

The Bar-shouldered Dove

Geopelia humeralis

by Tony Brancato, Santa Maria, CA

Chances are you have heard the unusual cooing of the Bar-shoulder Dove. Watch any Australian nature film and the clear, loud “hollyhock” or “cook-a-wook” call is one of the most characteristic sounds of the Australian tropical coast.

Bar-shouldered Dove is related to the Zebra Dove, *Geopelia striata* and the common Diamond Dove, *Geopelia cuneata*. It is nearly the size of a domestic Barbary or Ring-necked Dove and is a very lively and interesting bird for the avian hobbyist.

Description

The adult male has a crown of Payne's gray with pale gray and black flecks. The back of the neck and upper mantle are metallic bronze with each feather edged in black. The effect looks scalloped and beautiful. The rest of the back is a grayish-brown, scalloped in black. The tail is a deep gray, nearly black. Wings are brown with the underneath parts chestnut. The bird's chin, throat, and upper breast are steel blue-gray. The abdomen and under the tail are brown, with each feather tipped in white. The eyes are yellow, bill pale gray. Legs and feet are pink. During the breeding season, the male's orbital skin becomes bright red

and very noticeable.

The adult female is rather similar in size and color. Juveniles differ in that they are duller in color and more gray-brown in appearance. The coppery neck is lacking in juvenile birds.

Housing

Housing for the Bar-shouldered Dove is the same as that for all doves of medium size. This species requires a dry, draft-free aviary. They enjoy sun bathing and will spend many hours lying on their side with one wing in the air. A large planted aviary with plenty of space would do nicely for this species. Bar-shouldered doves can be aggressive among themselves but they will not usually bother other avian species (except for other doves during the breeding season). They can be wild and flighty until they adjust to their surroundings and keeper.

Diet

In the wild, Bar-shouldered Doves eat a variety of seeds and small insects. Our doves are fed an enriched mixture of finch mix, wild bird seed, and other seeds such as safflower, niger, wheat, sunflower, and hemp. I am a firm believer in providing soft food for our Bar-shouldered doves and other doves. These soft foods include steamed rice and vegetables, as well as raw grated vegetables. Fresh water, grit, and cuttle-bone round out our feeding program. Vitamins and minerals are added to the food daily. I do not recommend water soluble vitamins as they become breeding grounds for bacteria and germs during warm weather. All vitamins lose their potency if left on food too long. I only put vitamins on the food that the birds will clean up rather quickly. Many doves are unaccustomed to eating soft food but most of them will eventually try the soft food. Amazingly, if any food is left in the feed dishes it is never the soft food.

Breeding

During the breeding season the species can be aggressive with other doves. Bar-shouldered doves need to be in a large aviary if other doves are kept with them.

Unlike most birds and especially

other dove species, the Bar-shouldered Dove's gonads *decrease* in size at the time of increasing daylight. The breeding cycle is regulated by availability of *food* rather than light. The Zebra Dove shares this unusual characteristic. Zebra Doves are related to the Bar-shouldered Dove and their courtship is similar.

Bar-shouldered Doves are productive many times in the correct environment. Wild doves are never the breeding athletes that domestic doves are. The Bar-shouldered may breed well one season and then skip several seasons. Infertile eggs, or poor nest building is one of the species' problems. I recommend only one pair of Bar-shouldered Doves per aviary as some males can be aggressive to same-species males. I watch my Bar-shouldered doves to be certain they do not bully other doves. I had one individual male that bullied another dove of similar size. He never bothered smaller doves. These problems are minimized in an uncrowded aviary. Plants and shrubs provide cover for doves that need to escape from an aggressor. I'll remove a dove of any species that cannot live in a community aviary. These more aggressive doves need to be in individual breeding pens.

Bar-shouldered Doves are excellent


parents. Most of them like to nest as high as possible. They also are tight sitters. The young do not fledge until they are nearly as large as their parents and then they are quite wild. As they become more familiar with the caregiver they will become less flighty.

Status in the Wild

Bar-shouldered Doves are at home in shrubby, Eucalyptus woodlands of northern Australia and southern New Guinea. They congregate in small flocks and feed on native seeds. They also do well in rural agricultural areas. Bar-shouldered doves are common in cattle feed lots and in areas of freshly mowed fields.

This species has learned to adapt to the changing environment and has succeeded nicely.

Conclusion

I have bred the Bar-shouldered Dove for many years. They are delightful to hear and beautiful to look at. Their coppery necks glisten in the sunlight. Although they are a medium sized dove, they do well in most aviaries. Bar-shouldered doves are completely harmless to other non-dove avian species. This species is recommended for the novice as well as for the experienced bird fancier. 



Note the copper-colored bars on the neck and shoulders of the Bar-shouldered Doves (left). In the center is a Green-winged Dove with Senegal doves to the right.

Photo by Tony Brancato