



## Tambourine Dove

### Witborsduifie

#### *Turtur tympanistria*

The Tambourine Dove is a tropical forest species ranging from West Africa eastwards across the breadth of the equatorial forest belt to Central and East Africa and southwards to Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and South Africa. South of the Zambezi Valley it is found primarily in lowlands to mid-altitudes, seldom above 1200 m (Rowan 1983).

It is distinctive, the only dove with pure white underparts; the male is snowy white below, but the female is noticeably duller with an extensive grey wash. The two blackish bars across the lower back are prominent when it flies up from the ground, but they are similarly prominent in the closely related Greenspotted Dove *T. chalcospilos*, which occurs alongside in some areas. Its call can also be confused with that of the latter.

**Habitat:** Closed evergreen forest, especially in coastal and other low-lying regions, is the most favoured habitat. It is also found in riverine forest, especially where the introduced Castor Oil Bush *Ricinus communis* grows, as it is particularly partial to the seeds of this plant and will forsake its forest cover to feed on them. In the river valleys of the southern Cape Province and KwaZulu-Natal it extends into dry thornveld areas, but is confined to the denser evergreen growth along gullies and seasonal watercourses. It frequents shrubberies of gardens in well-wooded suburbs and may be seen drinking at garden bird-baths. Within its forest habitat it keeps mainly to the lower levels, feeding on the ground and flying with great agility through tangles

of undergrowth. Dowsett-Lemaire (1983b) found that in Afromontane forest in Malawi, the minimum-sized territory for a breeding pair was 2.3 ha.

**Movements:** It is considered to be sedentary. However, Rowan (1983) referred to a ringing study at Mtunzini (2831DD) in which two- to fourfold increases in capture rates were recorded July–August, in each of four years. The models show clear peaks in reporting rates, but at different times of year. If one assumes that long-distance migration does not occur, these differences probably represent differences in breeding season with concomitant differences in the timing of vocalizations associated with breeding, and post-breeding dispersal; the Tambourine Dove is always more readily heard than seen.

**Breeding:** Rowan (1983) provided data for KwaZulu-Natal and Zimbabwe where nests with eggs may be found September–May, peaking October–November. The few atlas records, and the peaks in the occurrence models (see above) for Zones 5 and 6, appear to agree with this, but earlier peaks in reporting rates in Zones 4, 7 and 8 suggest that breeding is earlier in the south.

**Interspecific relationships:** It is sometimes seen together with Cinnamon Doves *Aplopelia larvata* when both are attracted by the same seed falls on the forest floor. It also overlaps in some areas with the Greenspotted Dove and, in eastern Zimbabwe, with the Bluespotted Dove *T. afer*. Rowan (1983) reported an obscure reference to a hybrid between Bluespotted and Tambourine Doves, but the hybrid was believed to be infertile and the mating presumably occurred in captivity. All three species are similar-sized ground-feeding birds, but the Tambourine Dove tends to confine its foraging activities to the interior of evergreen forest, while the other two usually feed outside of the forest.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** There is some evidence for a post-1960s spread westwards from Knysna (3423AA) to the southwestern Cape Province, perhaps concomitant with the spread of Castor Oil Bushes (Rowan 1983). However, it is not easily observed and may simply have been present but previously unrecorded at the 'new' localities.

It is popular amongst aviculturalists, but in South Africa it is protected by law from trapping and trading. The Tambourine Dove's wide range and ability to inhabit secondary forest growth probably ensures its survival in the foreseeable future.

T.B. Oatley

Recorded in 408 grid cells, 9.0%  
Total number of records: 8305  
Mean reporting rate for range: 19.3%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



