



Cape Cormorant

Trekduiker

Phalacrocorax capensis

The Cape Cormorant is endemic to southern Africa, breeding at 69 localities between Die Oase (1912BC), Namibia, and Stag Island (3326CD), eastern Cape Province (Cooper *et al.* 1982; Crawford *et al.* 1994). There are *c.* 280 000 breeding pairs (Cooper *et al.* 1982). Off western Africa, the most northerly record is from Gabon. It is a vagrant north of Lobito, Angola, but is a regular winter visitor to southern Angola (Brooke 1981b; Cooper *et al.* 1982). On the east coast it ranges to Delagoa Bay, Mozambique (Cooper *et al.* 1982). It is abundant on the west coast of southern Africa and less common on the east coast (Maclean 1993b). Less than 0.2% of the population breeds east of Cape Agulhas (3420CC) (Cooper *et al.* 1992). This is reflected in the much higher reporting rates in the west throughout the year.

Habitat: Breeding has been observed on an island in a small lake 7.5 km inland at Die Oase, at guano platforms in salt pans off northern Namibia, and on sandbanks in the Orange River estuary. Elsewhere it is strictly marine, breeding on offshore islands and rocks, cliffs and on artificial structures on the coastline (Cooper *et al.* 1982). It usually feeds at sea, but is often present in estuaries and under conditions of stress may wander on land up to 10 km from water (Crawford *et al.* 1980; Cooper *et al.* 1982). It has been reported up to 70 km offshore, but few occur more than 20 km from the coast (Siegfried *et al.* 1975).

Movements: It is a regular visitor to the coasts of KwaZulu-Natal and Delagoa Bay, in varying numbers mainly July–November (Cyrus & Robson 1980; Brooke *et al.* 1981), and a winter visitor to southern Angola (Brooke 1981b; Cooper *et al.* 1982). The models indicate its occurrence off KwaZulu-Natal June–October, with peak reporting rates off the Transkei October–November; elsewhere seasonal fluctuations are relatively small. Movement to KwaZulu-Natal is likely to be associated with the winter migration of Sardine *Sardinops ocellatus* (the ‘sardine run’) along the KwaZulu-Natal coast (Armstrong & Thomas 1989). An unusually large incursion into the Kosi Lakes (2632DD) occurred in winter 1994 (Kyle 1996).

Breeding: In the western Cape Province, it usually returns to the breeding colonies in September (Rand 1960). Off both Namibia and western South Africa, the main breeding season is September–February, but substantial numbers may breed as late as May, depending on food availability (Berry 1976; Crawford & Dyer 1995). In Algoa Bay, eggs or chicks have been recorded July–March (Randall *et al.* 1981). Increasing day-length stimulates gonadal development from August onwards (Berry 1976). Atlas records confirm the peak of breeding in spring and summer, and suggest some breeding throughout the year off western South Africa, but not elsewhere.

Interspecific relationships: It nests in association with other seabirds and Cape Fur Seals *Arctocephalus pusillus* and competes with them for breeding space, especially at islands off central Namibia (Duffy & La Cock 1985; Crawford *et al.* 1989). White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* prey on eggs, nestlings and adult Cape Cormorants at Bird Rock platform, near Walvis Bay (2214CD), and Dassen Island (3318AC) (Berry 1976; pers.

obs). Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus* eat eggs and small chicks (Cooper *et al.* 1982), and seals take Cape Cormorants at sea (Crawford & Robinson 1990).

Historical distribution and conservation: An old breeding record exists for Hole-in-the-Wall (3229AA) (Cooper *et al.* 1982), east of the present breeding distribution. Four guano platforms were constructed between Cape Cross (2113DD) and Walvis Bay between 1930 and 1963 and are now used extensively for nesting (Rand 1963; Berry 1975, 1976). Earlier it roosted in large numbers at small islands in Cape Cross Lagoon and Sandwich Harbour (2314AD) before they became joined to the mainland (Cooper *et al.* 1982). The platforms provide alternative safe habitat and may have increased available breeding space off central Namibia.

The Cape Cormorant is not regarded as a candidate for conservation management in South Africa (Cooper *et al.* 1982). Off South Africa, large interannual fluctuations in numbers of breeding birds (*c.* 8000–100 000 pairs) are related to abundance of Cape Anchovy *Engraulis capensis* (Crawford & Dyer 1995). Therefore, it is dependent on good management of the anchovy resource which is intensively fished. In the early 1990s, tens of thousands died from Avian Cholera *Pasteurella multocida*, which is spread via carcasses of dead birds, and secretions from mouth and nose, particularly into water pools (Crawford *et al.* 1992). Burning of carcasses and treatment of pools at islands will reduce the risk of infection. Large numbers have been oiled by fish-oil originating as waste from fish factories, but this risk has been reduced by an improved method of offloading fish from boats (Cooper *et al.* 1982). Breeding Cape Cormorants are susceptible to human disturbance (Cooper *et al.* 1982).

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Recorded in 173 grid cells, 3.8%
Total number of records: 9016
Mean reporting rate for range: 33.8%

