



Cape Sugarbird

Kaapse Suikervoël

Promerops cafer

The Cape Sugarbird is endemic to the fynbos biome (Clancey 1986a), but occasionally wanders into other areas. There is an unusual extralimital record from Jagersfontein (2925CD) in the Free State (De Swardt & Buys 1992). It is the quintessential fynbos bird, noisy and conspicuous, and intimately associated with shrubs of the family Proteaceae, in which it nests and from whose showy inflorescences it feeds upon nectar and satellite insects (Skead 1967c; Mostert *et al.* 1980). It is probably an important pollinator of these plants (Collins & Rebelo 1987; Rebelo 1987; Seiler & Rebelo 1987; Wright 1991 *contra* Coetzee & Giliomee 1985).

Habitat: The vegetation analysis shows virtually all records came from Fynbos, in which it occurs almost exclusively in proteoid shrublands. Other vegetation types represented probably are near to fynbos or enclose fynbos isolates. Some alien plants attract sugarbirds, albeit on a transient basis, into otherwise inimical habitat. These include *Eucalyptus* spp. and Sisal *Agave sisalana* in the Karoo (Martin *et al.* 1989), Sisal in strandveld (Richardson 1990b) and suburban gardens (Russell 1991) and, on a finer scale, *Eucalyptus lehmannii* in Restionaceous Tussock Marsh (Taylor, H.C. 1984) on the Cape Peninsula (3418AB) (Fraser & Crowe 1990).

Movements: It moves in response to the flowering phenology of its food plants and tracks species such as Kreupelhout *Leucospermum conocarpodendron* on the coastal plains in spring and summer and Suikerbos *Protea repens*

on the hillsides in winter. Ringed birds have moved up to 160 km in the southwestern Cape Province (Fraser *et al.* 1989; Fraser & McMahon 1992a; pers. obs). Many birds return to the same areas at the same time each year after an absence in the intervening months. Some males may be virtually resident in artificial environments, such as botanical gardens, where an unnatural richness of plants provides a year-round food supply (Oschadleus & Fraser 1988). Records in non-fynbos vegetation types (e.g. Martin *et al.* 1989; Martin & Pepler 1995) may represent movements between isolated fynbos-clad mountains. These movements are today facilitated by the presence of alien food plants or, indeed, initiated by them. It also moves in response to fire and avoids burnt areas until food plants have matured (Fraser 1990). Given the restricted range and the nature of these movements, it is not surprising that the models fail to show patterns of migration. The Jagersfontein record is thought to have been a response to drought conditions in the eastern Cape Province (D.H. de Swardt *in litt.*).

Breeding: Atlas data are concentrated May–September, which coincides with the main flowering season of *Protea* spp. Its breeding biology has been studied in detail (Broekhuysen 1959; Winterbottom 1962c; Skead 1967c; Burger *et al.* 1976; Richardson 1990a).

Interspecific relationships: The closely related Cape and Gurney's *P. gurneyi* Sugarbirds have been found to co-occur in the Amatole Mountains (3227CA) in the eastern Cape Province (Skead 1964d, 1967c). During the atlas period, no records were received of both species in the same grid cell, but they were found in two cells close to each other (3226DB and 3227CB) in the Amatole Mountains area. An early 20th-century specimen from the southern Cape Province was tentatively identified as a hybrid (Skead 1967c). Males defend food plants against other nectarivores, particularly Orangebreasted Sunbirds *Nectarinia violacea* as well as other sugarbirds (Wooler 1982).

Historical distribution and conservation: The distribution map is similar to that presented in Skead (1967c) and the range does not appear to have changed in recent times. Destruction of coastal lowlands by holiday-home and other development, agriculture and invasion by alien plants, are serious long-term threats. Habitat in mountainous areas is lost to alien-plant infestation (notably by *Pinus* spp. and *Hakea* spp.), agroforestry and water impoundment. Too-frequent burning eliminates seed-regeneration of the slow-growing Proteaceae food source (Martin & Mortimer 1991; Richardson & Fraser 1995).

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Recorded in 150 grid cells, 3.3%
Total number of records: 5847
Mean reporting rate for range: 25.9%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



