky. She progressed well and reached adulthood. She was included in the captive breeding programme of William Horsfield. She later paired with a male and produced a chick in 2007 which I thought of as a victory. Unfortunately in 2008 she died from a liver disease.

But what about the two male nestlings? Before they successfully fledged a special ring/band was placed on each of their legs for identification by Craig Symes and Mark Brown. This was the ring that Malcolm now saw eight years later on one of the birds that was now adult and reproducing. Interestingly it was only a few kilometers from his original nest site. To me this was our second victory. This also highlights the importance of ringing birds.

### *Conferences*

Mike Perrin, and Colleen Downs and Shernice Soobramoney will be participating in the International Ornithological Conference in Brazil in September 2010. Mike attended a Parrot Symposium in Ireland in July 2009 and participated in the World Parrot Trust Celebrations. He visited the Echo Parakeet Rehabilitation Project in Mauritius in November 2009. He presented two papers at the Australasian Ornithological Conference in Armidale in December 2009, and has been invited to give a plenary talk at Parrots Internal in San Deigo in May 2010.

### *Current Activities*

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr Shernice Soobramoney as assistant to the Cape Parrot Working Group. Shernice worked on Fiscal Shrikes with Colleen Downs for her PhD and then did some post-doc work on passerine feeding preferences and lovebird vocalisations with Mike Perrin. She is currently employed at SANPAD.

Mike Perrin retires in June 2010 and so has relinquished the chair of the CPWG. Colleen Downs will continue in this position. THE CPWG will function at a lower level with the absence of a full-time co-ordinator. Coll will continue to co-ordinate the Parrot day and other parrot research. She will also liaise with the public. William Horsfield will continue to advice on captive birds and Shaun Wilkinson will continue as studbookkeeper for captive birds. All are involved in monitoring illegal trade in birds.

### *Cape Parrot Day 2010*

As diaries start to fill for 2010, please may you book Saturday 8th May and Sunday 9th May for our **thirteenth** Cape Parrot Big Birding Day.

#### Contact persons for Cape Parrot Big Birding Day 2010- 8 & 9 th May

Area	Name	Tel	Email
Overall co-ordinator	Prof. Colleen Downs	033 260 5127; 0829202026	<a href="mailto:downs@ukzn.ac.za">downs@ukzn.ac.za</a>
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Figure 1. Some of those involved in counting Cape Parrots at Gxalingele Forest in May 2009 which included some local school children and staff from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife from Coleford

### *Captive Birds – William Horsfield*

William Horsfield has reported that the pair of Cape Parrots on leave to him from the CPWG has reared three chicks from a clutch of four fertile eggs. The chicks will be leaving the nest within 2-3 weeks as the parents are doing a great job of rearing them. The fourth egg embryo appeared to have died for some reason at about 14 days of incubation. Once the chicks have fledged and weaned they will be surgically sexed.

Shaun Wilkinson, the Cape Parrot Stud Book Keeper, has reported that the Umgeni River Bird Park will be re-opened to the public once it has been purchased and re-vamped by the Durban municipality. The Cape Parrots on loan will probably be moved to a new breeding centre at Monte Casino in Johannesburg.

### *Contact Details*

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# Cape Parrot Counting Day 2010



**Wanted**  
Volunteers to  
help count the  
endangered  
Cape Parrot in  
the wild

## Sat May 8th (pm) & Sun May 9th (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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