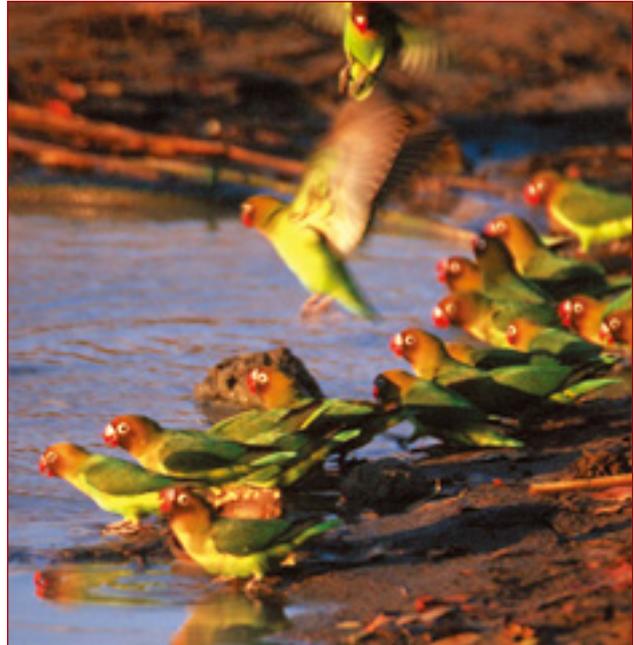


BLACK-CHEEKED LOVEBIRD | *Agapornis nigrigenis*

RE Simmons | Reviewed by: T Dodman

© Pete Leonard



© Louise Warburton

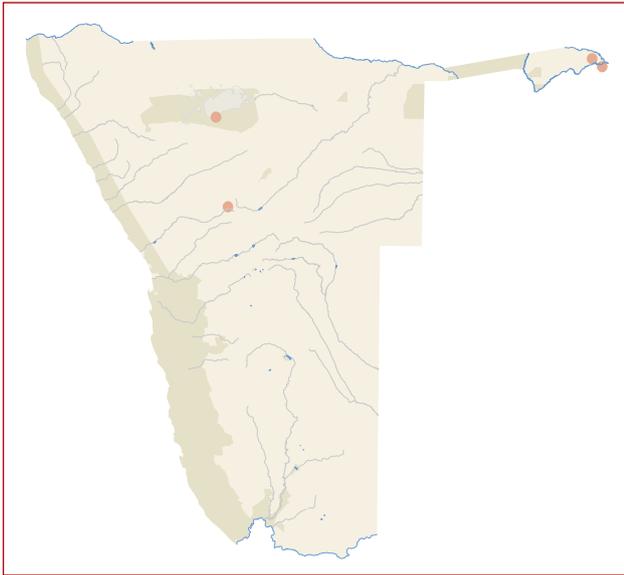
Conservation Status:	Critically Endangered
Southern African Range:	North-eastern Namibia
Area of Occupancy:	Unknown
Population Estimate:	Unknown, probably fewer than 50 birds
Population Trend:	Stable, possibly increasing
Habitat:	Mopane, broadleafed woodland
Threats:	Parrot trade, degradation of sandveld woodlands



DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

This small, colourful parrot has one of the most restricted ranges of any parrot in Africa. The entire population of Black-cheeked Lovebirds occurs within Zambia, between the Kafue and Zambezi rivers (Stattersfield & Capper 2000). It is estimated to have a global range of 4,550 km² and a core breeding area of only 2,500 km² (Dodman *et al.* 2000). Birds occasionally stray into the Zambezi region of Namibia across the Zambezi River (Dodman *et al.* 2000), but sightings are few and rarely confirmed (Winterbottom 1971). It was not recorded more recently in a survey by Brown (1992) in Bwabwata National Park or by Koen (1988) in the Zambezi, although sightings still occasionally occur in these regions (Spottiswoode 1997, Kaestner 1998, Warburton 2005). However, on the basis

of these sightings and, more importantly, the fact that it once occurred regularly in north-eastern Namibia and at Victoria Falls, it is accepted to the southern African list (Hockey *et al.* 2005) and enters this Red Data book. It is expected to occur in Namibia on a seasonal basis as it moves to ripening sorghum and millet crops, especially on Impalila Island and Lisikili, 20 km east of Katima Mulilo (Dodman *et al.* 2000). It has reduced populations because of massive bird-trade capture in the 1920s, a perceived drying-out of surface water on which it depends in its core habitat, and a reduction in the planting of its favoured seed plants (Dodman 1995, Dodman & Katanekwa 1995, BirdLife International 2004). There is also the possibility that it is overlooked, given that there are vast woodland tracts supporting Mopane and the favoured annual grasses in the Zambezi region of Namibia (C Hines in Mendelsohn



& Roberts 1997), rarely surveyed by ornithologists. Two populations of escaped birds persist at Mount Etjo (near Omaruru) and Okaukuejo (in Etosha National Park).



ECOLOGY

In Zambia, it is usually found in flocks of eight to 12 birds but flocks of up to 800 birds form at the end of the dry season at the limited water points in Mopane (not *Baikiaea*) woodlands (Dodman *et al.* 2000, Warburton 2002). It is most active early in the morning and late in the afternoon and breeds in loose colonies in hollows of large Mopane trees. Nests are large and domed, similar to those of other lovebirds, but material is not carried in the rump feathers as in the Rosy-faced Lovebird (del Hoyo *et al.* 1997). Typical breeding months are February to April, somewhat later than usually reported (Warburton 2002). Clutches of two to eight eggs (typically five) are laid, with isolated reports of brood sizes of seven and eight nestlings (Warburton 2002). The Black-cheeked Lovebird feeds in small flocks on the ground, primarily on annual grasses whose seeds remain for several months and include *Echinochloa* and *Oryza* grasses (Dodman *et al.* 2000). It was once considered to be a pest species, feeding in large swarms on planted millet and sorghum seeds (Dodman & Katanekwa 1995). It is also known to feed on flowers, leaves, fruits and insects (Warburton 2002). It is resident and is best seen close to water points that it visits twice per day.



THREATS

There are few current threats to this bird in Namibia because of the few birds present, but they are probably similar to those in present-day Zambia. Future populations may be influenced by the parrot trade, the degradation of Mopane and *Terminalia* woodlands in the Zambezi region and increasing numbers of cattle throughout

previously unoccupied areas (Mendelsohn & Roberts 1997). However, waterholes or troughs for cattle and the growing of millet may increase the likelihood of birds returning to Namibia, given its fondness for this food type and its dependence on water (Dodman 1995, Dodman *et al.* 2000, Warburton 2002). The present threatened state of the small population was exacerbated by the capture of large numbers of birds, peaking in 1929, when an estimated 16,000 birds were captured over a four-week period by parrot traders (RE Moreau in Dodman 1995). The trade was banned in 1930 and the species remains on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Present-day trapping is limited to casual trapping of birds for food in Zambia, although some commercial trade is occasionally reported (Dodman 1995, Dodman & Katanekwa 1995).



CONSERVATION STATUS

It is globally classified as *Vulnerable* (Stattersfield & Capper 2000, IUCN 2012a) having been down-graded from *Endangered* because of a larger than previously known population of 10,000 birds in Zambia (Dodman *et al.* 2000). We list it as *Critically Endangered* in Namibia; although the current population is unknown, it probably numbers fewer than 50 individuals (IUCN criterion D). This is despite the fact that this species was regarded as 'plentiful' in the Zambezi region 70 years ago (Leppan 1944), and specimens were collected a century ago in the same area (Haagner 1909). The conservation measures presently undertaken in Zambia probably mean that more birds will appear in Namibia over the next 10 to 20 years. Released birds are also known to form natural self-sustaining populations in Namibia, for example in Etosha National Park and Mount Etjo Lodge (W Versfeld, RE Simmons pers. obs.), indicating this species can be re-introduced to partially suitable habitat. Any revised or new Namibian Parks and Wildlife legislation needs to give *Specially Protected* status to this species.



ACTIONS

Systematic surveys should be undertaken in suitable Mopane habitat east of Katima Mulilo or at Impalila Island to determine Namibian population levels, especially in light of the conservation and research measures being enacted in Zambia (Warburton 1999, 2002, 2005). Black-cheeked Lovebirds may be encouraged back to Namibia either by deliberately releasing wild birds in suitable areas, or by the planting of millet (*mahango*), which is a staple food type, to encourage Zambian birds across the border. If it is found that this species occurs regularly in Namibian woodlands, then further research on its habitat requirements should be undertaken and water points should be provided where the birds can drink.