

# Cape Parrot Newsletter

Number 1 - November 2006



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## A Word from the Editor

Hi to you all,

Well here it is, my first Cape Parrot Newsletter! It has been really great to hear from people both in South Africa, and internationally, who are interested in the Cape Parrot. I hope that this newsletter will over time manage to cover a wide range of issues that may interest to you. Thanks to all the people who have submitted something for this newsletter. My intention is to keep the newsletter open to all potential articles and try to cover all interests relating to the Cape Parrot. Be that projects undertaken by groups to projects run by individuals or organisations who's impacts on the CP, to observations or comments about wild Capes in the field (or pinching your Pecan nuts) to captive breeding issues etc. As I tend to be stuck in an office all day I'm relying on you guys to supply the information, articles and some photos to brighten the pages!

Please feel free to contact me (details at end of newsletter) if you would like to submit something to the newsletter. Or let me know if you would like me to try and get information on a specific subject of interest.

Tee

## News relating to the Cape Parrot re the CPWG & BirdLife SA:

I understand a joint statement is to be issued in the near future, and hopefully I will be able to provide in the next newsletter.

In the meantime just for information for those who are unaware: after a period of time working together the CPWG and BirdLife SA recently decided to become separate entities again. This is to allow them to focus on their different areas of interests. Both groups will still be actively involved in Cape Parrot Conservation.

## CPWG Co-Ordinator:

The CPWG is currently without a Co-ordinator, and the CPWG is in the process of seeking funding in order to fund the post before advertising the position.

Kate Henderson the previous CPWG Co-ordinator is still working for BirdLife SA but is now involved in their Southern Bald Ibis project - so you may come across her with relation to that species - all the best Kate.

For those of you who remember Lu Warburton (the original CPWG Co-ordinator) I met up with her recently in the UK and am pleased to report she is looking great and enjoying life.

## Header Photo:

The photo of the Adult male Cape Parrot in the header was supplied by William Horsfield, the next issue will include news of 3rd generation captive bred Cape Parrots.

The provision of nest boxes in areas where nest sites may be limiting is an ongoing research project. The CPWVG has put up 10 nest boxes at Ingeli (August 2006) and Trogan Bird Club from the south coast are monitoring these monthly.

Artificial nest boxes were used by Cape Parrots in Karkloof in 2005 (Downs 2005) and maintenance of next boxes in Karkloof is being undertaken (November 2006). Contact: Colleen Downs Downs@ukzn.ac.za

### Cape Parrot Studbook:

The Cape Parrot Working Group has been updating the Cape Parrot Studbook over the last year. The studbook aims to provide an accurate, up to date, overview of all Cape Parrots kept in captivity, including those in breeding programmes or kept solely as pets. The studbook aims to provide a resource that contains information which is useful in provide important insights to assist the conservation of the species both in captivity and the wild. As with most parrot species Cape's are relatively difficult to observe in the wild, and whilst not mirroring wild populations avicultural records can still provide useful information. For example, information on age at first breeding, clutch size, longevity which can be useful in determining effective population sizes in the wild.

The studbook can also provide useful information on the captive population, issues such as inbreeding and relatedness become increasingly important over time and it is useful to be able to look at the population for these factors. Unlike many of the management studbooks which form the basis for genetic and demographic management of populations in other species, Cape Parrots are mainly held in private collections and so they are not actively managed by the studbook keeper. However, the studbook keeper can be called upon to offer advice to breeders wishing to locate birds that are unrelated.

To compile this data the studbook keeper, Shaun Wilkinson, has an onerous task. He needs to track down the histories of Cape Parrots of unknown origin, link these to others that have disappeared from one location and have reappeared at another, and tie in all new births. If you own Cape Parrots please do consider participating.

If you have any questions or wish to add your details to the studbook please contact Shaun Wilkinson at the Umgeni River Bird Park: (031) 579 4600, Email: urbpmark@iafrica.com

### CPBBD - Cape Parrot Count 1998 - 2006:

Most of you have already seen the data for the Cape Parrot Big Birding Day - but just in case here is a summary of the collection data for the last 9 years.

Reminder for your diaries: The next Cape Parrot Big Birding Day in 2007 will be the **10th CPBBD!** It will be held on the Saturday afternoon of the 5th May and the morning of the Sunday 6th May. Contact: Colleen Downs email : Downs@ukzn.ac.za

Year	Weather	Observers	No. of Cape Parrots and (Observ. Locations)	
			Morning	Afternoon
1998	Good	136	321 (47)	179 (37)
1999	Poor	155	282 (53)	237 (53)
2000	Good	118	459 (42)	460 (38)
2001	Good	153	356 (75)	316 (69)
2002	Good	339	634 (144)	476 (141)
2003	Mixed	332	885 (149)	717 (148)
2004	Good	336	994 (127)	1021 (125)
2005	Good	339	969 (125)	894 (122)
2006	Mixed	282	1332 (103)	1108 (103)

### Request for information: Cape Parrot Projects

Is there anyone, either individuals or organisations, involved with projects or work/industry that have an impact on Cape Parrots, in a direct or indirect way, who might like to provide a bit of information on how their work relates to the Cape Parrot for the newsletter?

### Unusual Cape Parrot Activities:

Cape Parrot sightings are often reported by people when they are seen their property e.g. when feeding on Pecan nuts and also Wattle pods. A couple of people have mentioned to me that there may have been some out of character behaviour relating to Cape Parrot feeding patterns at farms and properties this year. That they are arriving earlier in the year and staying later than they normally do. Or turning up at places they have never frequented before.

Mr & Mrs Wellmann from Dundee won the reprint of the Cape Parrot Painting by Mrs Fouche at the recent PMB Garden & Leisure show raffle.

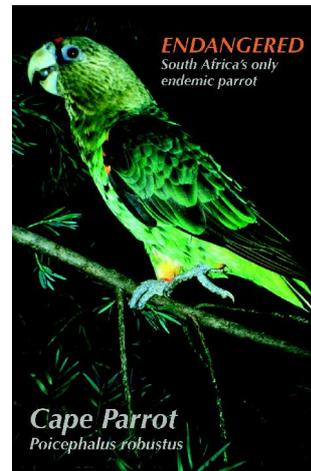
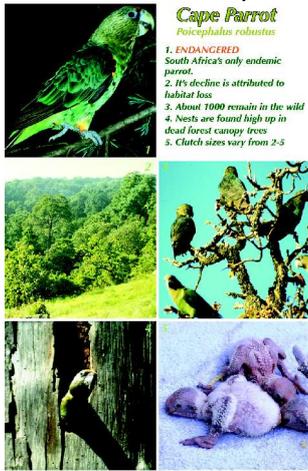


### Reprints

If you are interested in owning a copy of this beautiful painting reprints are still available.

### CPWG Postcards

On a smaller scale 3 Cape Parrot postcards are available at a price of R1,50 wholesale:



Monies received in respect of the reprint and postcards go towards Colleen Downs Cape Parrot research at UKZN and the CPBBD. Contact: Colleen Downs email : Downs@ukzn.ac.za

Development of a Beak and Feather Disease Virus Vaccine: Livio Heath\* and Ed Rybicki.

Department of Molecular and Cell Biology, University of Cape Town. Contact: Ed Rybicki: ed@science.uct.ac.za

\* Current affiliation: Exotic Diseases Division, Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute.

Psittacine beak and feather disease, caused by Beak and Feather Disease Virus (BFDV), is currently recognized as the most significant infectious disease of parrots. The virus is highly infectious and can spread through affected aviaries at an alarming rate. Although indirect transfer of virus occasionally involves contaminated objects or material, most often spread is effected by direct contact between infected animals actively excreting virus and susceptible birds. It is for this reason that control strategies generally focus on good husbandry and minimizing the risk of exposure. However, quarantine measures often prove inadequate in preventing the spread of the disease. This has prompted researchers to investigate the use of vaccination as a supplementary control measure.

Researchers at the University of Georgia and the University of Sydney have independently developed 'DNA' and 'killed' vaccines respectively. The first vaccine is simply a DNA molecule which encodes the coat protein, the second is produced by purifying live virus from infected birds and treating it with chemicals thereby killing it. Initial results clinical trials using the second vaccine were promising, but large-scale production for commercial application is generally considered to be impractical and not economically viable. Added to this is the threat of exposing healthy birds to improperly killed vaccine preparations. These factors have largely curtailed the commercial application of the killed vaccine. While the first, the DNA vaccine, appears promising, no commercial release appears to have occurred.

The problems associated with the killed BFDV vaccine could be circumvented by the development of what is known as a recombinant vaccine. Recombinant vaccines utilize only part of the virus, rendering it completely

non-infectious. The BFDV virus particle is made from a single protein, which is the predominant target of the immune system. We have used this part of the virus in the production of a potential recombinant vaccine against BFD. To test the vaccine we immunized chickens with the recombinant vaccine. The immunization resulted in a strong antibody response. The chickens furthermore showed no signs of side effects associated with the vaccine. This suggests that parrots that are vaccinated with the recombinant vaccine would be able to mount an effective defense against the virus and highlights the potential usefulness of this BFDV vaccine.

The testing of our recombinant vaccine in chickens signals the completion of the first major milestone in our quest to develop an effective vaccine against the disease. Further clinical trials have been scheduled for 2007. These trials will be done in collaboration with Prof. Rob Bragg at the University of the Free State and will involve testing the vaccine in parrots. If successful the trial will be expanded to include field studies and ultimately the release on a commercial BFDV vaccine.

### Cape Parrot DNA Profiling Update: Tee Taylor

I will end this newsletter with a bit about my own work: This project, to develop genetic markers to profile Cape Parrots, started in April 2004 (ends April 2007), it is part of a larger initiative, co-ordinated by myself and, funded by the (Darwin Initiative, DEFRA UK), aimed at encouraging the use of Genetics to detect illegal wildlife trade in South Africa.



How does this affect the Cape Parrot? As part of the project Kerusha Pillay, an MSc student at UKZN, has developed genetic markers (microsatellites) that can be used to examine parentage and relatedness between individual Cape Parrots. Kerry started her MSc in January 2005. During this time she has spent two 6 month periods in the UK working with our collaborators, Sheffield University, developing the genetic markers. Kerry is currently analysing the data and writing up her MSc thesis after which we can report more about her findings.

In addition to providing genetic markers useful in detecting illegal trade of wild caught parrots these markers also have the potential to look at issues such as relatedness and inbreeding which may be useful to breeders as well as individual identification in cases of theft. With regard to the wider aims of the initiative, similar markers have been developed for the Blue Crane and I have been working on developing presentations and workshops for officials interested in the use of DNA in wildlife investigations.

I have recently given workshops relating to the use of DNA and other forensic techniques used in detecting illegal trade in wildlife to DEAT's Forensics Training for EMIs and DEAT's Environmental Crimes Workshop for Magistrates. Both of which I really enjoyed and I got to meet some very interesting people, including many who were interested in the Cape Parrot.

Contact: Tee Taylor - email [taylor2@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:taylor2@ukzn.ac.za) Web: [www.ukzn.ac.za/Biology/TeeTaylor233.aspx](http://www.ukzn.ac.za/Biology/TeeTaylor233.aspx)

### Web Sites of Interest:

I will try to include some web sites that may be of interest (please let me know of others):

**Thor's Cape Parrot website** run by Craig Harris in the US: [www.capeparrot.org](http://www.capeparrot.org)

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