

Transfer of South African population of Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus* from Appendix II to Appendix I. Proponent: South Africa.

NOTE: Under the current standard CITES taxonomy (Sibley and Monroe 1990), *Poicephalus robustus* is the Brown-necked Parrot, a species with a widespread though fragmented range in sub-Saharan Africa. Under this taxonomy, two of three subspecies of *P. robustus* occur in South Africa, the nominate subspecies or Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus robustus*, and *P. robustus suahelicus*. The latter also occurs in eastern Africa from Mozambique and Zimbabwe north to Tanzania and the southern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The third subspecies, *P. robustus fuscicollis*, is found in west Africa. If accepted in its present form and current CITES taxonomy is not revised, this proposal will have the effect of transferring both all known populations of *P. r robustus* and the South African population of *P. r. suahelicus* from Appendix II to Appendix I. However, the supporting statement indicates that the taxon to be considered in the proposal is "*Poicephalus robustus robustus*" and notes that this taxon has recently been recognised as a separate species, *Poicephalus robustus*. Under this proposed taxonomy (which has yet to be widely reviewed and recognised), other populations formerly assigned to *P. robustus* are now placed in *Poicephalus fuscicollis*, so that the other South African population of Brown-necked Parrot would be regarded as *P. fuscicollis suahelicus*. The proponents do not appear to intend to transfer South African populations of the latter from Appendix II to Appendix I. On the assumption that this matter is resolved during consideration of this proposal, and in line with the evident intent of the proponents as set out in the supporting statement, the analysis will consider *P. robustus robustus*.

Summary: *P. robustus robustus* is restricted to Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo Northern provinces in South Africa. Within this restricted area of distribution, the population is thought to be less than 500. The species reaches sexual maturity at four to five years, produces single clutches of around four eggs (double clutching is recorded in captivity) and is thought to have a long lifespan. Habitat destruction has been reported as the major threat to the population. Capture for aviculture is also reputedly threatening the species; prices for birds have reportedly risen from ZAR 1 000 per pair ten years ago to around ZAR 35 000 per pair today. The population is infected with the incurable Psittacine Feather and Beak Disease. The level of off-take cannot be quantified with any reliability, but according to the proponents is likely to be 20-50 birds a year, up to 10% of the population. Because CITES trade data do not distinguish between trade in this and other subspecies of *P. robustus*, it is impossible to tell how many individuals of the populations under consideration have been traded internationally in the past, although national trade is believed to be at a much higher level than international trade. There is apparent demand for the taxon outside South Africa, but there are very few definite records of birds kept in captivity outside this country. The proposal seeks to include this population in Appendix I in accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.24 Annex 1 criteria Aii), Bi) and Cii), on the basis of a small population, restricted area of occurrence and declining population.

Analysis Although data on current trends in population and habitat availability are lacking, *Poicephalus robustus robustus* has a very small population with a distribution that appears to be fragmented and has undergone historical contraction. With a total population estimated at perhaps 500 birds and fragmented range, each subpopulation can be expected to be well below the guideline figure of 500 in Annex 1 criteria Ai) of Resolution Conf. 9.24. It seems apparent therefore, that the taxon meets the biological criteria for inclusion in Appendix I. The great majority of reported commerce in the taxon is within the range State. However, the high reported value of the taxon there, the reported existence in the past few years of at least some birds outside the range State and the nature of the parrot trade in general indicate that the taxon is actually or potentially in international trade. It would appear therefore to meet the criteria for inclusion in Appendix I.

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
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Taxonomy

Although the Cape Parrot, *Poicephalus robustus* has been recently described as a new species, the supporting statement is presented using the Standard CITES taxonomy, which recognises the South African population as a subspecies, *P. robustus robustus*.

The recently proposed taxonomy has not yet been widely reviewed and recognised.

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
Range	
<p>South Africa: Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Limpopo Northern provinces.</p>	<p><i>The species has been recorded as occurring in Swaziland, but there are no recent reports to confirm this (TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa - South Africa, 2002; UNEP/WCMC, IUCN/SSC and TRAFFIC, 1999).</i></p>
IUCN Global Category	
LR/lc (Baillie and Groombridge, 1996)	

Biological criteria for inclusion in Appendix I

A) Small wild population

(i) Population or habitat decline; (ii) small sub-populations; (iii) one sub-population; (iv) large population fluctuations; (v) high vulnerability due to biology or behaviour

The results of annual total counts throughout the range of the species suggest that the population is below 500 birds.

The 2002 count found 476 parrots in the morning and 634 in the evening. This increase in numbers seen is attributed to a doubling of observer numbers and observation points (Warburton, 2002).

B) Restricted area of distribution

(i) Fragmented or localised population; (ii) large fluctuations in distribution or sub-populations; (iii) high vulnerability due to biology or behaviour; (iv) decrease in distribution, population, habitat or reproductive potential

No information measuring the area of occurrence is presented, but the species apparently has a restricted area of distribution. The range is becoming increasingly fragmented.

Due to the seasonal movements of the Cape Parrot, it is difficult and misleading to present an actual area (km²) of distribution (Warburton, 2002).

The habitat of the Cape Parrot is the discontinuous belt of naturally fragmented Afromontane forest patches (Symes and Downs, 1998). In many parts of its range where the Cape Parrot had been common, there has been a decline in sightings, with no recent records in some areas, indicating local extinction. In addition, several museum specimens were collected outside the present range indicating a historical contraction and fragmentation of range (UNEP/WCMC, IUCN/SSC and TRAFFIC, 1999; Wirminghaus, 1999).

Present Cape Parrot numbers are considered too low to enable recolonisation of suitable, distal forest patches (Wirminghaus et al., 2000).

It is not known to what degree the populations of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal are fragmented (Wirminghaus et al., 1999).

C) Decline in number of wild individuals

(i) Ongoing or historic decline; (ii) inferred or projected decline

No historic information on the degree of decline of the species is presented. Data from censuses are presented from 1998 to 2001, with numbers encountered being similar in 1998, 2000 and 2001.

Geldenhuys (2002) has no doubt that the taxon is declining in number.

In the mid-1960s there were no reliable estimates of Cape Parrot numbers although Skead (1964, cited in Wirminghaus et al., 2000) suggested that there were approximately 600 in the Eastern Cape (excluding the Transkei). The large flocks reported then have disappeared, attributed to the illegal capture of birds for the avicultural trade and the large scale selective logging of yellow woods (Brooke, 1984 cited in Wirminghaus et al., 2000).

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
	<i>Wirminghaus et al. (2000) state that populations have declined greatly in the past 50 years, particularly in the Eastern Cape, less so in KwaZulu-Natal, and slightly in the former Transvaal where it remains scarce.</i>
<u>D) Status suggests inclusion in Appendix I within 5 years</u>	

Trade criteria for inclusion in Appendix I

The species is or may be affected by trade

National trade is reportedly far more intensive than international trade. There is reputedly demand for the taxon outside South Africa. CITES trade data are rarely reported at the subspecies level, and as two subspecies occur in South Africa, it is not clear to which taxon the trade data refer.

Warburton (2002) contends that both national and international demand for the species appears to have increased over the last 12 months. Warburton (2002) further reports that a pair may fetch up to ZAR 41 000 in South Africa as of June 2002.

The United Kingdom Parrot Society Poicephalus Section Stud Book records four P.r. robustus birds in the Netherlands (Maddock 1999).

Recent web searches have not found any evidence of the taxon offered for sale.

Forbes and Downs (2000) describe the Cape Parrot as a highly sought-after avicultural species, and suggest that they are sold on the black market at exorbitant prices.

Other information

Threats

The primary threat is thought to be habitat destruction and fragmentation. Trade is thought to be a lesser threat. Part of the population is infected with the contagious, untreatable Psittacine Feather and Beak Disease.

Geldenhuys (2002) questions the conclusion that the taxon is declining due to loss of the Podocarpus forest and has been unable to find a historical account of the decline of this taxon. However, he does not dispute the low and currently declining numbers of the taxon.

TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa – South Africa (2002) note that the provincial nature conservation body, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) has not issued any permits for the collection of P. robustus from the wild. The origin of the birds held by aviculturalists is therefore unclear.

Cape Parrots, particularly nestlings, appear to be poached by a discrete, small group in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape (Wirminghaus, 1999).

Conservation, management and legislation

The species is totally protected from international trade by legislation in South Africa. It is also protected by general wildlife legislation in the provinces of South Africa where it occurs.

Population censuses are conducted annually, a consortium of NGO and University staff linked with provincial government agencies, and national government agencies.

There is no management or sustainable harvesting of the taxon. However, local communities are involved in conservation efforts for the taxon.

South Africa has no national CITES implementing legislation nor other legislation restricting exports of native fauna. Provincial legislation varies. In Northern Province permits are required to catch birds and these would apply to P. robustus robustus, although there are estimated to be less than 50 birds left in the wild in this region. In the Eastern Cape, permits are required to trap birds, but no permits have been granted in at least the past 10 years. The origin of birds currently held in captivity in Eastern Cape is unclear, however possession permits have been granted, in Kwazulu/Natal the taxon is designated a "specially protected" species under provincial legislation. Permits are required for hunting, transport, possession, sale, or donation of this species. Only

Supporting Statement (SS)	Additional information
	<p>one permit has been granted for capture in the wild in at least 10 years, and that for a deformed bird put into a breeding programme.</p> <p>The origin of birds in captivity in KZN is unclear, however possession permits have been granted. (TRAFFIC East/ Southern Africa - South Africa 2002).</p> <p>National legislation for birds kept in captivity is apparently being upgraded in South Africa, particularly in relation to this taxon (Warburton, 2002). However, enforcement of such legislation and prosecution of offenders is poor, due to a lack of resources.</p> <p>NGOs are developing identification material and dealing with confiscations (Warburton, 2002) with the University of Natal developing identification sheets (TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa - South Africa, 2002).</p> <p>The Cape Parrot Working Group has recommended that all Cape Parrots in captivity have close-rings, are microchipped, entered into a Studbook and have DNA samples registered in the Studbook. They have also applied to remove the youngest chick from natural nests for rearing in captivity, as they do not generally survive in the wild (TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa – South Africa, 2002).</p>

Similar species

The species is very similar to the Grey-headed Parrot, but distinguished by head colouration. An informed lay person should be able to distinguish the taxa and morphological measurements are also available to help distinguish it.

Captive breeding

Fifty birds are in captivity in breeding programmes in South Africa. The only known *P. robustus robustus* outside southern Africa are at a zoo in France.

The parrot breeds fairly easily in captivity; however, parrot re-introduction programmes are seldom successful and run the risk of further spreading Psittacine Feather and Beak Disease (TRAFFIC East/Southern – South Africa).

Two pairs of *P. robustus robustus* were registered in a stud book in the United Kingdom in 1997 (UNEP/WCMC, IUCN/SSC and TRAFFIC, 1999).

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