



Cape Parrot

Grootpapegaaï

Poicephalus robustus

This is one of the largest of the African parrots and it is represented in southern Africa by two races which are separable on size, colour, distribution and habitat preferences. The endemic, nominate race is found from the eastern Cape Province to southern KwaZulu-Natal, and in the eastern Transvaal. Densities of 1–1.5/km² in the breeding season have been recorded in southern KwaZulu-Natal (pers. obs). The more numerous *P. r. suahelicus*, commonly known as the Grey-headed Parrot, is found in the northeastern Transvaal, Zimbabwe, the Caprivi Strip in Namibia, and extraliminally to Tanzania and southern Uganda (Fry *et al.* 1988); it may reach far northern Botswana (Penry 1994). A third and isolated race (*fuscicollis*) is found in West Africa.

The Cape Parrot's distinctive coloration and loud calls render it conspicuous and readily identifiable; the atlas data are thus reliable.

Habitat: The nominate race occurs and breeds in Afro-montane forests between 1000 and 1500 m, while *suahelicus* is typical of miombo and Mopane woodlands, and along well-wooded river courses, generally below 1000 m (Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983; Quickelberge 1989; Maclean 1993b). Occurrences in atypical habitats (e.g. grasslands) may be accounted for by sightings of parrots flying between forest patches and to coastal and riverine bush (see Movements).

Movements: Though mainly resident, irregular feeding forays for distances of 90 km or more are known in many parts of its range (Skead 1964b; Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983). Significant increases in reporting rates in the models coincide with breeding and are probably related to increased flying and foraging activity at this time. Records in the Caprivi Strip and northern Botswana (Zone 1) are almost confined to the period

February–June. In northern Zimbabwe it is thought to be a nonbreeding visitor from further north; birds arrive in the Zambezi Valley in late July or August, and on the Mashonaland highveld between early August and early October. Departure is rapid in December or early January, and there are scattered records through the remainder of the year (Flynn 1991; A.J. Tree pers. obs). This pattern is not clearly evident in the data for Zone 5.

Breeding: Eggs are laid March–November by *suahelicus*, and August–December by *robustus* (Irwin 1981; Fry *et al.* 1988).

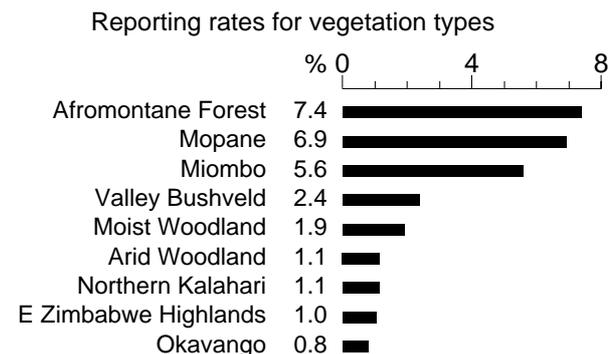
Interspecific relationships: Over most of its range in the region, *suahelicus* is broadly sympatric with Brown-headed *P. cryptoxanthus* and Meyer's *P. meyeri* Parrots, while nominate *robustus* is the only parrot found in southern Afro-montane forests. There is possibly some competition throughout its range with other secondary cavity-nesting species (Rowan 1983).

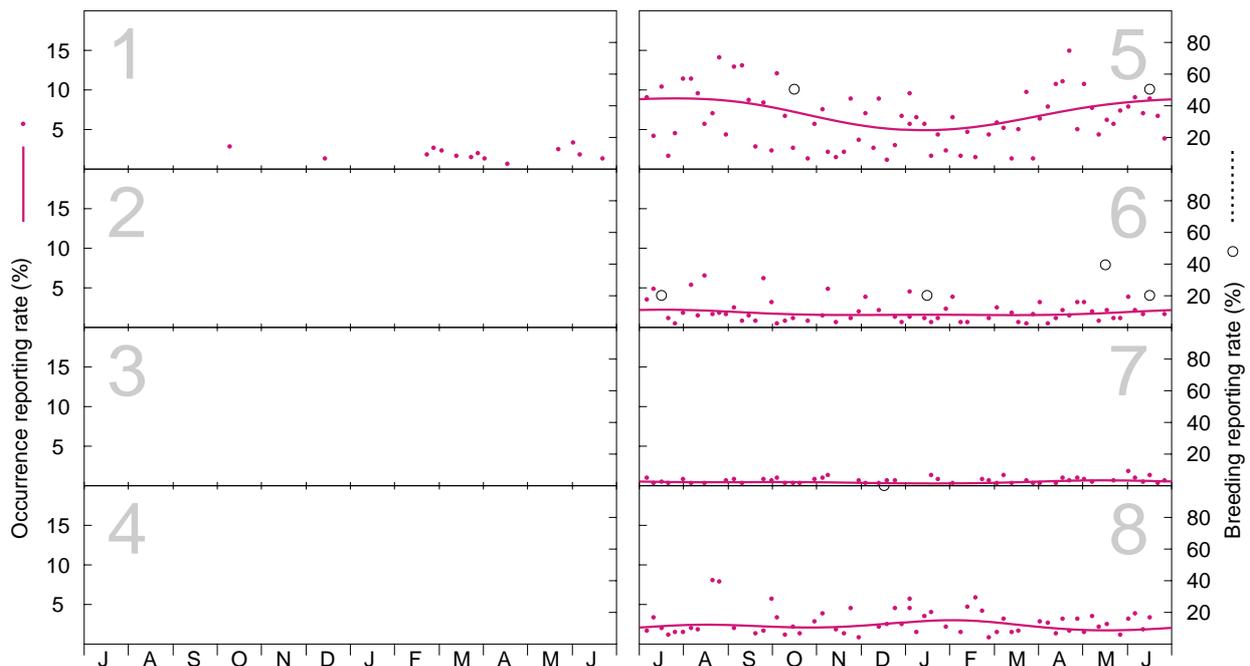
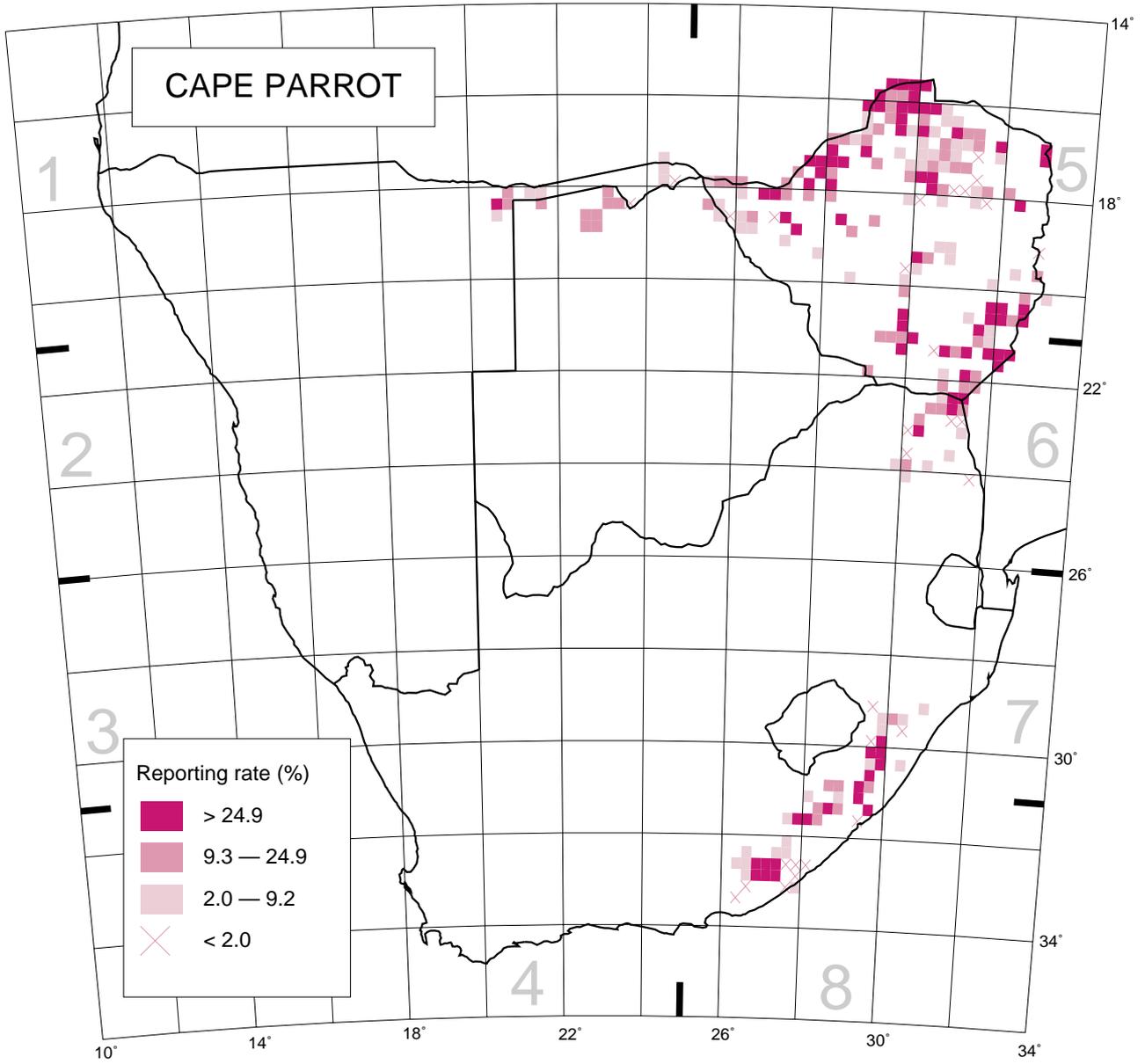
Historical distribution and conservation: The historical range of *suahelicus* is not known to have differed from its current distribution. Skins in the British Museum collected from Newcastle (2729DD) in 1890, and from Zuurbroon (2730AD) in 1904, suggest that *robustus* was once distributed in a continuous belt from the eastern Cape Province through to the forests of the Transvaal Drakensberg. Before the atlas period, it was known from several inland forests of northern KwaZulu-Natal (Clancey 1964b; Skead 1971). The last confirmed record for central KwaZulu-Natal was at Nkandla Forest (2831CA) during the 1970s (Cyrus & Robson 1980).

The race *suahelicus* is not considered threatened in South Africa (Brooke 1984b), but is worthy of monitoring as the sale of nestlings as pets and for food has been reported in the northern Transvaal (P.G. Lourens pers. comm.). This practice is probably widespread as nest holes, particularly in Baobabs *Adansonia digitata*, are easily accessible. In Namibia it is considered a vulnerable species; the main current threat being deforestation, particularly of riparian vegetation by humans and elephants (C.J. Brown pers. comm.). The status of the race *robustus* was regarded as 'vulnerable' by Brooke (1984b), but this requires upgrading to 'endangered' as there are indications that it is a separate species from *suahelicus* (Maclean 1993b; Tree 1994b), and numbers are believed to be perhaps fewer than 2000 individuals. Declines in density have been attributed mainly to capture for the cage-bird trade and the removal of large, old yellowwood *Podocarpus* spp. trees which are their preferred nesting sites (Skead 1971; Brooke 1984b; pers. obs).

J.O. Wirminghaus

Recorded in 254 grid cells, 5.6%
Total number of records: 1927
Mean reporting rate for range: 13.0%





Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 15, 0, 0, 0, 626, 202, 90, 126; Breeding: 0, 0, 0, 0, 2, 5, 0, 1.