

Cape Parrot Newsletter

The 27th Cape Parrot Count

CONTENTS

Parrot updates	2
Passing of a Parrot Protector	3
Contact persons for CPBBD 2024	4
Map of areas covered for CPBBD	5

This year marks the 27th Cape Parrot Big Birding Day (CPBBD). KwaZulu-Natal and the former Transkei will count the central subpopulation on the afternoon of the 4th and morning of the 5th May 2024. Meanwhile, those in the Amatholes (Stutterheim, Hogsback, Fort Beaufort) (southern subpopulation) and Limpopo (northern subpopulation) will count on the afternoon of the 20th and morning of the 21st April 2024. See Page 4 for coordinator contact details.

Many people are disheartened when they see no parrots, or the parrots no longer visit the area they are station at for the count. However, this still contributes greatly to our knowledge and understanding of the current situation of the Cape Parrots. Climate and weather patterns over the past few years have become chaotic with many changes, for example with rainfall, at a local level. The effects of this have been notable with many bird species, Cape Parrots included.

The Cape Parrot Big Birding Day is focused on getting the population numbers of the Cape Parrot, but in addition we are gathering information about our bird and mammal forest species. The Cape Parrot was labelled as the jewel of the forest, which ran as a main theme for the Bird of the Year campaign last year, but it is also considered as an ambassador for the Mistbelt Forest habitat, decided by the stakeholders from the Cape Parrot Action Plan workshop in 2019.

Citizen science plays a major role in adding to information about species and this initiative has been running strong for 27 years. It has provided many insights and helped us understand where to best focus our efforts to protect this critically endangered species and its vulnerable habitat. We encourage all to participate and support us in continuing with this initiative.



Parrot updates

Request for information

Feeding on pecans

Cape Parrots have been reported feeding on green pecans in some areas earlier this year. We would appreciate reports of this behaviour if observed (email downs@ukzn.ac.za). We suspect that heavy rains, wind, extreme hot days or ongoing rain or drought affected the fruiting of forest trees in certain areas. There is some speculation that eating pecans, especially green pecans, is not good for them. However, this has not been tested so we are currently unsure of the effects. Practically, Cape Parrots are natural food nomads which means they are well equipped to take advantage of different food availability. They also exhibit geophagy, which means they eat clay and other substances that help them against accumulation of toxins like tannins. Pecans may well be helping them buffer against the unpredictable changes in fruiting with changes in climate so we needn't be so hasty in thinking that this is a potential threat to them.

Threat of tree climbers

An emerging threat to large trees was identified in the Dargle Forest recently. These two plant species, i.e. *Senegalia ataxacantha* (flame thorn) and *Bianca decapetala* (Mauritius thorn or cats claw), are tough climbers that have invaded the forest canopy. They are thorny and can pull down large established trees like the yellowwoods. We welcome and appreciate any insights or ideas to help in controlling them (email downs@ukzn.ac.za).



Updated CITIES list available for comment

In March the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) published an update on the Convention on International Trade In Endangered Species (CITIES) of Wild Fauna and Flora list. The Grey-headed Parrot (*Poicephalus fuscicollis suahelicus*) and the Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*) featured on the list. Trade is allowed only in captive bred birds and, since parrot chicks are difficult to distinguish, only birds with juvenile plumage or older. Specific recommendations include: that there must be records in the studbooks; birds must have closed rings and/or be DNA fingerprinted; there must be complete breeding records; and breeders to have appropriate registration and compliance with the relevant authorities.

Passing of a Parrot Protector

Professor Michael (Mike) Richard Perrin died peacefully in his sleep on the morning of the 28 December 2023 at 77 years old. He retired from professional life in 2010 to concentrate on his parrot research but continued engaging with intellectual activities, such as the University of the Third Age, and writing books on parrots until the very end.

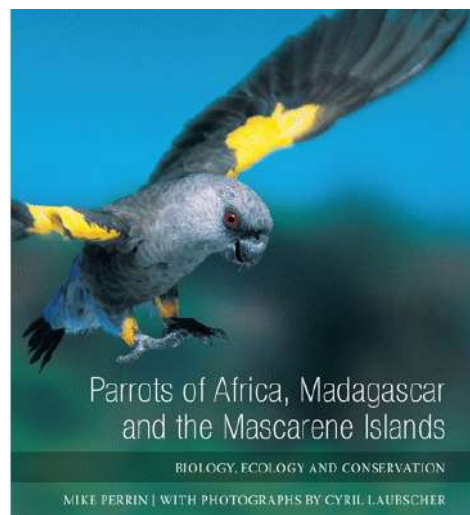
In 1981 Mike was appointed to the headship of the Department of Zoology in Pietermaritzburg, at the then University of Natal. He then took on the deanship of the Faculty of Science from 1986-1989. He continued in his position as head of the Department of Zoology and Entomology until 1996, when he stepped down. He began to focus his research on mainly African parrot species, founding and directing the Research Centre for African Parrot Conservation at the now University of KwaZulu-Natal. He initiated field studies and published numerous scientific papers on several African parrot species. For many of these parrot species, this was the first time that aspects of their ecology had been systematically studied in the wild and “his body of work remains the foundation of much of what we know of those parrot species today” (Rowan Martin, World Parrot Trust). Mike worked closely with the World Parrot Trust (WPT). Among his many contributions to parrot conservation, Mike was a key player in the development of the 2000 IUCN Parrot Action Plan, leading the section on African parrots.

Following his retirement in 2010, Mike became Emeritus Professor of Zoology in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He continued to be an active researcher and penned the definitive book on the Parrots of Africa, Madagascar and the Mascarene islands. Even as his health faltered, Mike maintained a keen interest in parrots and, in 2023, co-authored a review of the research and conservation priorities for the African lovebirds. Mike published nearly 300 research articles during his career and his contribution to our understanding of the biology of so much of South Africa’s wildlife was immense – current research is in many instances built on the foundations he laid. He leaves an important legacy, not least in the students, researchers and conservationists he inspired.

Adapted from the official UKZN obituary compiled by: Prof Michael J Lawes, Prof Colleen T. Downs, Prof Robert Hart



Professor Michael (Mike) Richard Perrin
28 December 1946 – 28 December 2023



Contact persons for Cape Parrot Big Birding Day

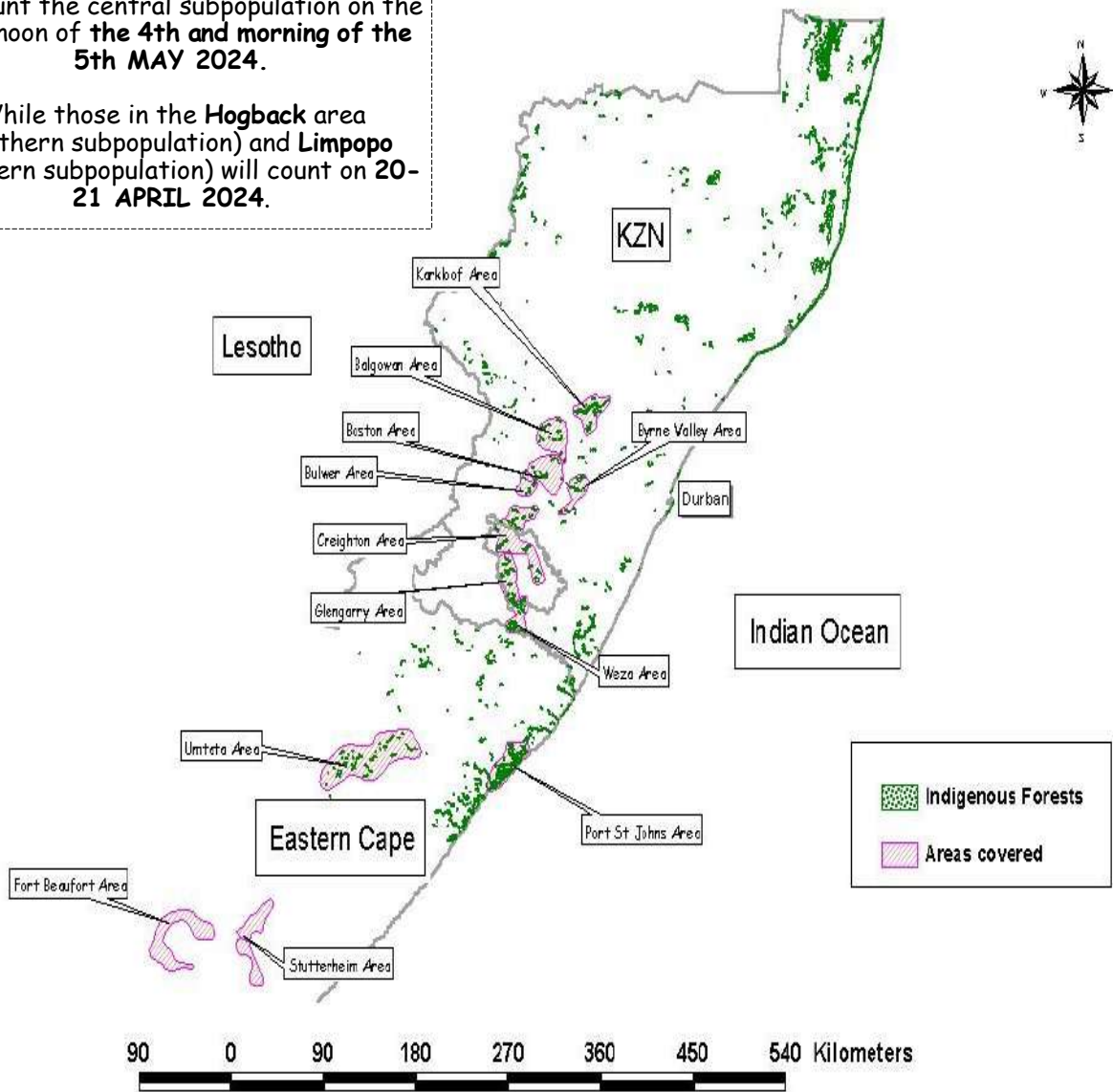
20 & 21 April or 04 & 05 May 2024

(See next page for map)

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KwaZulu-Natal and the former Transkei will count the central subpopulation on the afternoon of the 4th and morning of the 5th MAY 2024.

While those in the **Hogback area** (southern subpopulation) and **Limpopo** (northern subpopulation) will count on **20-21 APRIL 2024**.



Main areas covered by coordinators on the Cape Parrot Big Birding Day (Limpopo areas not shown)



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Preshnee Singh



<https://cpwg.ukzn.ac.za/>

CONTACT DETAILS

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