



One of the author's dove aviaries.

## Why Do Doves Abandon Their Nests?

by Tony Brancato, Santa Maria, CA

**T**his question is common among dove breeders. Why do doves and particularly the non-domestic doves abandon their nests for no apparent reason? I have posed this very question to many of today's leading dove breeders. As you may have surmised there is not one single answer.

Doves and especially the non-domestic doves will abandon their eggs or young seemingly for no reason. But that is not true. There *are* reasons why a pair will abandon their nest.

My theory is that there is not one single cause. Parasites are a probable cause of why doves abandon their eggs and young. Insect pests, such as the "pigeon fly," blood sucking mites, and feather lice make brooding doves so nervous and uncomfortable they quit brooding eggs and young.

Disturbances of any sort are major reasons non-domestic doves abandon their nests. Competition for nests among same species or even unrelated species causes eggs to be broken and young to be killed or tossed from the nest. Over-crowding is the culprit in these situations. Unnecessary handling of the birds, eggs or young by the fancier will cause nervous doves to abandon nests, even after a single inspection.

Strange activities that cause noise or frightening situations cause doves to be alarmed. Cats, strange people, barking dogs, and children playing too close to the aviary frighten doves. Visitors should never be allowed into the aviaries.

Visitors may carry diseases on their shoes or clothing. Doves are very sensitive to strangers. I have personally visited some aviaries of some well known dove breeders and the set up of their aviaries was such that visitors could walk through without causing alarm to the doves. Most of us do not have the expertise nor the means to build such accommodations for our birds.

Our visitors can view our birds from inside one of our bedrooms. The film on the windows allows visitors to see the birds while the doves cannot see the viewers. The threat of disease then is nearly nil. Unfortunately, not all of our aviaries are set up this way. The doves are natural-acting and not aware that they are being observed and, of course, are not alarmed or stressed by intruders.

For whatever reasons, some doves abandon their young. Young abandoned doves can be saved by bringing them into a heated box and hand-feeding them. Care and caution need to be exercised or dove squabs will die of fright.

I place young doves in a heated box for several hours before I attempt to feed them. Put an older Diamond Dove with the young birds and they will learn to eat and drink quickly. Dove squabs that are not incubated at night become chilled and die. Some breeders use nest warmers or rig up a red light over each nest for heat.

Many dove fanciers use domestic Ring-necked Doves *Streptopelia risoria* as foster parents for their exotic doves. Domestic doves are calm, reliable, and

excellent parents. Use small individual pens for each pair of domestic foster parent doves. A wise rule of thumb is to have three pairs of domestic Ring-necked Doves for each pair of exotic doves. Eggs must be swapped within a day of each other. Exotic doves should be allowed to raise a brood every third time. Continuous laying by the hen is detrimentally to her health.

Unfortunately, not everyone has the room and space to maintain a large flock of domestic foster doves. Domestic Ring-necked Doves are noisy and require additional care.

High protein diets stimulate male birds to renew courtship activities. Hens may abandon the nest to begin the process all over again. The solution is to feed a well-balanced diet that contains soft foods.

Birds that are infested with feather lice are not happy sitters. Blood sucking mites that live in filthy nests and feed on nesting birds are another pest.

Non-domestic doves are very sensitive to intrusions into their area. Disturbing nesting birds by simply walking by or whatever, may cause some skittish doves to abandon their nests. Use prudent caution when entering and exiting aviaries. Move slowly and wear similar clothing each time. Doves will come to recognize their keeper. Young pairs are also more apt to abandon their eggs or young.

Individual doves vary within a species. I have had Green-winged not budge from their nest while others immediately leave their nest when they hear the garden gate (that is 50 feet from the nearest aviary) swing open. The problem is acute when the birds finally refuse to return and eggs become chilled. Parenting is an instinctive as well as a learned skill. Some doves are just better parents than others. Non-domestic doves are notorious for infertile eggs. Check eggs for infertility when nest has been abandon. Chances are the eggs were infertile and that is why the nest was abandoned.

In conclusion, there are many causes why exotic doves will abandon their eggs or young. With careful observation and patience we can try and understand these wonderful creatures and why they do the things they do. 