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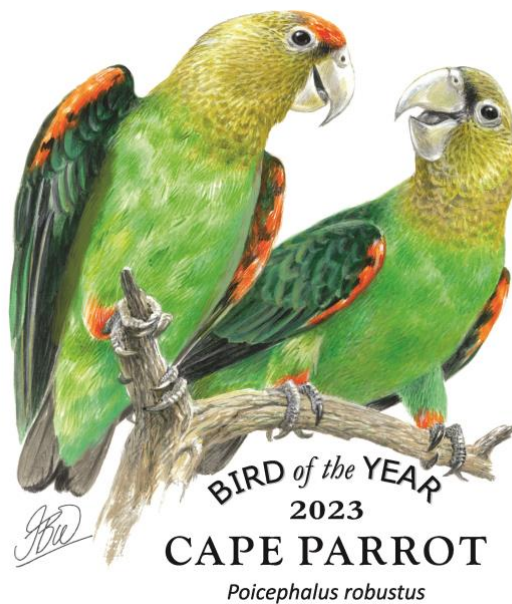
CAPE PARROT  
& MISTBELT FOREST  
ACTION PLAN

## MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

### BIRD OF THE YEAR 2023

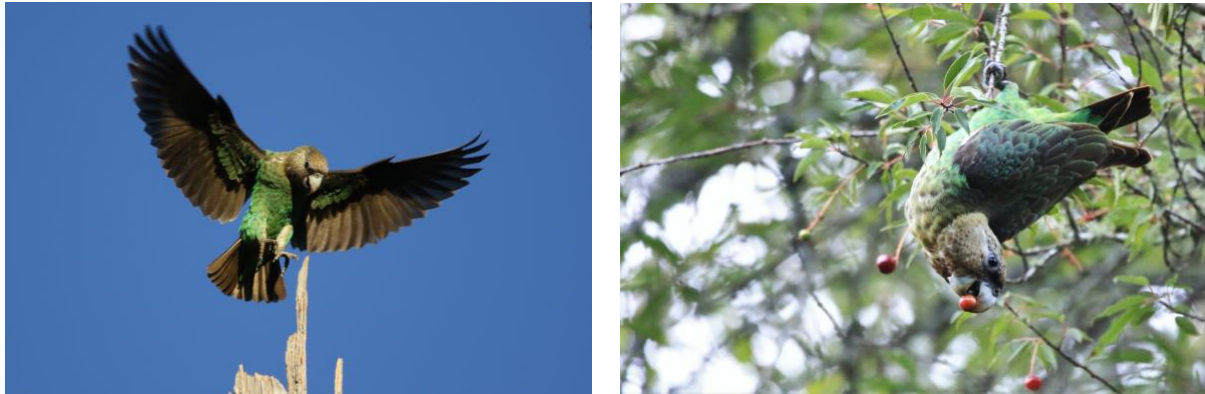
BirdLife South Africa is pleased to announce the Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*) as Bird of the Year for 2023.



The Cape Parrot (isikhwenene, upholi, Hokwe, Dikgwapa, Woudpapegaaï) is endemic to South Africa, so it occurs nowhere else in the world. This beautiful parrot inhabits isolated patches of forest in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces. It is classified as Endangered, and is estimated to have a remaining population of fewer than 1800 individuals.

The Cape Parrot is a medium-sized bird (~30 cm high) with a striking green body and golden head and neck. Adults have small orange patches on the shoulders and leg feathers, with females having a red patch above their beak, which is generally missing in males. They are usually seen as singletons, pairs, family groups or larger flocks. They are most often seen flying, or at roosting and feeding sites, especially at dawn or near dusk.

The Cape Parrot is typically found in the inland Afromontane forests, much of which have been heavily affected by the logging of large hardwood trees (like Yellowwoods), causing a shortage of natural nesting sites and food availability for the species. Cape Parrots are also susceptible to the highly contagious and sometimes fatal Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease.



© Cassie Carstens (Cape Parrot Project)

Several conservation organisations and individuals are working together to protect South Africa's Endangered Cape Parrot population. BirdLife South Africa is pleased to partner with our BirdLife Species Guardians, the Cape Parrot Working Group and the Wild Bird Trust's Cape Parrot Project to raise awareness about this species through our Bird of the Year 2023 campaign.

Dr Melissa Whitecross, who is the Landscape Conservation Programme Manager at BirdLife South Africa, and a Committee Member of the Cape Parrot Action Plan Coordinating Committee (CPAPCC), said "As South Africa's only endemic parrot, the Cape Parrot is a flagship species for Mistbelt forests, which span much of eastern South Africa's escarpment. As Bird of the Year 2023, the Cape Parrot will bring much-needed awareness to the importance of this ecosystem in providing ecological services to communities and supporting a host of other unique forest biodiversity. Working together with the Cape Parrot Project and Cape Parrot Working Group, we look forward to a year of raising awareness about this incredible bird species."

The work of these Species Guardians includes initiatives, such as population monitoring, habitat restoration, the provision of nest boxes, species rehabilitation, education of the public, and community outreach, among others.

"We had such a great celebration when we found out that Cape Parrot had been chosen as Bird of the Year for 2023. We live and breathe Cape Parrots every day, and feel that everyone should know more about this special species that is only found in South Africa. Through a focus on this flagship species, we are conserving their threatened forest habitat to leave a lasting legacy for them and all forest species", said Dr Kirsten Wimberger, Cape Parrot Project Director; Wild Bird Trust Trustee; and Co-chair of the CPAPCC.

Professor Colleen Downs, who is fellow CPAPCC Co-chair, Cape Parrot Working Group Chair, and SARChI Research Chair in Ecosystem health and biodiversity in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, was equally excited: "We are extremely grateful. Many people don't know that

South Africa has an endemic parrot species. Their preferred habitat, Mistbelt forests, are poorly protected. These forests are important, not only for other fauna and flora, but also for water catchment protection and carbon capture and storage.”

David Letsoalo, a BirdLife South Africa-trained Community Bird Guide who is based in the Magoebaskloof area and who has been involved in the conservation of the species for two decades, shared his thoughts upon hearing the news: “I first encountered the Cape Parrot when I was given an opportunity to join a Cape Parrot census back in the early 2000s. After I saw and experienced them, I started guiding people to see this special bird. I was given another opportunity to monitor them at their feeding and roosting sites, which furthered my interest in them. Now, when I hear them calling and see them flying, it heals me, and I feel proud to have played a part in conserving the Cape Parrot. I am so happy to see the Cape Parrot selected as Bird of the Year 2023!”



© Cassie Carstens (Cape Parrot Project)

Cape Parrots are truly the bright green and gold jewels of the forest, attracting birders from around the world to South Africa, and helping to support avitourism in rural areas that rely heavily on ecotourism for sustainability. They symbolise hope and resilience, and the species persists despite decades of historical, exploitative logging. A deserving Bird of the Year 2023, indeed.

Throughout 2023, BirdLife South Africa, together with our Bird of the Year partners, will create awareness about the Cape Parrot through the production of educational materials, such as posters, infographics, and learning resources for schools that will be free to download from the BirdLife South Africa website ([www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za)); articles in *African Birdlife* magazine; social media posts; and presentations to interested groups. Cape Parrot merchandise, such as t-shirts, pin badges, and fluffy toys, will also be on sale through BirdLife South Africa’s *Shop for the Birds!* from January 2023 (<https://shop.birdlife.org.za>).

We are extremely grateful to our Bird of the Year sponsor, the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, for once again making this initiative possible through the funds they generously donate towards BirdLife South Africa and the conservation of birds and biodiversity.

**ENDS**

For more information, photographs and interviews, please contact:

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Notes for the editor:

BirdLife South Africa strives to conserve birds, their habitats and biodiversity through scientifically-based programmes, through supporting the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources and by encouraging people to enjoy and value nature.

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More information about Bird of the Year 2023 will be made available from January 2023 at:

<https://www.birdlife.org.za/bird-of-the-year-2023>.

The Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust is the sponsor of Bird of the Year 2023.

Cape Parrot Project

The Wild Bird Trust's Cape Parrot Project (CPP) was established in 2009, with a base in Hogsback in the Eastern Cape. CPP has recently expanded into Magoesbaskloof in Limpopo. The project aims to conserve the Cape Parrot by using research to fill critical knowledge gaps and partnering with local communities for habitat restoration. More information: <https://www.wildbirdtrust.com/projects/cape-parrot-project>.

Cape Parrot Working Group

The Cape Parrot Working Group (CPWG) has been coordinating the interests of stakeholders concerned with the conservation of the Cape Parrot since 2001. The stakeholders include researchers, aviculturists, provincial and national conservation authorities, NGO's, and any interested individuals. The main aims of the group are to promote the conservation of the Cape Parrot and its habitat, encourage effective law enforcement for the protection of the Cape Parrot, bring awareness to the conservation issues of the species and support the captive breeding programme. More information: <https://cpwg.ukzn.ac.za/about-us>.

### Cape Parrot & Mistbelt Forest Action Plan

The Cape Parrot and Mistbelt Forest Action Plan was published in March 2020. This collaboratively developed, multidisciplinary action plan is underpinned by a unified vision for the conservation of the Endangered and endemic Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*), and its forest habitat. Specifically, the action plan identifies species and habitat conservation goals, and the activities needed to achieve them over the next 10 years. More information: <https://www.capeparrotactiongroup.org>.