

# in their element

AS THIS PORTFOLIO SHOWS, PHOTOGRAPHER RICHARD DU TOIT IS A PAST MASTER AT CAPTURING BIRDS AS THEY GO ABOUT THEIR LIVES, AT HOME IN THEIR HABITAT. PHIL HOCKEY WROTE THE CAPTIONS.

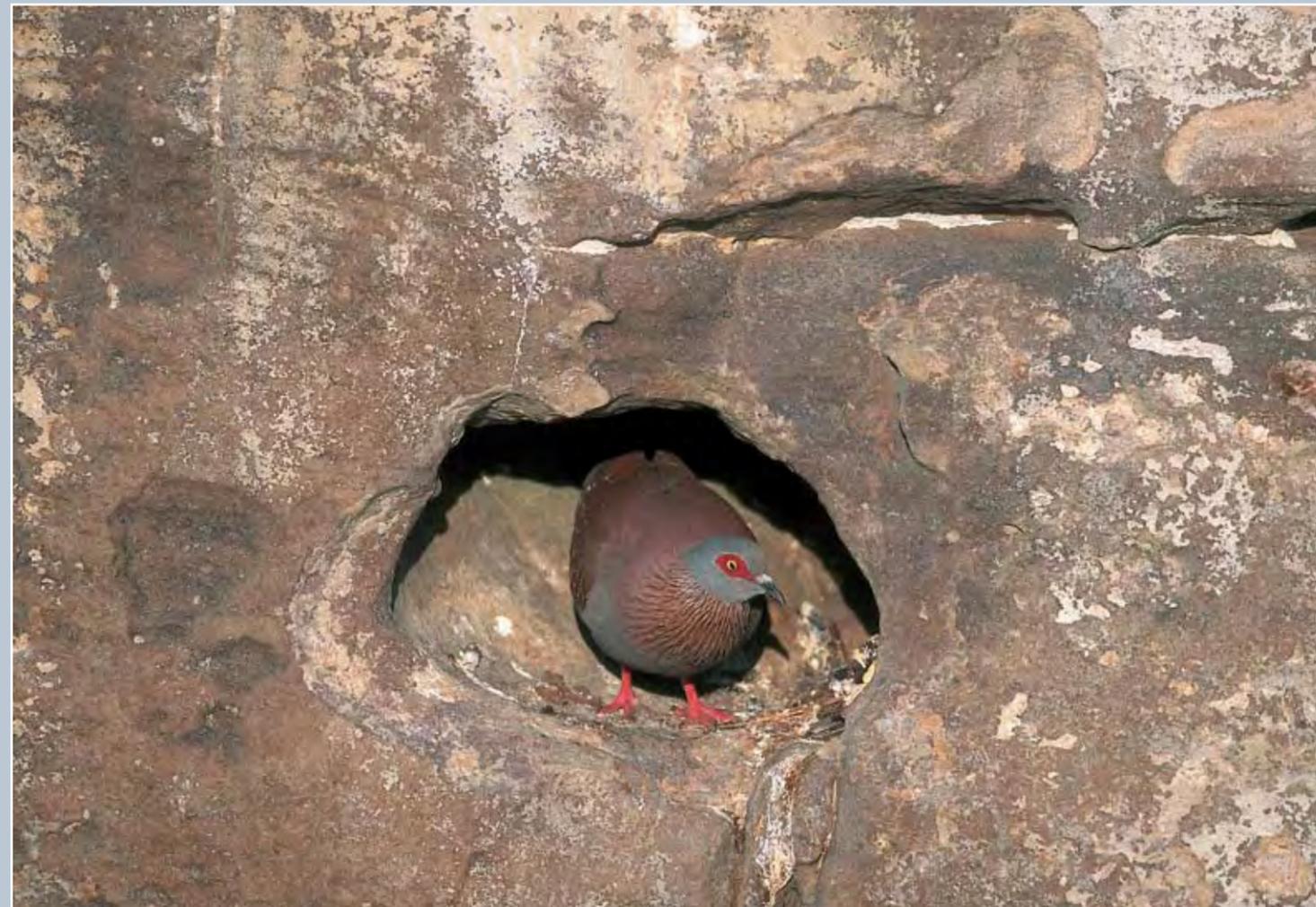


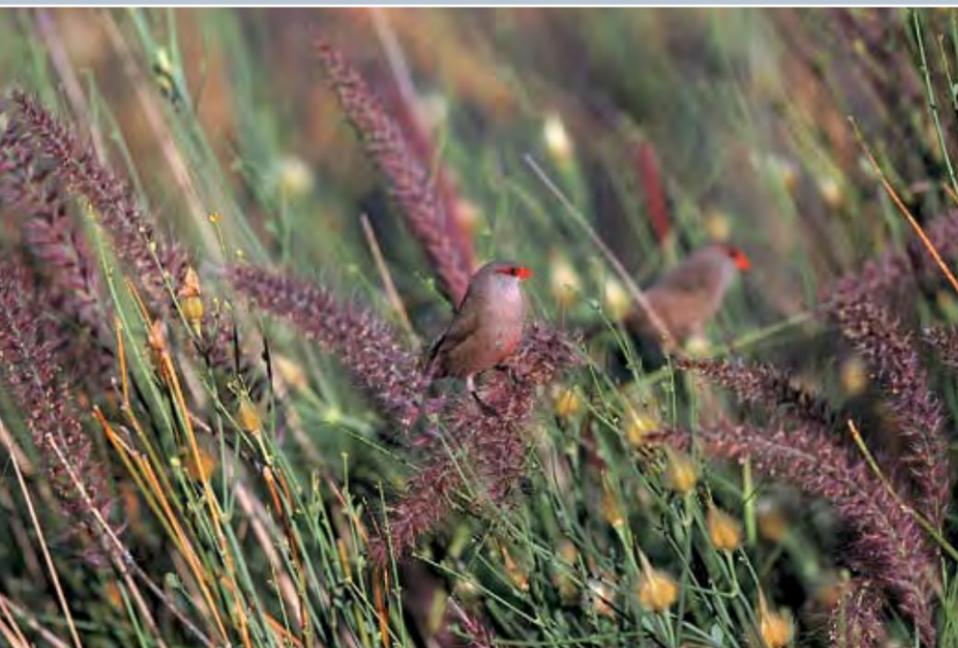
The Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* (male on the left) is a cooperatively breeding species, with up to four male helpers assisting the breeding pair. As food becomes more and more scarce, so the number of helpers increases. Primary helpers, usually offspring of the breeding pair, help throughout the breeding cycle, including in defence of the territory. Secondary helpers, usually failed breeders that are unrelated to the breeding pair, only arrive after the eggs have hatched.



The Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* is a widespread, common, familiar (and noisy!) species. In eastern and southern Africa combined, its population may be as large as half a million birds. In recent years, these birds have become increasingly urbanised, breeding on buildings and in suburban stands of alien trees, where they regularly usurp nests of the Black Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucus*.

The natural habitats of the Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea* are mountains, rocky gorges and cliffs, where they roost on cliff ledges and in caves. The advent of modern man, however, opened up a whole new habitat niche for these birds, which now frequently breed and roost on buildings in towns, flying out during the day to forage in flocks in the surrounding croplands.





The diminutive Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* is a bird of rank vegetation, usually found close to water. This combination of habitat requirements has allowed it to spread into arid areas, such as along the lower Orange River and even along ephemeral watercourses in the Namib Desert. For example, its spread along the Kuiseb River has allowed it to colonise the coastal towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund.



Denham's Bustard *Neotis denhami*, formerly called Stanley's Bustard, favours grassland and lowland fynbos for breeding, but outside the breeding season spends most of its time in agricultural lands. Although the species has a wide dietary spectrum, including plant material, invertebrates and vertebrates, habitat loss and human disturbance have led to it becoming globally Near-threatened. ■