



## Cape Eagle Owl

### Kaapse Ooruil

#### *Bubo capensis*

The Cape Eagle Owl is the Afrotropical member of a superspecies that also includes the Eurasian Eagle Owl *B. bubo* and the Great Horned Owl *B. virginianus* of the Americas (Kemp & Calburn 1987). Three subspecies are recognized and two of these inhabit southern Africa (Fry *et al.* 1988). The nominate race is restricted to South Africa (Steyn & Tredgold 1977), Lesotho (Osborne & Tigar 1990) and Namibia (Clinning 1980b; Walter *et al.* 1986; Brown 1986b). The species has not been recorded in Botswana (Penry 1994), nor in Swaziland (Parker 1994), but it may occur in the high-altitude grassland regions in the west of Swaziland. It may also extend through Namibia to southern Angola (Kemp & Calburn 1987). The larger subspecies *B. c. mackinderi* – sometimes referred to as Mackinder's Eagle Owl – occurs from Zimbabwe (Benson & Irwin 1967) and Mozambique (Jackson 1973) northwards to Kenya (Fry *et al.* 1988). The third subspecies *dillonii* is found in the highlands of Ethiopia (Fry *et al.* 1988).

In the Matobo National Park (2028C,D) *c.* 8–13 pairs occupied 620 km<sup>2</sup> (Macdonald & Gargett 1984). Neighbouring pairs have been found 2.5 km apart in the Matobo Hills and as little as 2 km apart in the Transvaal (Fry *et al.* 1988; Allan 1995a).

This species has become better known in recent years and observers now pay more attention to the possibility of recording Cape Eagle Owls, but it is still widely confused with the Spotted Eagle Owl *B. africanus*, especially the rufous form of that species (Steyn 1982a). The atlas data were vetted as carefully as possible to eliminate such errors.

**Habitat:** The nominate race inhabits a wide variety of biomes, including relatively mesic fynbos (Martin & Pepler

1977) and grassland (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b) to arid Namib (Brown 1987) and semi-arid Karoo scrub (Steyn 1982b). It occurs from sea-level in the southwestern Cape Province (Martin & Pepler 1977) and Namibia (Walter *et al.* 1986) to alpine conditions (>3000 m) in Lesotho (Osborne & Tigar 1990), and the reporting rate for Alpine Grasslands in the vegetation analysis is markedly higher than for any other vegetation type. It is found from areas with flat topography (Steyn 1982b) to rugged mountainous regions. The inland *mackinderi* race occurs in montane grassland (Benson & Irwin 1967) and hilly woodland (Gargett 1977a). Although the wide range of biomes inhabited suggests a fairly catholic choice of habitats, this owl is actually highly habitat specific and restricted to rocky areas (e.g. Gargett 1977a; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b), albeit that small rocky outcrops in otherwise unsuitable habitat can suffice to support individual breeding pairs (Allan 1995a). It nests on the ground, often in a position sheltered by rocks and scrub (Maclean 1993b).

**Movements:** Neither regular nor nomadic movements are known and the models show little seasonal variation in reporting rates. Some local dispersal by young birds can be expected.

**Breeding:** Most eggs are laid May–July (Fry *et al.* 1988) and the atlas records span May–December.

**Interspecific relationships:** Its distribution and abundance have been linked to that of red rock rabbits *Pronolagus* spp., which have long been thought to provide the staple prey. Allan (1995a), however, showed that the nominate race takes a wide variety of prey; indeed it appears to overlap widely in diet with the ubiquitous Spotted Eagle Owl.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** Populations may have increased in some areas, birds moving into quarries and even into cities to roost on buildings (Fry *et al.* 1988). Southern African populations are unlikely to face any immediate threat, although the Cape Eagle Owl has been classified as 'worthy of monitoring' in the South African Red Data book (Brooke 1984b).

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Recorded in 271 grid cells, 6.0%  
Total number of records: 927  
Mean reporting rate for range: 3.0%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



