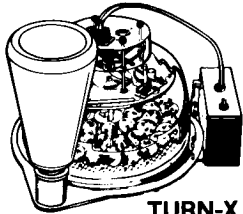
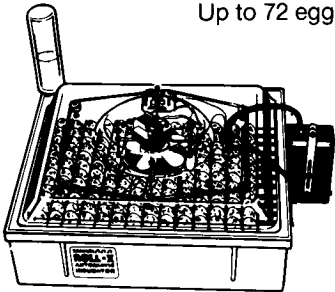


## Marsh Farms INCUBATORS

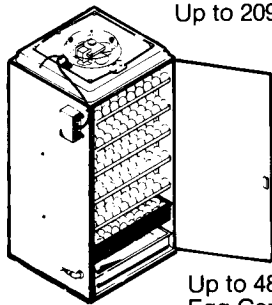
- FEATURING fully automatic turners. Adjustable temperature and humidity control.



**TURN-X**  
Up to 72 eggs.



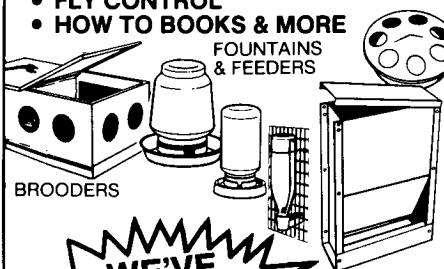
**ROLL-X**  
Up to 209 eggs.



Up to 480  
Egg Capacity.

## & BIRD EQUIPMENT

- BROODERS
- FEEDERS & FOUNTAINS
- FLY CONTROL
- HOW TO BOOKS & MORE



**WE'VE  
MOVED!**  
Write for our  
CATALOG today.

MANUFACTURED BY

**LYONE**  
ELECTRIC COMPANY, INC.

2765 MAIN STREET Dept. W  
CHULA VISTA, CA 92011 U.S.A.  
TELEPHONE: (619) 585-9900

WE ACCEPT



## Uncertain Future for Southern Race of Cape Parrot

by Andre' Boshoff  
Republic of South Africa

There are considered to be nine species in the genus *Poicephalus* which has been divided into two groups, namely the *P. robustus*; superspecies with two species and the *P. meyeri* superspecies with seven species. The two *P. robustus* species, namely *P. robustus* and *P. gulielmi*, are similar in size and plumage characteristics. *P. robustus* can be divided into three isolated populations which differ at the subspecific level; the head is brownish in the most southerly form, *P. robustus*, which is restricted to the southern part of Africa, and silvery grey in the remaining two forms, *P. fuscicollis* in west Africa and *P. suabelicus* in south-central Africa. The plumage colour variation is paralleled by a habitat difference: *P. fuscicollis* and *P. suabelicus* inhabit woodland and wooded savannah mainly in the tropical regions, while *P. robustus* mainly inhabits montane forest in subtropical and temperate regions, where it breeds. The montane evergreen forest is associated with the foothills of the Great Escarpment of southern Africa.

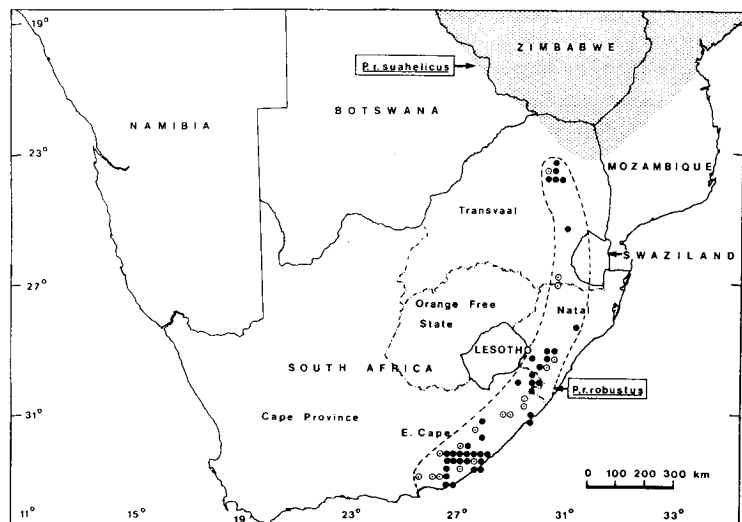
*P. fuscicollis* is well isolated from *P. robustus* and *P. suabelicus* but the latter two subspecies come to within about 100 km of each other in the north-eastern Transvaal Province of South Africa. These two subspecies are separated by habitat (see earlier) and two morphological characters: the mandible of *P. robustus* is less than 23 mm broad, while that of *P. suabelicus* is slightly larger (22.6 to

28.3 mm), and the latter has a lighter, more greyish head.

The type locality of *P. r. robustus*, the nominate race, is given as "eastern Cape" (Cape Province, South Africa); *P. r. robustus* is endemic to South Africa (see Figure 1). For the sake of convenience the Ciskei and Transkei, two small independent homelands which were formerly part of the eastern Cape Province (referred to hereafter as "E. Cape") are included as part of the E. Cape in Figure 1.

*P. r. robustus* is listed as Vulnerable in the South African Red Data Book — Birds and if it proves to be a separate species then steps to ensure its survival will require urgent attention. It is primarily a bird of high altitude (above 1,000 meters a.s.l.) evergreen forests, but it is not confined to this habitat. It is known to visit other habitats, usually in lower lying areas, in search of food (see later); for example, it is found on occasion in relict forest patches, in richer types of bushveld and thornveld, and in copses of the introduced black wattle *Acacia mearnsii*. Feeding parties have also been recorded in coastal forests and dune forests in the E. Cape, Ciskei and Transkei; it is not known from coastal forests in Natal although it was recorded there on occasion at the turn of the century.

Although *P. r. robustus* uses traditional roosting and breeding sites in the montane forests, it travels extensively on feeding forays; these flights away from the forests may be in any



The distribution of the nominate race of the Cape parrot *Poicephalus robustus robustus* in southern Africa; solid circles represent post-1959 records and open circles represent pre-1960 records. The distribution of *P. r. suabelicus* south of 19°S is indicated.

direction and they may occur over short or long distances (to over 100 km). The foraging flights do not exhibit regular patterns and in the outlying feeding areas they may be highly irregular. For example, flocks may feed and roost at a locality for days, weeks or months on end and then vanish for months or even years; some birds may return nightly to their traditional roost sites in the montane forests. These movements still occur in the E. Cape, Ciskei and Transkei but, although they may have taken place in earlier years, they have not been recorded in Natal in recent times. The coastal records in the E. Cape, Ciskei and Transkei (see Figure 1) are of birds on feeding forays.

*P. r. robustus* is normally gregarious, and while singletons are observed on occasion it is more common to find small flocks of up to 20 birds, and occasionally up to 40 or 50 birds. In a census covering 258 months (from January 1965 to June 1986) at Fort Grey, near the coast at East London in the E. Cape, flocks of between 70 and 150 birds were observed at a roost in five of the 42 months in which parrots were recorded.

*P. r. robustus* is primarily a consumer of the seed kernels of a variety of indigenous trees. The most important items in the diet of *P. r. robustus* are the seeds of yellowwoods *Podocarpus* spp., followed by those of the kaffirplum *Harpephyllum caffrum*, wild olive *Olea capensis*, red milkwood *Mimusops caffra* and the Cape chestnut *Calodendron capense*, and also the seeds and nectar of the coral tree *Erythrina caffra*. In addition, *P. r. robustus* has adapted to feeding on the seeds of some introduced trees, e.g. syringa *Melia azedarach*, black wattle *Acacia mearnsii*, pecan *Carya illinoensis*.

Few details are available on the breeding biology of *P. r. robustus* and those that follow relate to *P. robustus*. The normal clutch is of three or four eggs, single broodedness probably prevails, and there is an incubation period of almost four weeks and a nestling period of nine to eleven weeks.

According to the few breeding records that exist, the species breeds most often in autumn and spring. It nests in cavities in trees, where it makes use of natural hollows which, based on available data, are between six and 12 meters above the ground. No nest lining is used and the eggs are

# STILL TEN BUCKS!

## THE WORLD'S BEST TALKING PARROTS



1. African Grey *Ptilinopus erithacus* 2. Panama Yellow-fronted Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos* 3. Yellow-naped Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos* 4. Mexican Double Yellow-head Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos* 5. Tree-Martin Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos* 6. Scarlet Macaw *Ara macaws* 7. Blue and Gold Macaw *Ara macaws* 8. Green-winged Macaw *Ara macaws* 9. Military Macaw *Ara macaws* 10. Yellow-fronted Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos* 11. Blue-fronted Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos* 12. Eudemonia *Eudemonia erythrorhynchos* 13. Titi Cuckoo *Coccyzoides erythrorhynchos* 14. Greater Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* 15. Blue-headed Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* 16. Blue-crowned Amazon *Amazona formicivora* 17. Red-headed Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos* 18. Finch's Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos* 19. Tamarac Grey Parrot *Ptilinopus erithacus* 20. Spectacled (White-fronted) Amazon *Amazona erythrorhynchos*

©1984 WAYNE E. SMYTH

Wanna great stocking stuffer? "The World's Best Talking Parrots" poster measures 24" X 36." Each poster is available for \$10 plus \$4.50 P/H (CA res. add .65 sales tax/orders outside U.S. send \$7.00 postage). Send check or money order to Wayne Smyth or Caesar Bonilla, 837 North Fairfax, Los Angeles 90046, CA.

laid on bare wood some 30 to 90 cm below the entrance hole. Observation of captive birds indicates that only the female incubates. Little is known of the breeding biology of the species in the wild, particularly from the post-hatching stage to when the young leave the nest.

No reliable estimates of the size of the *P.r. robustus* population exist. A tentative estimate of about 600 birds was made for the area west of the Great Kei River (i.e. the E. Cape and Ciskei). In October 1966 a flock of 150 birds was seen at Fort Grey, near East London. Flocks of 150 to 200 birds were recorded in feeding grounds near King William's Town in the early 1970s, and in 1983 about 300 birds were counted in a single homeward bound flock near Fort Beaufort. During 1988 a total of 280 parrots, in several flocks, was counted in one evening near Stutterheim, north of King William's Town.

*P.r. robustus* numbers have apparently "decreased greatly" in the E. Cape and Transkei, less so in Natal and "perhaps hardly at all" in the Transvaal where it was always scarce. However, the irregular movements of the parrots may have helped to create the impression that the population has decreased. It is speculated here that there are now (1980s) probably around 1,000 birds remaining in the wild. Notwithstanding the fact that numbers have decreased, the present (post-1959) distribution is apparently much the same as the historical (pre-1960) distribution (see Figure 1).

It would appear that there are three main reasons for any reduction in the numbers of *P.r. robustus* that may have occurred.

1. Destruction and alteration of habitat. The past 150 to 200 years has seen varying degrees of destruction and alteration, by man, of coastal and montane evergreen forests in the range of *P.r. robustus*. This factor may have contributed to an overall reduction of the Cape parrot population.

2. Caged bird trade. *P. robustus* was, and is apparently still, keenly sought after for the caged bird trade and much illegal activity in this regard has been reported from southern Africa. "Cape parrots" are now frequently offered for sale by dealers outside Africa but it is not known which races are most commonly involved in this trade. A "large number" are held in captivity, even though their breeding potential in such circumstances is relatively poor,

as far as parrots go. Adults are trapped, but more often nestlings are taken, for caging and trade.

3. Persecution. *P.r. robustus* is often directly persecuted by farmers when the birds cause damage to fruit crops. In the E. Cape, *P.r. robustus* has taken to feeding in orchards of pecan trees; the pecan is native to North America. This situation has developed mainly in the past 20 or so years when farmers in the region came to recognize the agricultural and economic potential of pecan nuts. In particular, pecan growers are angered by the high wastage factor, which is characteristic of the parrots' feeding behaviour. Fruits are picked and, if not suitable (e.g. too green), are discarded; farmers talk of a pecan fruit "rain" when a large flock of parrots is feeding in a tree. It has been calculated that more than 50% of the fruits picked by the parrots are wasted. Some growers consider that without employing control methods they would stand to lose most of their crop. With present, and largely ineffective, control methods losses are estimated by one grower at 5 to 25% of the annual crop. Another grower stated, *inter alia*, that "our industry has been wrecked." Control methods attempted to date include shouting and throwing sticks and the use of gas guns, catapults, fire crackers, pellet guns and salt-filled shotgun cartridges to frighten the birds away. However, during the 1988 pecan nut season a grower in the Fort Beaufort district was seen shooting, with the intent to kill, at parrots in his orchards. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this practice is more common than is thought. *P. robustus* has been known to raid apple orchards but no serious damage has been reported.

*P.r. robustus* is known to breed in at least five protected forests in the E. Cape and Ciskei, in four in Natal, and probably in five in the Transvaal. Since most of the large patches of montane evergreen forest now enjoy a relatively good conservation status, it is probably safe to assume that the breeding localities are reasonably secure.

*P. robustus* enjoys full legal protection by the Cape Province, Ciskei, Transkei, Natal and Transvaal nature conservation ordinances, i.e. birds may not be caught, kept or transported without a permit. These regulations are enforced in most of the listed countries/provinces. In the

Cape Province a clause in the ordinance requires that details of the successful breeding of the species in captivity be reported to the conservation authority. The species is a "specially protected" bird in Natal.

*P. robustus* is listed in Appendix II of CITES, in an effort to halt or reduce trade in wild-caught birds. In the Cape Province, at least, only captive reared birds are considered for trade purposes.

Aside from the protection afforded by the respective nature conservation ordinances, and the conserved status of many of the forests where breeding takes place, there is at present no intensive and systematic program to ensure the survival of *P.r. robustus*. In Natal the Natal Parks Board is actively promoting the conservation of forests that are under private ownership.

There is an overriding need to establish the exact taxonomic status of the three races of *P.r. robustus*; should *P.r. robustus* prove to be a distinct species, action to ensure its survival will require urgent attention.

For *P.r. robustus* there is also a need to (i) obtain reliable estimates of total numbers, (ii) document and determine the conservation status of the extant breeding, and traditional roosting, localities in the montane forests, and (iii) investigate the movement patterns of the birds in relation to the temporal and spatial variation in the food supply in the montane forests and at the feeding grounds away from these forests.

Particular attention should be given to establishing the degree to which *P.r. robustus* is used in the caged bird trade, and to investigating non-destructive methods aimed at preventing or reducing damage caused by the birds in pecan orchards.

Depending on the outcome of the above studies, consideration can be given to a captive breeding program. Should the latter become a reality, the information gained from extant breeding operations, conducted by private individuals, will be of great value.

Steps must be taken to ensure the protection of all breeding localities and traditional roost sites; the conservation of prime feeding grounds should also be considered. Individual nest trees deserve special protection, and nest robbing must be curbed. An education campaign amongst landowners in the feeding grounds would be worthwhile.

Generous financial support from



*Cape parrots are extremely partial to the fruits of the pecan tree and are persecuted by commercial pecan nut growers.*

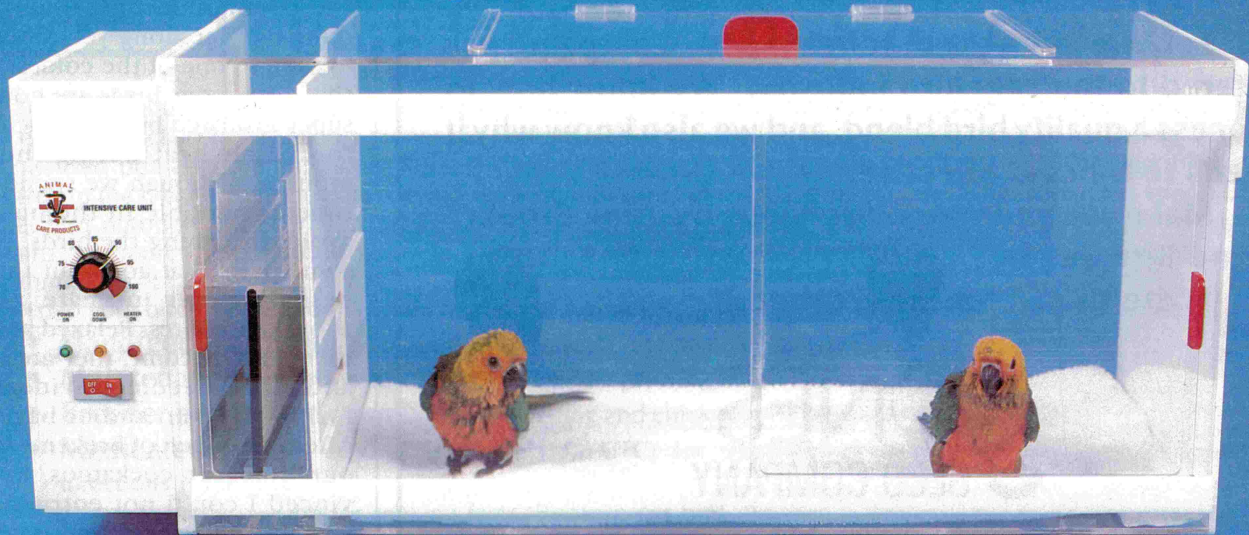
the AFA Conservation Fund made it possible for me to represent Africa at the 2nd International Meeting of the ICBP/IUCN Parrot Specialist Group in Curitiba, Brazil in October 1988, where I presented a paper, on which this article is based. ●



*The southern race of the Cape parrot  
Poicephalus robustus robustus.*

## Animal Intensive Care Unit

Birds in Need Will be Getting More ...



... And That's the Best Reason of All

- HANDFEEDING
- INJURED
- ILL

The "AICU" ANIMAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT, was designed, veterinary tested and proven by Hannis L. Stoddard, III, D.V.M.  
Outside dimensions 31-3/8 x 14-1/2 x 13. Inside dimensions 24 x 12 x 12.

- TEMPERATURE
- HUMIDITY
- FILTERED AIR

CALL OR WRITE FOR INFORMATION AND FREE BROCHURE  
ANIMAL CARE PRODUCTS, 3179 Hamner Ave., Suite 5, Norco, CA 91760 (714) 371-2465