



Laughing Dove

Rooiborsduifie

Streptopelia senegalensis

The Laughing Dove occurs virtually throughout southern Africa, with apparent gaps in its range closely matching areas not well atlased. The lower reporting rates in the driest parts of the Namib and the Kalahari are genuine. It is evidently most common over the central plateau of South Africa, while elsewhere many of the grid cells with high reporting rates match the distribution of various cities, towns, and even villages. A population of 7000 was recently estimated for Swaziland (Parker 1994). Extraliminally, it occurs over most of sub-Saharan Africa; it extends into southern Asia and parts of the eastern Mediterranean where it was probably introduced, as in Western Australia, and where it is now well established (Goodwin 1983).

Although not a sociable species, individuals and pairs often gather to feed or drink in open spaces. Its abundance around human settlements means that it is well known, and the atlas data are reliable.

Habitat: Its ubiquity is obvious in the vegetation analysis. Its abundance on the central plateau is reflected in high reporting rates for the grasslands which used to cover this region, but where human settlements and agriculture now predominate. In natural areas, it prefers open savanna and *Acacia* thornveld; it avoids natural high-altitude grasslands but will visit associated cultivated fields.

Movements: Movements in southern Africa have been widely reported (e.g. Tree 1963, 1990a; Irwin 1981; Rowan 1983; Quicquelberge 1989; Clancey *et al.* 1991). Most of the models show only slight seasonal variations, but the predominance of records from suburbia, where the species is resident, would tend to mask patterns in more natural areas. Zones 1 and 2 do have slight summer increases while Zone 5 appears to have a complementary summer decrease. It is possible that a population which breeds in the relatively arid west in summer when water and seeds are peaking there, moves to the relatively mesic east in the dry winter season. 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). These observations tend to support the claim that it is 'partially migratory, at least in southern Africa' (Urban *et al.* 1986).

There are ringing recoveries that show that it is capable of long-distance movements: southern Botswana to southern Zambia (998 km); Mwaku Pan (2022D) to Kadoma (1829BD) (750 km); Mazoe (1730DB) to Beit Bridge (2229BB) (550 km);

and Gobabeb (2315CA) to near Helmeringhausen (2516DD) (299 km). However, out of 107 recoveries in South Africa, only two birds were recovered more than 10 km (11 and 21 km) from the ringing sites which, significantly, were mostly in urban areas (SAFRING).

Breeding: It breeds throughout its range in southern Africa, and throughout the year, with a spring and early-summer peak in Zones 3–8. The peak breeding season is clearly different in Zone 2 and part of Zone 1 where late-summer breeding coincides with late-summer rains, as for the Cape Turtle Dove *S. capicola*. This agrees with egg-laying data from Namibia and Botswana which show clear October–March and November–April peaks respectively (Skinner 1996a; Brown & Clinning in press). The amount of breeding is greatly influenced by conditions at the time, particularly the availability of food (Skinner 1996a).

Interspecific relationships: Of the ten highest-ranked vegetation types, seven appear in the top ten for the other ubiquitous columbid, the Cape Turtle Dove, but in a different order. Thus, despite their general sympatry, and the frequency with which they are seen together, there may be some consistent differences in their ecological requirements. In miombo woodland in Zimbabwe, a degree of competitive exclusion has been suggested, with the dominant species varying from one area to another (Irwin 1981). In cleared woodland, it has been observed that Cape Turtle Dove is replaced by Laughing Dove (A.J. Tree pers. comm.).

Historical distribution and conservation: The Laughing Dove's ability to take advantage of habitats, water and food sources afforded by human activities has probably enabled it to increase in total numbers in southern Africa, so that instead of seeming to be 'everywhere fairly common' (Stark & Sclater 1906), it is now very common in most areas. Indeed, under certain conditions, it reaches pest status (e.g. Centre for Overseas Pest Research 1976; Beesley 1978).

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Recorded in 3900 grid cells, 86.0%
Total number of records: 102 168
Mean reporting rate for range: 69.5%

Reporting rates for vegetation types



