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COURTSHIP AND MATING

COURTSHIP DISPLAYS AND MATING BEHAVIOUR OF THE CAPE PARROT IN THE HOGSBACK AREA, SOUTH AFRICA

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The Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*) is an endemic and rare parrot which occurs in small populations in scattered Afromontane forests in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, with a small, isolated population in the Wolkberg area, Limpopo Province (Wirringhaus *et al*, 2000). Cape Parrots have been recorded breeding all year round, with a peak between August and February, and courtship behaviours that have been described include the archangel display, wing and leg stretches, allopreening and feeding, shoulder rubbing and nibbling of each other's beaks (Wirringhaus *et al*, 2001). In this note, I describe the courting and mating behaviour exhibited by a pair of Cape Parrots recorded on video, copulating in the wild.

At 07:15 on 19 August 2016, a pair of parrots was observed flying into a White Stinkwood (*Celtis africana*) below the Hogsback Pass (-32.6113, 26.9329), on the edge of a large Afro-montane forest. Both individuals perched separately on exposed, upper branches of the tree at eye level from my observation point 10 m away. Both individuals proceeded to exhibit courting behaviour and previously undescribed pre-copulation behaviour. Pre-copulation behaviour consisted of a stepping motion, repeatedly shifting weight quickly

from one foot to the other, making a chewing action with their bills, rubbing their bills on branches as if to clean them, and lowering their body onto the perching branch whilst wagging their tails from side to side and holding the wings slightly cocked or removed from the body. These displays continued for seven minutes. The male then flew onto the branch on which the female was perched. The male immediately attempted to mount the female, but she shifted her body to force him to dismount. A second attempt by the male was again unsuccessful. The male then perched close to the female whilst bumping and rubbing his right wing against her. After a short period, he proceeded to successfully mount her and immediately started copulating, first from the right hand side of the female's tail, and then on the left. The female remained stationary and lifted her tail upwards and to the side. The male extended his wings downwards during copulation. Copulation continued in this manner for 7 minutes and 55 seconds. No vocalisation was made by either individual during the observation period. The male however, continued to make chewing motions with his bill during the mating process. After copulation, the male remained perched on the female's back for a short period, before dismounting. The male then proceeded to regurgitate food portions and fed the female on two occasions. After each courtship feeding event, the female removed mucus remains from her bill by rubbing it on surrounding branches. The male flew off after two minutes, whilst the female remained perched in the tree. Upon the return of the male three minutes later, both birds flew off into the surrounding forest.

The behaviour observed during this encounter corresponds with that reported by Wirringhaus *et al* (2001), especially the courtship feeding, wing-displays, and shoulder rubbing. The length of copulation observed is however more than double the 2-3 minutes reported previously. The stepping motions and chewing action performed by both birds has not yet been described in any literature, and this is most likely the first observation of this behaviour.

Video footage of this observation is available on the Cape Parrot Project Facebook page:

<https://web.facebook.com/groups/capeparrotproject/> (scroll down to 13 Sept 2016, 2.31pm, John Carr).

References

Wirringhaus JO, Downs CT, Symes CT, Perrin MR 2000. Abundance of the Cape Parrot in South Africa. *South African Journal of Wildlife Research* 30(1): 43-52.

Wirringhaus JO, Downs CT, Perrin MR, Symes CT 2001. Breeding biology of the Cape Parrot, *Poicephalus robustus*. *Ostrich* 72(3&4): 159-164.



Fig. 1. Cape Parrots copulating (still photo from video clip).