



Cape Turtle Dove

Gewone Tortelduif

Streptopelia capicola

This is probably one of the commonest birds in southern Africa, occurring virtually throughout the region and recorded in more grid cells than any other species. Many of the *c.* 8% of grid cells in which it was not recorded were thinly covered, but its absence from most of the Namib, including the better-atlased northern section, is probably accurate. Although it is the most abundant large dove of arid to semi-desert regions, at least some trees and access to water are essential requirements (Rowan 1983). A population of 40 000 birds was estimated for Swaziland (Parker 1994). It occurs across Africa to the equator, but further north it is present only in the east, as far as Ethiopia (Rowan 1983).

Generally it is seen singly or in pairs, foraging in cleared areas and agricultural lands, but large numbers often congregate at water or food, and at roost or rest sites (Rowan 1983). As a large, conspicuous dove that utters its penetrating, well-known call all day, and often at night, throughout the year, it must have been one of the most thoroughly recorded species. In the more arid parts of the region, concentrations coincide with proximity to reliable sources of water (e.g. Nossob, Molopo and Okavango rivers and areas with concentrations of boreholes on farms and cattleposts, such as near Ncojane (2220C,D, 2320A,B) and Ghanzi (parts of 2121 and 2122)).

Habitat: Its catholic choice of habitat is obvious in its presence in all vegetation types, with reporting rates of over 50% in most of them. High reporting rates in the grassland types and Grassy Karoo are at least partly the result of tree-planting, especially in groves (Rowan 1983), and of man-made water sources. It avoids forest, however (Rowan 1983).

Movements: Reporting rates were fairly constant through the year but in the most arid area, Zone 2, there was an apparent increase in late summer and early winter, and a decrease in late winter and early summer. This may reflect an influx during the late-summer rainy season and exploitation of the flush of grass seeds thereafter. Seasonal population fluctuations in the Kruger National Park (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b and northern KwaZulu-Natal (Rowan 1983) have been

reported, but are presumably localized phenomena. In Lesotho, unexpectedly, it moves into the highlands in winter, apparently to exploit grain in fields of harvested maize (Tarboton *et al.* 1993; Allan *et al.* 1996).

Ringling recoveries in southern Africa indicate a sedentary nature: of 225 birds recovered, only seven were 10 or more kilometres from the ringing site (maximum 38 km). However, these ringing statistics probably reflect a pattern typical of birds in human-dominated as opposed to natural habitats. In a strong flyer such as this, it can be assumed that extensive movements to exploit seasonally abundant water and seeds were the norm prior to large-scale habitat alteration and the widespread impoundment of water.

Breeding: Breeding was recorded in all parts of its range, throughout the year, with a spring/summer peak evident in most Zones. In Zones 1 and 2 the peak season is markedly different, mid- to late summer, coinciding with the late-summer rains; this agrees with egg-laying data from Namibia (Brown & Clinning in press). A greater proportion of late-winter records is evident for Zones 5–7.

Interspecific relationships: Although there are many grid cells in which this species and the Laughing Dove *S. senegalensis* both had high reporting rates, there are also extensive areas of sympatry not so shared, suggesting some degree of complementarity. The occurrence of these two species is considered to be 'very closely linked' within the same savanna and woodland environments in Zimbabwe, but with one usually outnumbering the other (Irwin 1981).

Historical distribution and conservation: From early accounts of the avifauna of this region (e.g. Stark & Sclater 1906), it has always been common over much of southern Africa. However, it is likely to have expanded its range into some open, waterless areas because of man's activities there, and has certainly adapted to human-modified habitats elsewhere (Irwin 1981; Hockey *et al.* 1989).

B.D. Colahan and J.A. Harrison

Recorded in 4111 grid cells, 90.6%
Total number of records: 104 224
Mean reporting rate for range: 70.7%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



