



Volume 30/Issue 1

Mourning Dove

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MOURNING DOVE



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MOURNING DOVE

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Have you ever heard a soft cooing “hoo-LA-hoop-hoop-hoop” sound in your neighborhood? This is the song of a mourning dove. They are one of the most common birds in North America. Named for their mournful song, these slender doves are light brown with black spots on their wings. Their tail is long and pointed with white tips on the feathers. Mourning doves are 12 inches long, the size of the ruler you might have in your desk. Their feet are bubble gum pink.

Mourning doves live in many kinds of habitats. The only habitats they don't live in are thick forests. As people settled across the United States and Canada, they created more open habitat. This helped mourning doves become more common. Cities and towns are good habitats for mourning doves because of parks, green spaces and backyards. You probably have mourning doves in your neighborhood.

The number of doves you see changes with the season. Mourning doves do not do well in very cold places. Birds living in northern areas migrate to the southern United States. Sometimes, a few tough doves will spend the winter. Bird feeders become important in helping them survive winter's cold. If your family feeds the birds, watch to see if any doves spend the winter in your yard.

Seeds make up almost all of a mourning dove's diet. They are ground feeders. Doves will eat corn, wheat, sorghum, millet, sunflower seed, grass seed, mustard seed, ragweeds, pine nuts and many other seeds. Because many of the seeds they eat are small, a mourning dove eats a lot at one time. Scientists found one mourning dove that had eaten 17,200 bluegrass seeds in one sitting! All this food gives the doves the energy they need to fly swiftly. It also helps with the demands of raising babies.

Mourning doves build their nests in trees and shrubs. They will also nest on the ground. Doves sometimes choose strange places to build their nest. People have found dove nests in the eaves and gutters of buildings. They have even found mourning dove nests in old abandoned tractors. Male doves bring their mate nest materials. She arranges the twigs, pine needles and grasses into a flimsy, 8-inch bowl-shaped nest. Two white eggs are laid in the nest. Young doves are called squabs. They grow very quickly and leave the nest in a little over two weeks. Often, the parents will raise several broods of babies over the summer.

Mourning doves can live to be very old. In Florida, a mourning dove was banded as a squab in 1968. In 1998, a hunter harvested this dove in Georgia. The dove was 30 years old! Imagine all the miles that dove flew in its lifetime.

MEET THE PIGEONS



Mourning doves belong to the pigeon family. Pigeons spend most of their time on the ground. They are also strong flyers. They have small heads and bills and short legs. Some kinds of pigeons, like rock pigeons, are very colorful. Pigeons live all over the world.

Nearly 312 different species live worldwide. Pigeons do not live in polar regions where it gets very cold. Here in North America, we have 10 different kinds of pigeon---rock pigeon, mourning dove, Eurasian collared dove and band-tailed pigeon.

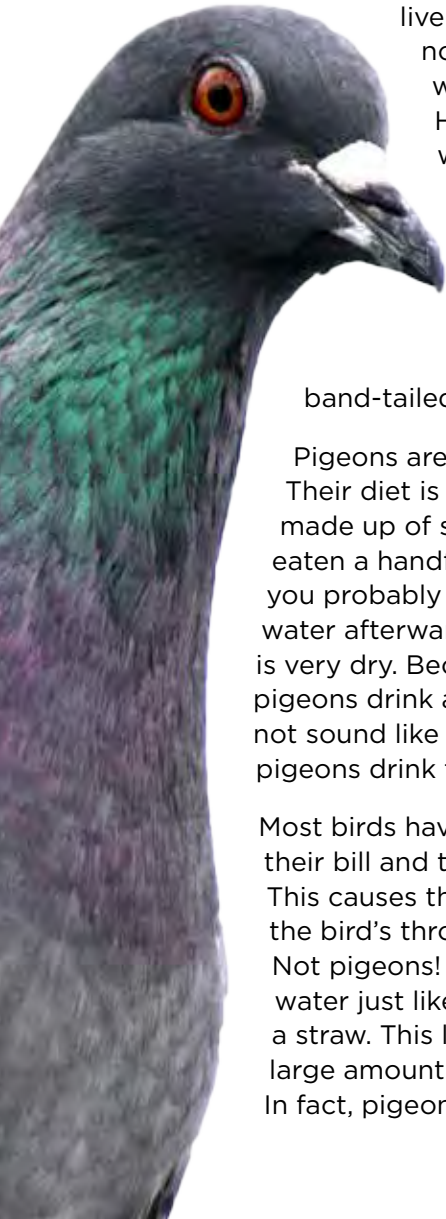
Pigeons are unique in several ways. Their diet is almost completely made up of seeds. If you have ever eaten a handful of nuts or seeds, you probably wanted a drink of water afterward. This kind of food is very dry. Because of this dry food, pigeons drink a lot of water. That may not sound like a big deal, but it's how pigeons drink that is pretty cool.

Most birds have to scoop water into their bill and then tilt their head back. This causes the water to run down the bird's throat so it can swallow. Not pigeons! These birds can suck up water just like you would drink from a straw. This lets pigeons drink a large amount of water in a short time. In fact, pigeons drink 15 per cent of

their body weight each day. A fourth grader would need to drink almost 1^{1/2} gallons every day to keep up with a pigeon!

Another unique thing about pigeons is what they feed their babies. Young squabs are fed a substance called crop milk. It looks a bit like cottage cheese and is very rich in fat and vitamins. Crop milk has more fat and protein than whole cow's milk! Adult birds make the crop milk in their crop and then spit it up to feed the squabs. That might sound kind of yucky, but crop milk helps squabs grow very quickly. After about a week, adult pigeons begin to feed the squabs seeds.

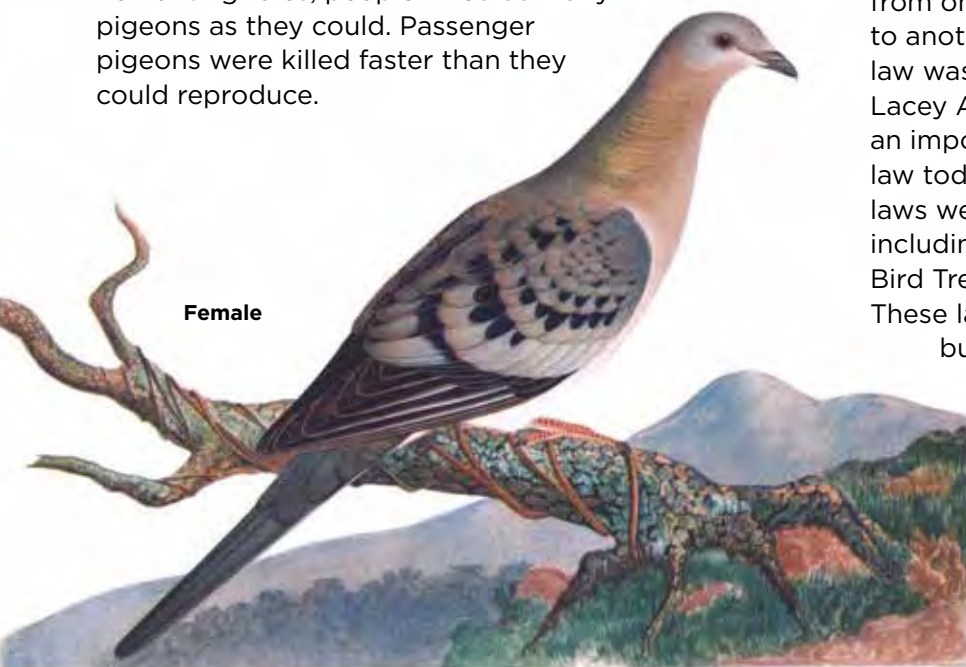
Pigeons have played an important role in human history. Like the fictional mail-delivering owls of Harry Potter, homing pigeons have been used to send messages. In the 1800s, many European countries used pigeons to deliver messages. During World War I, the French used 30,000 pigeons to deliver messages to troops in battle. Pigeons also carried messages during World War II. The birds were used because they can return to specific places, called lofts. Scientists are not exactly sure how pigeons find their way. They think that pigeons use a sun compass and the earth's magnetic field. Much of their ability to navigate right back to their loft is still a mystery.



PASSENGER PIGEONS

On September 1, 1914, the passenger pigeon became extinct. The bird that died that day was the last of her kind. Her name was Martha and she lived at the Cincinnati Zoo. Passenger pigeons once numbered in the billions. In 1871, a large flock passing overhead was described as sounding like the roar of 1,000 trains. Huge flocks traveled looking for food. Like mourning doves, passenger pigeons ate nuts and seeds. Acorns and beechnuts were favorites. They nested and roosted in huge colonies. The biggest colony was 850 square miles! But by 1900, the birds were gone from the wild. What happened?

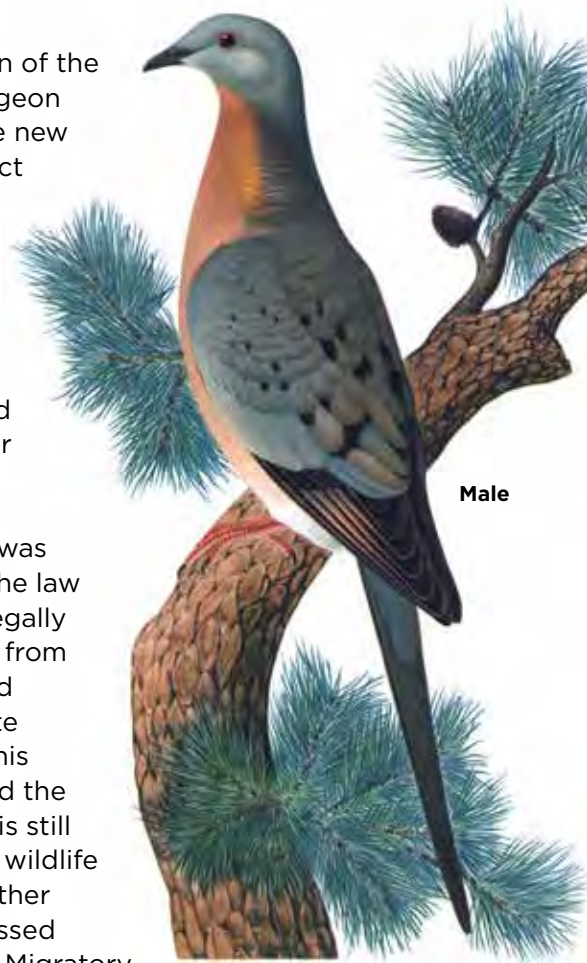
The answer is market hunting and overhunting. Market hunters killed the pigeons to sell for food. Millions of passenger pigeons were killed in Wisconsin alone. They were packed in barrels and shipped to markets in large cities. With no hunting rules, people killed as many pigeons as they could. Passenger pigeons were killed faster than they could reproduce.



Female

The extinction of the passenger pigeon helped create new laws to protect wildlife. Senator John Lacey from Iowa wrote a new law in 1900. He used the passenger pigeon as his example for why this law was important. The law prevented illegally killed wildlife from being shipped from one state to another. This law was called the Lacey Act. It is still an important wildlife law today. Other laws were passed including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

These laws could not help the passenger pigeon, but they ended market hunting. States made more rules for hunting. These rules allowed people to hunt, but not harvest too many animals. Many kinds of wildlife still benefit from these laws.



Male



BE OUTSIDE
IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

DOVE HUNTING



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Mourning doves are the most popular game bird in the United States. A game bird is any bird that can be legally hunted. Many states, including Idaho, have a fall dove hunting season. Hunters enjoy the challenge of hunting these birds. They are fast, wary and acrobatic in flight. Mourning doves are also a delicious part of a meal.

Because doves are hunted as they fly, dove hunting is known as wing-shooting. It is a very challenging sport. Practicing using clay targets at a shotgun range is important. It will help you improve your shotgun shooting skills. It is also a lot of fun. Clay targets are thrown into the air using a throwing machine. Shooters try to hit the flying targets. The more you

practice, the better you will become. This will help make you a successful dove hunter.

If you are interested in dove hunting, you will need to take Hunter Education. This class will help you learn to be a safe, responsible hunter. You will need a Junior Hunting License and a Migratory Bird Permit to hunt mourning doves. Make sure to read the mourning dove hunting regulations. If you have a friend or relative that is a dove hunter, tag along on a dove hunt. Ask if they would help you practice your shotgun shooting skills. Many experienced hunters enjoy helping new hunters learn about the sport. With some patience and practice, you can enjoy the challenge of dove hunting. You might even bring home healthy wild game for a family meal.



Eurasian Collared Dove- Invasive or Not?

A new dove has been making its way across the United States. The Eurasian collared dove is native to Asia. Over time, it spread into Europe. In 1974, a pet shop selling these doves in the Bahamas was robbed. Some Eurasian collared doves escaped during the burglary. By 1982, this species was found nesting in Florida. People in California began to see them in 2002! And in 2005, this dove showed up in Idaho. Since 1982, the Eurasian collared dove has spread all over the United States. The only places it does not live are in the Northeast. Scientists think this is because this area gets too cold for the birds.

Eurasian collared doves like living in the landscapes people create. Parks, neighborhoods and other human-made spaces are perfect.

These doves are slightly larger than mourning doves, but are heavier. This makes them look much bigger. They are mostly light tan with white patches on their tail. The tail is squared off and not pointed. They get their name from a thin black collar on their neck. Their song is a very loud “koo-KOO-kook” all on the same note. And they like to repeat their song---a lot.

People are concerned that Eurasian collared

doves might be a problem for mourning doves and other native birds. So far, this does not seem to be the case. This is good. Introduced species can become a big problem. When this happens, they are called an invasive species. They might harm the environment, or they could hurt people or cause people to lose money. Most invasive species are brought into ecosystems by people. Sometimes this is by accident and sometimes on purpose.

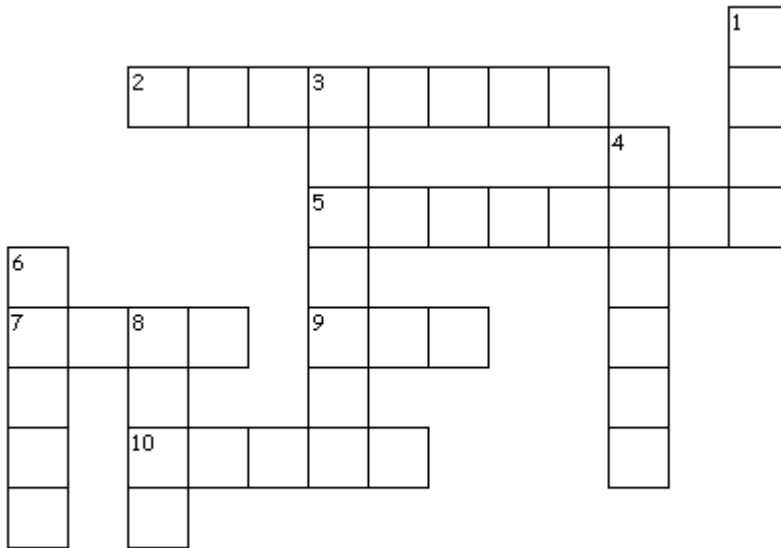
In their new homes, invasive species often don't have natural enemies. They might compete with native species for food. Their numbers in the new habitat can quickly grow. Most invasive species are able to make lots of seeds or lay many eggs. They reproduce very quickly and can survive in many different habitats. Invasive species can take over non-native areas very quickly.

Invasive species are a big problem all around the world. They ruin and change habitats, crowding out the native plants and animals. Once established, invasive species are nearly impossible to remove. Controlling them takes a lot of time and money.

For now, the Eurasian collared dove seems to be fitting into its new home without causing problems. Dove hunters in some states are welcoming this new quarry. Time will tell us if this new species is a problem or not.



Mourning Dove Puzzle



- | Words |
|-----------|
| Crop milk |
| Game |
| Hunt |
| Invasive |
| Nest |
| Pigeon |
| Pointed |
| Seeds |
| Two |
| White |

Across

- 2. Mourning doves feed their young _____.
- 5. Eurasian collared doves may become an _____ species.
- 7. It is fun and challenging to _____ mourning doves.
- 9. This is the number of eggs a mourning dove usually lays.
- 10. Mourning doves mostly eat _____.

Down

- 1. Mourning doves are one of the most popular _____ birds.
- 3. Mourning doves have a _____ tail.
- 4. Mourning doves are part of the _____ group.
- 6. This is the color of mourning dove eggs.
- 8. The _____ of a mourning dove is eight inches across.

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express,
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