

Cape Parrot Newsletter

Number 3 - April 2007



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A Word from the Editor

Hi Everyone

I have published this newsletter a bit early in order to provide a reminder for those of you who are interested in getting involved in the 10th Cape Parrot Big Birding Day on the 5th & 6th May and have not yet have made contact and plans. I am hoping that I get a few reports and photos from people involved in the Cape Parrot count about how it went for the next newsletter. Photos of both parrots and your groups would be good - I know some people are camping out so there may be some stories there as well I'm sure we would all be interested. If you make a fool of yourself - feel free to tell me we don't mind laughing at your mistakes!

I have had a busy time recently, in Pretoria for a week long Wildlife DNA Forensics workshop, although I did manage to see a couple of friends at the same time. Then down to uShaka for the KZN Wildlife Crime Working Group Open day where I was speaking on the role that DNA can play in wildlife crime. These are a really great bunch of people covering a wide range of interests: wildlife investigators, SAPS, prosecutors etc. all eager to protect wildlife. I think that creating such networks such as this is the way forward in tackling wildlife crime. When cases arise a wide range of expert advice and expertise is available. The rest of my time has been in the office writing reports and funding proposals.

For those of you going on the count have fun and I hope you see loads of parrots and have a great weekend.

Tee

Header Photo: Wild Chicks from 2001

The header photo this month is of a clutch of wild Cape Parrot chicks, within their nest. In July 2001, four active Cape Parrot nest sites were discovered. One of these nests was in a live Yellowwood tree that was climbable. This was rather exciting as it was the first time Cape Parrot chicks had been monitored in the wild.



Nest hole



Young chicks

In addition to growth measurements, blood samples were also taken for sexing and disease testing, there were two males and a female all were negative for Pbfd. The chicks development was monitored over the following weeks by Craig Symes and Louise Warburton (CPWG) up until the time they fledged. This was also documented in film by Don Guy and shown on the 50/50 programme on SABC.

During their development the female chick (at ~60 days old), the youngest of



Chicks removed from nest to collect vital statistics

three, was found to have suffered serious injuries to her beak and also showed significant weight loss. The concern was that the severity of the damage might cause feeding problems later given the importance of the beak in obtaining its natural diet. After obtaining a wide range of expert local and international advice it was considered that the damage to the beak made its survival in the wild highly unlikely. It was agreed that the chick should be taken into captivity and incorporated into the captive breeding programme. The other two chicks fledged successfully into the wild. The female chick settled into captivity well, after two months its beak had healed although it was skew and lacked its tip.

I hope to bring you an update on how this chick is doing, five years down the line, in the next newsletter.

Pictures from the CPWG, information taken from:

Louise Warburton, Craig Symes & Mark Brown (2002) Every chick counts, Avizandum, March.

Symes, CT, Brown, M, Warburton, L., Perrin, MR and Downs, CT. (2004) Observations of Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus* nesting in the wild. Ostrich 75:106-109.



Chick with damaged beak

Whoops!

I think that this might become a regular section!

Sorry folks I put a incorrect web site address in the last newsletter for William Horsfield's Amazona Endangered Parrot Breeding Facility with his piece on 3rd generation captive bred Cape Parrot's.

Sorry about that - it should have been Website: www.amazona.co.za Email: amazona@iafrica.com

Funds Raised for the Cape Parrot: Paul Hardingham & Ron Timm

Congratulations and thanks go to Paul Hardingham and Ron Timm from Johannesburg. Paul and Ron run a midweek wildlife interests group, called M-WIG for short. Recently they screened a film lent to the group for free. So they generously decided to donate the entry fee towards assisting the Cape Parrot. The group raised a total of R1,800.00 that evening and the monies are to be donated to the Cape Parrot Working Group. What an excellent way to raise money for good causes.

Entry fees for their speaker in October, Chris Mercer of the Canned Lion Hunting Campaign will be used towards that campaign.

Contact Paul & Ron, Email: zoomers@mweb.co.za

Cape Parrots Arrive Early: Tig Warne

Tig Warne, from Magoebaskloof, has reported that large numbers of Cape Parrots arrived on their Pecan nut trees in mid-March, earlier than normal as they usually don't arrive until early April. They have two flocks, one they estimate to contain about 50 birds, the other a smaller group of 6. As the Pecan trees were still in full leaf they were not too easy to see, but they have been very vocal. I'm hoping that Tig manages to get a photo for the newsletter once those leaves start to fall! Seemingly the birds were not deterred by the fact that the nuts were still green. They currently have competition for the Pecans in that a large group of Samango monkeys (~20+) are wanting a share in the feast.

Tig is hoping to be able to count these birds for the 10th Cape Parrot Big Birding Day but points out that in the past the parrots usually hide on counting day and considers this rather unsporting given the Pecan nuts they feed on.

Contact Tig Warne, Email: tigphilw@metroweb.co.za

Note from Tee: Thanks Tig - I am extremely jealous as I am sat here in an office when you have Cape Parrots, Samangos and Pecans (although there may not be that many Pecans left!). Keep that camera handy and I hope the parrots are a bit more sporting during the count this year!

PS Malcolm Gemmell has reported (April) that two landowners in the Village of Creighton and surrounding area are already receiving daily visits by Cape Parrots into their Pecan nut trees.

Contact Malcolm Gemmell, Email: buttonbirding@futurenet.co.za

Cape Parrot Nest boxes : Wynand Espach

Wynand Espach sent some photos of nest boxes that were erected last year (photo without leaves) to attract Cape Parrots in the Tzaneen area. Initially the nest boxes were between 5 and 10 metres from the ground and this year they are currently working at raising the height of the boxes.



Close-up

Nest box centre of picture

The trees are currently in leaf (nestbox centre of picture, right of trunk).

Last year they were lucky enough to count up to 100 parrots on some days and they have begun to arrive again this year. I'm looking forward to receiving more photos from Wynard.

Contact Wynand Espach Email: amorentia@silvernet.co.za

I hope that the Cape Parrots show interest in the nest boxes, as I reported in the first news letter it has been suggested that nest sites may be a limiting factor for Cape Parrots. So it is really great to hear of projects putting them up - even if it does tend to take them a while for the birds to show interest in the boxes.

Other Parrots and Nest box Use

I am including the reference to this article as I know a few people on the list are involved in using artificial nest boxes to assist Cape Parrots in the wild. The journal of Avian Conservation and Ecology publish articles free online at <http://www.ace-eco.org/> the latest issue includes an article on "Artificial Cavities and Nest Site Selection by Puerto Rican Parrots: a Multiscale Assessment" which can be downloaded free.

I know that the Mauritius Wildlife foundation tried many different designs of nest box before finding something acceptable to the wild Echo parakeets. I have followed the work of the Echo Parakeet programme since undertaking some DNA work on them back in the late 90's. What a success story - from a population of less than 20 birds in 1986, with only 3 known females, to between 309 and 335 birds in April 2006. Although, I understand they have recently been having some problems with PBFDV and are having to change some of their management strategies to try to reduce any impact of this.

To date wild Cape Parrots have not seemed that interested in the artificial nest boxes erected for them. I was wondering if breeders of captive Cape Parrots had noticed any preferences or dislikes by Capes as far as nest box preferences (size / shape/ angle) are concerned? If you have - I could include a few comments on this in the next newsletter.

Cape Parrot Nest boxes & Problem Bees: Kate Meares

One of the other problems that is occurring with nest boxes is their being taken over by bees. Kate Meares (acting CPWG co-ordinator) has been doing some investigation into how bees might be deterred from entering boxes and has come up with the following:

1. All the chemicals used are toxic, no-one seems to know of any enviro-friendly bee repellent,
2. Even if the resident bees are removed, pest control experts say that new bees will move in shortly after,
3. Bees are pretty flexible and finding substances that prevent them attaching and building from the roof of the nestbox may not be sufficient as they will probably attach to the sides of the box.

If anyone has any comments or suggestions they can contact Kate at Email: CapeParrot@ukzn.ac.za

Mike Perrin the Chairman of the CPWG attended the Birdlife KZN meeting at the Umgeni Valley Nature Reserve at Howick, on the 31 March 2007 to report on the activities of the CPWG since its split from BL-SA last year. He has provided a summary of his report for interest:

1. The CPWG is regrouping after the loss of sponsorship for the co-ordinator's post from BLSA.
2. Kate Meares is the new temporary part-time co-ordinator. (She has just completed her masters on crane forensic DNA, involving individual identification to prevent illegal trading. Kerry Pillay is finishing off a similar project on Cape Parrots. This should deter the illegal removal of chicks from the wild, that are then traded as captive-bred since we can prove/dis-prove parentage and kinship).
3. Information, publicity and networking are now critically important for the CPWG.
 - a. A new CPWG web site has been set up and can be accessed at: <http://www.cpwg.unp.ac.za/>
 - b. A new email contact address Email: CapeParrot@ukzn.ac.za
 - c. Articles about Cape Parrots and the CPWG's activities have been submitted to Africa Birds & Birding and Avizandum.
 - d. The CPWG hopes to hold its AGM soon.
 - e. Two excellent newsletters aimed at people interested in the Cape Parrot have been distributed by Dr Tee Taylor (Tee runs the Darwin Initiative programme and supervised Kate and Kerry's research). Are you on her mailing list and do you have material for the next issue she is drafting? If you wish to subscribe send an email to taylor@ukzn.ac.za with the word 'subscribe' in the subject line. The newsletter can also be downloaded at <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/Biology/CPNewsletter905.aspx>
4. Colleen Downs and Kate are busy organizing the Cape Parrot Big Birding Day for the weekend of 5-6 May. We need all of the help and assistance we can get. Please participate. The CPWG would like to receive your contact details.
5. The CPWG has received a research grant from the World Parrot Trust for continuing field research on Cape Parrots in the E Cape and Traskei. We will be appointing a suitable researcher to conduct the research.
6. The CPWG has a publication list of articles on Cape Parrots, including recent ones on the successful use of nest boxes in the wild, and acceptance of the Cape Parrot as a good species.
7. The Cape Parrot Stud Book (administered through PAAZAB) is up-to-date, thanks to the studbook keeper, Shaun Wilkinson, and Willaim Horsfield. Details of almost all captive birds have been recorded. The CPWG Cape Parrots are in a breeding programme with the Johannesburg Zoo.
8. Progress has been made, through collaborative research, in an attempt to produce a vaccine against psittacine (parrot) beak and feather disease (virus) which can cause high levels of mortality to Cape Parrot chicks.
9. New national legislation should overcome the problem of different provincial legislation in terms of controlling the registration, keeping and trading of captive Cape Parrots.
10. The CPWG recognizes BLSA's initiative in terms of education and community development projects in the E Cape concerning the conservation of Cape Parrots.

Cape Parrot Big Birding Day Preparations: Malcolm Gemmell

I asked CPBBD local co-ordinators if they might provide a piece for the newsletter about some of the preparation they undertake in their areas. I have attended a CPBBD in Malcolm's area and can see from his preparation in the lead up to the event why everything went so smoothly on the day! Malcolm writes:

My preparation takes 6 angles.

1. Contact all and sundry by e-mail to encourage their participation.
2. Repeat same by telephone.
3. Personally investigate each site re-suitability/access/safety and categorise same with regard to type of participant. (Can a little old lady in a Morris Minor count from said site or is this a Macho 4x4 site?)
4. Who is the Land-owner/custodian/Chief and do they object?
5. Plan to relocate "the Faithful" to new sites - particularly if they have not seen a parrot for years!!!
6. Commence with daily prayer for good weather May 5th and 6th.

Contact Malcolm and Gail Gemmell, Email: buttonbirding@futurenet.co.za

Tel: +27 (0)39 8331029, Fax:+27 (0)39 8331129, Cell: 082 789 5000, Web site: www.buttonbirding.com

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
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Dargle/ Nottingham Rd/ Balgowan	Adam Robinson	033 2344484 0726146081	adamjnr@mweb.co.za
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Boston	Barbara & Glyn Bullock	033 997 1783	
Bulwer	Russell Hill	039 8320053	carolhill@futurenet.co.za
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New Threatened or Protected Species Regulations & the Cape Parrot

On 20 February 2007 Marthinus van Schalkwyk, the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, published the new national regulations for threatened and protected species which will come into effect on 1 June 2007. This means that listed species nationally listed species will now have uniform conservation status, with the same legal standards applied across the country. This should hopefully close some of the loopholes and remove discrepancies between the provinces. The regulations list a broad range of restricted activities that will now require permits. The Cape Parrot is listed within these regulations under Schedule A: Threatened Species - species threatened by one or more restricted activities as defined in the NEMA: Biodiversity Act, 2004. In the Category: Critically Endangered Species - indigenous species facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future.

The regulations are available at www.environment.gov.za/HotIssues/2006/protected/protected_regs.html

H5N1 – Global Dispersal most likely through Poultry Trade

I was interested to read a paper (details at end) on examining the role of migratory birds vs. human commercial activities in the dispersal of the H5N1 virus around the world. Although not directly related to the Cape Parrot if the virus heads this way it could potentially impact on it in some way, this region is one of the major chicken farming areas of South Africa.

H5N1 was first detected in poultry in 1996 in south-east China and subsequently spread throughout most of Asia, and then into Africa and Europe. From 2005 many authorities had placed emphasis on the role of migratory birds as being the primary source in the spread of the virus outside Asia. In this paper Gauthier-Clerc and colleagues criticise these authorities. The pattern of incidents clearly shows that the spread of the virus does not correspond with the main migration routes of wild birds, and that had this been the primary method a much different pattern of cases would have been expected. Rather, they were able to convincingly show that the dispersal of the viruses could be linked to human activities, in particular, the movement of poultry or its by-products either as legal or illegal trade. Therefore, that the human movement of domestic poultry has been the main method of global dispersal of this virus to date. It is an important finding as given this placing additional emphasis in maintaining stringent veterinary scrutiny and control of disease and trade will be an important factor in the control of this virus.

Gauthier-Clerc, M., Lebarbenchon, C. and Thomas, F. Recent expansion of highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1: a critical review. *Ibis* 2007. DOI 10.1111/j.1474-919x.2007.00699.x.

Night Parrot: First authenticated sighting since 1990

I thought I would include this piece of recent news, especially as people are about to go on the parrot count. It was unfortunate that this parrot was only seen due to it having been killed on a fence. But it is good to know that animals that are rarely observed can still be out there. It is also a reminder that we generally only see a much smaller number of representatives of a species than are actually present when observing many species in the wild.

The Night Parrot (*Geopsittacus occidentalis*) is a small broad-tailed parrot endemic to Australia. Historically the Night Parrot had been reported, although rarely, from every state on mainland Australia. Its population crashed in the 19th century for unknown reasons. Its current population size is unknown and little is known of the species' habitat requirements and threats to its conservation. There were only a few records since the 1880s, with the last authenticated sighting in 1990 (a road kill in northwest Queensland). Presumed extinct by many, it is listed on the IUCN Red List as Critically Endangered.

This latest sighting was last November (details released in Feb) in western Queensland (200km south of the 1990 road-kill) it had flown into a barbed-wire fence and been killed. This is only the second authenticated sighting in the last 100 years, and unauthenticated sightings are also rare. A tour operator reported flushing 4 Night Parrots in the northeast of South Australia from shrub during a safari. So lets hope that they are out there breeding well but that their nocturnal and other behaviours just mean they are rarely observed.

Contact Details:

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