

# Cultivating Wild Foreign Doves and Pigeons

by Carl Neather  
Encino, California

Breeding foreign doves and pigeons in captivity presents a challenge to the aviculturist: Why do certain breeds not produce young readily in captivity despite good feeding and care? Why do they forsake eggs and squabs long before these are due to hatch or to mature? Is it a matter of too much inbreeding or wrong feeding, or what?

In some countries, as for example, Australia, forests and jungles which often form the habitats of doves and pigeons are being destroyed at an alarming rate to prepare the land for agricultural uses. Population pressure is usually the cause. As a result, the wild pigeons are compelled to seek new habitations, often with losses to their own kind, when adaptation to new and strange locations proves difficult or dangerous. Aviculturists should take careful note of these forced displacements of desirable wildlife on the pretext of so-called civilized progress, by breeding a surplus especially of displaced species in captivity, thus saving these particular breeds from extinction.

## Nomenclature of Wild Doves and Pigeons

Common, popular names are used to suggest:

**Habitat**, as in Nicobar Pigeons—the Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, India

**Habitat and species**, as in Torres-Strait Fruit Pigeon—Torres-Strait lying between New Guinea and Northwest Australia

**Habitat and plumage color**, and habits, as in Jamaican White-fronted Ground Dove

**Food preference**, as in Olive Pigeon — fond of olives

**Unusual behavior**, as in Mountain Witch Dove—elusive appearance in jungle and distinctive voice

**Sound of voice**, as in Mourning Dove, Laughing Dove (Senegal)

**Plumage pattern**, as in Diamond Dove, Spotted Pigeon

**Relationship to other birds**, as in Key

West Quail Dove, Blue-headed Quail Dove (low flight of quail, freezing, ground feeding)

## Typical Behavior Aspects of Doves and Pigeons

Pigeons drink by sucking water up; the only other bird drinking in this manner is the sand grouse. Pigeons usually mate for life; lay two white eggs. Exceptions include certain large breeds, such as Nicobar, Crowned Pigeons, and many large fruit pigeons, also the Bartlett Bleeding Heart which lays only one egg to a setting. Both male and female incubate: the male from about 10 a.m. to about 4 p.m., the female the rest of the time. Varying with the size of the dove or pigeon, brooding may last from 10 to 30 days. Pigeons build a flimsy nest. Their ancestors, the Rock Pigeons, placed but a few sticks in rock cavities. Some exceptions: Silver King built nest with tobacco stems between six and eight inches high. Every time the hen tried to get into the nest, the fragile structure toppled over, and the pair would build anew. My Tambourine Doves build a substantial nest consisting of tree leaves and twigs.

## Seed-eaters and Fruit-eaters

Seed-eating doves and pigeons in captivity are usually fed on the following grains: milo, wheat, whole corn, popcorn, sunflower seed, large millet, shelled or cracked peanuts and walnuts, and niger seed as a special treat. These grains are especially suitable for the large and medium-sized foreign pigeons, including Bleeding Hearts, Mt. Witches, Cuckoo Pigeons, Nicobars, Splendid Pigeons, and many more. Doves, which are generally smaller than pigeons, thrive on small seeds, including small millet, canary, and so-called wild-bird and grass seeds. My Cape and Diamond Doves are fond of blue poppy seed.

In nature, both pigeons and doves pick up soft food in the form of insects, such as beetles, small worms, and snails. Also they relish berries of various kinds in season, such as pyracantha, elder, manzanita, lantana, and blue berries, as well as grapes. In captivity, we can give them also mealworms, which come in convenient sizes. Fed in large quantities they tend to fatten the doves and pigeons. An effective substitute, which I have used for many years, is diced longhorn cheese or hardboiled egg, mixed with a little dry baby cereal, such as barley, rice, or oats. I feed this rich mixture sparingly, except when babies are in the nest. Incidentally, my Mt. Witches relish peanut butter, which I give to my softbilled birds. Mineral grit, crushed oyster and eggshell should be

available for the birds all day long. And, of course, fresh clean water.

Fruit Pigeon will also eat seeds, but they do not digest them. They should have a variety of fresh fruits, diced, including ripe apples, pears, bananas, avocados, and whatever else is seasonally available. The diced fruit may be mixed with mynah-bird pellets to firm the droppings. Fruit pigeons are voracious feeders.

## Some Characteristics of Wild Doves and Pigeons

Doves are generally smaller than pigeons. Thus we have Diamond Doves, Cape Doves, Mourning Doves, the Snow Pigeon, the Bandtailed Pigeon, the Crowned Pigeon, and many more. It is estimated that there are over 300 species of wild doves and pigeons. In captivity, the seedeaters are usually preferred, because they are easy to feed and care for. Fruit doves and pigeons are often very colorful. Their names frequently suggest the bright colors which establish their beauty: the Crimson-crowned Fruit Dove from the Fiji, Marshall and other islands; the Purple-bellied Fruit Dove from New Guinea, and the Orange-bellied Fruit Dove from the same region, as well as numerous so-called Imperial Fruit Pigeons. They are as decorative as parrots and adjust readily to life in aviaries, which should be heated during cold weather.

Foreign doves differ from domestic pigeons in their habits of feeding, drinking, and bathing. Generally, they are less prolific breeders, especially in captivity. With domesticated pigeons, it is a fairly simple matter to induce a given pair to produce a good many squabs during a year's time. Not so with wild doves and pigeons in captivity, especially those recently trapped in their native hunts. No matter how painstaking the care they receive in captivity, how plentiful or how nourishing the food placed at their disposal, they will instinctively, naturally, follow their own breeding habits.

If the physical captive conditions are too unnatural and artificial, too strange, too insecure for them, they will simply not go to nest at all. Many a pair of wild, foreign pigeons has been shut up in a coop by a fancier of domestic pigeons for weeks and months, who simply could not understand why they would not get busy and breed for him fast and continuously, in the manner of his domesticated varieties.

Doves and Pigeons operate in more or less rigid cycles. The female broods the eggs from late afternoon till the forenoon of the following day, the male the rest of the time. When a cat killed a

domestic female pigeon which was on four-day-old squabs, her mate kept strictly to his 10 a.m. to about 4 p.m. schedule. He roosted in his usual place at night beside the nest, with the result that the squabs, lacking warmth, died. Nevertheless, the male started to brood them at the usual hour of 10 a.m. the next day. There can be no doubt that birds possess an internal regulatory mechanism or rhythm, but this is difficult to prove experimentally.

On the other hand, there is much experimental evidence to prove that LIGHT is one of the most important external factors in furthering the ONSET of the breeding condition in doves and pigeons. Ample sunlight in their aviary is very desirable. By artificially increasing the light hours of early morning, experimenters succeeded in inducing ducks to display and to mate prematurely. Intensity, wave-length, and method of light-increase—all these factors play an important part in hastening the onset of the breeding condition.

Food supply affects the breeding cycle. When starlings were kept on a low diet, their sexual rhythm did not respond as when they were well fed. Soft, rich food for doves and pigeons in the form of mealworms, diced cheese or egg, will definitely affect their breeding tendencies.

The presence of suitable sites for nests and appropriate nesting materials, such as pine needles, short-cut hay or straw, small twigs, etc., may stimulate the birds to nesting. Open-top boxes and baskets of various sizes hung up at different heights in the aviary and partially filled with nesting materials may also stimulate nesting tendencies.

An isolated female will not lay, but if given a female companion, both will start laying eggs. My two Mt. Witch females laid a whole dozen eggs within a month's time, sitting side by side, and being quite tame.

#### Housing Foreign Doves and Pigeons

It is essential to keep doves and pigeons comfortable, quiet, and absolutely safe. The worst thing an aviculturist can do is to crowd his birds in the aviary, thus greatly restricting their freedom of movement, making their captive life unnatural, troublesome, and cruel. It is important to have suitable aviary accommodations ready for doves when you first get them. Wild, foreign doves and pigeons are very sensitive to environmental changes. Some of them may require weeks and months to get used to a new cage or aviary. Absolute protection from disturbance by hawks, mice, rats, cats and dogs is essential, for if they feel insecure and nervous, they will not nest. I had my first aviaries in

Sherman Oaks, in the San Fernando Valley, some 17 years ago. They were modeled after the then popular more or less spacious flight, covered with half-inch or one-inch netting, on sides and top, with an attached shelter, made of solid boards and topped with a solid roof. At that time, I kept both softbilled birds and foreign doves in a series of half dozen open flights with attached shelters, the flights being planted with some low, leafy shrubs.

To make a long, disappointing story short, every night serious trouble developed in these aviaries as the neighbors' cats, also some possums from the nearby hills, got on top of the wire-flight, prompting the doves to crash against its front and sides. Some left nests with eggs or young for good, so shocked were they by the intruders' sudden and vicious attack. The half-inch netting enabled cat and possums to hang on to it and injure doves as they crashed against it in their desperate attempt to evade the enemy. Even some snakes managed to squeeze through the much too wide netting, as also did mice. Rats burrowed underneath in the soft garden soil without difficulty. Our watchful cocker spaniels, "Nip" and "Tuck" sounded the alarm unflinching when the back garden aviary was being attacked. Many doves suffered scalped heads and injured wings during these attacks. Needless to emphasize, this was no way to keep birds effectively—it endangered their lives day and night, and, of course, it produced unsatisfactory breeding results.

So when we moved to Encino, our present residence about 17 years ago, I had my current aviary built. It faces east, thus benefiting from the almost daily bright morning sunshine. It consists of ten individual pens, each one four feet wide, eight feet high in front, sloping to six feet in the rear. *Quarter-inch* netting on the front keeps cats and possums from sticking their razor-sharp claws through the netting: they cannot get a lasting foothold on it and usually drop down quickly without injuring any aviary occupant. A solid, wooden roof keeps birds of prey and other enemies from catching sight of the birds from above. The aviary rests on an 18-inch concrete foundation, which prevents mice and rats from burrowing underneath. A few leafy shrubs in each of the ten pens lend this bird-house a leisurely, natural appearance, and serve also as hiding places for the doves. A sandy, porous soil for quick draining, is always kept dry to the doves' advantage. Against the front of the aviary I have planted bushy purple lantana, which is now three feet high, mak-

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*Thick-billed Green Fruit Pigeon (Treron curvirosta)*



*Victoria Crowned Pigeons (Goura victoria). This is one of the largest, most magnificent pigeons in the world. It is almost as large as a turkey.*

ing it impossible for cats and other unwelcome visitors to see inside the aviary through the netting at ground level. Water is provided in each one of the ten pens. Since foreign doves and pigeons prefer their bath water, rainlike, to come from above, I simply spray them with the hose as they come to the front of their pens to enjoy this weekly sprinkling. For over 17 years now, this carefully planned aviary has proved its usefulness in keeping its occupants safe and sound, and perhaps even "happy," if their successful breeding in it is proof of what a modern dove aviary should be.

For nesting accommodations, I hang small open-top boxes and baskets, their bottoms covered with pine needles or short-cut hay or soft straw at heights of from four to five feet off the aviary floor. Tree branches and 1 x 2 smooth boards serve as perches along the sides of the aviary. All feed and water dishes are placed on the floor, the latter under cover to keep the water from being soiled. Each kind of grain is offered in a separate dish, sort of cafeteria style. Dishes of the same color and size are used again and again, since the doves are very sensitive to changes. No special heating or lighting is needed in our mild climate. My aviary has proved its practical worth now for well over 17 years. I have raised cuckoo doves, violet doves, snow-pigeon hybrids, diamond doves, and some other species each in a separate pen where I have had effective control and good observation of their daily and especially their breeding activities. Since to wild, foreign doves and pigeons man is the hateful intruder, I respect their instinctive, natural fear by moving carefully and slowly in their presence, wearing the same color sweater or other clothes day in and day out. I try not to make any sudden movements which might frighten my birds, such as waving a broom.

#### **Final Comment**

To keep interest in the foreign-dove hobby alive and growing, we need a group of serious fanciers who are able and willing to import some of the rarer species of both seed- and fruit-eaters. Such importations are most likely in due time to result in more or less sizable stocks for distribution among dove fanciers.

Also much needed are aviculturists who will write about their experiences with keeping and breeding foreign, wild doves and pigeons for publications in various magazines, thus greatly aiding in the dissemination of authentic information on the aviculture of wild, foreign doves and pigeons. ●





*Yellow-breasted Fruit Dove (Ptilinopus occipitalis)*



*Nicobar Pigeon (Caloenas nicobarica). This rear view shows the long shining hackle feathers that hang over the mantle and shoulders.*

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**TOUCANS FOR SALE,** Tocos \$1000 each, Red-billed \$1200 each. Emerald toucanettes \$350 each, Green aracarís \$350 each. Jerry Jennings, P.O. Box 6393, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. (213) 884-5476.

**COCKATIELS,** young, hand tame, normals, piers, lutino splits, pearlie splits. Indian Ringneck hen, sell or trade. No shipping. (707) 823-1364 No. California. Will deliver this area.

**PEACH FACED LOVEBIRDS** from \$12.50, all mutations. Hand-fed Jenday, Nanday and Green cheeked conures. s/s pair Red fronted macaws. Paul (714) 780-1218.

**HONEY** for you or your birds. 1 lb.—\$8.00 (price includes postage). Send check to Jack's Honey, 2602 E. Foothill Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91107.

CLEAN, LIVE, INSECTARY-GROWN MUSCA Domestica larvae. These house fly maggots are the best feeder insects you can buy for your birds. Information on request. Minimum order 2 oz. @ \$8.50, incl. air postage to anywhere in U.S.A. Forrest Foods Corporation, P.O. Box 717, Tillamook, OR 97141.

LORIES! Presently breeding Yellow streaked, Blue streaked, Chattering, Swainson's, Edward's and Goldie's. Both hand-fed babies and sexed individuals. SASE for availability list. John Nero, 2202 S. Ridge Rd., Green Bay, WI 54304. Call (414) 499-9013 or 497-0457.

SEXED PAIR of Green winged macaws, breeding age, also sexed pair of Blue and Gold macaws. Best offer for pairs. Serious inquiries only. Call Rick at (213) 424-2789 (Long Beach, CA) after 5 p.m.

FORPUS PARROTTLETS WANTED by Canadian breeder. Pairs preferred, single birds considered. Feathers Galore, Elizabeth Dapp, 5755 34B Ave., Delta, B.C., V4K 3N2 Canada.

BABY AFRICAN GREYS — hand fed from 10 days old, extremely tame and starting to talk. Also hand fed Gilded mantled rosellas, cockatiels, and Quaker Parakeets. Linda Price, Rt. 8, Box 238, Rock Hills, South Carolina 29730. (803) 366-7650.

BIRDS OF ALL TYPES—Hoffman's Aviary, Rt. 1, Box 201, Kings Mountain, NC 28086. phone (704) 867-8629.

MACAW SOCIETY now forming. Please contact Jim Reid, 299 W. Basic Rd., Henderson, NV 89015. Call (702) 564-5559.

Wanted: FEMALE ILLIGER'S MACAW and Coulon's macaws. Candy Mills (213) 365-4277 after 7 p.m. or write c/o SMPMG, 1260 15th Street, #1501, Santa Monica, CA 90404.

MOLUCCAN COCKATOOS—sexed pair, excellent condition, female semi-tame, using nest barrel. \$1400 pair. Bill Wegner, 3 Ann St., New Paltz, NY 12561. (914) 255-1445.

BABY DOUBLE YELLOW HEADED AMAZONS, captive hatched June '82, mother raised. Blue fronted Amazons, captive hatched August '81, hand raised, surgically sexed. Kansas (316) 342-4506.

DRIED PAPAYA for tropical birds. 3 x 3 inch square package \$1.35 plus 65¢ postage and handling. Neat Co., P.O. Box 1654, Hawaiian Gardens, CA 90716.

CARETAKER DESIRES WORK: experienced general curator, rare pheasants, waterfowl (inc. cranes). Also landscaping and groundwork. Write or call, resume. Dan, P.O. Box 144, South Prairie, Washington 98385.

CUTTLEBONE—6" - 3" and cleaned. 5 lbs @ \$4.75 per lb (\$23.75) or 10 lbs @ \$3.75 per lb (\$37.50) Schroeder & Atkinson, 644 So. Isis, Inglewood, CA 90301. ph (213) 776-6486.

BABY AFRICAN GREYS—hand fed from 10 days old, extremely tame and starting to talk. Also hand fed Gilded mantled rosellas, cockatiels, and Quaker Parakeets. Linda Price, Rt. 8, Box 238, Rock Hills, South Carolina 29730. (803) 366-7350.

CINNAMON COCKATIELS, crested canaries, peachface lovebirds, and halfmoons. Helen Forsythe, Soda Canyon Bird Ranch, Napa, CA. ph (707) 226-8671.

4000 BIRDS to choose from, over 200 different types: macaws, cockatoos, Amazons, cockatiels, conures, parakeets, finches, canaries, toucans, lories, quail, doves, lovebirds, mynahs, rosellas. Visitors welcome. Send SASE for price list. Hoffman's Aviary, Rt. 1, Box 201, Kings Mountain, NC 28086. Call (704) 867-8629.

SELLING PRIVATE COLLECTION: pr. Green winged macaws, \$1800. male \$850.; Citron cockatoos \$1500. pr., male med. Sulphur cockatoo \$1000.; pr. Congo African greys \$1000., female \$500.—All birds SS and been in U.S. 2 to 7 yrs. Haglers, P.O. Box 2637, Bartow, FL 33830 (813) 644-3385.

For sale—very tame BLUE & GOLD MACAW, three years old, \$750. Young Blue & gold with large cage \$850. Robert Cohen, 467 Hazel Ave., San Bruno, CA 94066. ph (415) 871-7555.

RINGNECKS FOR SALE, '82 hatch, lutinos, split lutino cocks, split blue, and possible split blue. Also lovebird mutations as lutino and jade split blue. Jim Zuber (714) 684-2964.

SCARLET MACAWS, 2 surgically sexed mature males, tame and talking. \$1100, and \$1600, or will trade for female scarlet, military, or both scarlets for one Hyacinth macaw. Colorado, (303) 494-0626.

Sunday, November 21, 1982, 1st ALL BIRD BREEDERS BIRD FAIR sponsored by Orange County Bird Breeders Club. 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at Orange County Fairgrounds, bldg. 14, Costa Mesa, CA. BOOTHS NOW AVAILABLE for vendors, breeders, club displays. This is going to be one of the biggest bird fairs this year, so don't wait! For information call: Dean (213) 443-6241 or Candy (213) 537-0408.

BIRD STANDS FOR PARROTS, floor or on cage tops, handcrafted in cedar and cypress. Also available are play stands for smaller birds. Name tags and signs plus wood toys. Send S.A.S.E. for brochure to: JACK'S WOODCRAFT, P.O. Box 16595, West Palm Beach, FL 33406.

BABIES hatched in our aviary, hand-fed, super tame and loveable. Sun conures, African greys, cockatoos, and cockatiels. Joe and Loretta Barbercheck, West Bend, Wisconsin. (414) 334-5600.

HAND-FED FROM THE EGG, Umbrella and Triton cockatoos, Slenderbill conures, Senegal parrots, normal and lutino Ringnecks. We also have Redrumps, Cockatiels and Peachfaced lovebirds. SASE please. Lannom Farm, Rt. 6, Box 2108, Escondido, CA 92025. phone (714) 749-3115.

TRITON COCKATOO, female, 8 years old \$1800. Tame & talking. Poor plumage. Prefers men. (415) 883-9795.

FINCHES for sale: Lady Gouldians, Owls, Diamonds. Sacramento, CA (916) 447-4124.

KAKARIKIS (yellow and red fronted), Golden mantled rosellas, scarlet chested parakeets, Indian ringnecks, cockatiels, and canaries. Domestically bred. Will ship. Call Bill (714) 287-7353, San Diego.

SURGICALLY SEXED BIRDS, Hoffman's Aviary, Rt. 1, Box 201, Kings Mountain, NC 28086. Call (704) 867-8629.

PET PARADISE, Route 2, Laddonia, MO 63352. Pet supply catalog available. Product sheets on birds, supplies, and also on other pets. Specify pet you have. If you need an exact pet product please specify name and brand. We will quote a current price.

COCKATOOS, Handfed baby Tritons and medium sulphur crests. A. Chandler (213) 454-6971.

MATURE RINGNECKS, 1982 1st breeding year, lutino hen-split male \$795.00 pr. A. Chandler (213) 454-6971.

PROVEN BREEDERS for sale. One pair Pennant rosellas \$600. One pair Rock pebbles \$600. One pair Moluccan cockatoos \$1400, breeding age. Jerry Jennings, P.O. Box 6393, Woodland Hills, CA 91365. (213) 884-5476.

HAND-FED COCKATOOS; Rose-breasted, 2 males and 2 females. Starting to talk. 1 Moluccan. All hatched this spring on a clean, isolated ranch. Very nice birds. C. Tamaki-Dinsmoor, P.O. Box 865, Nipomo, CA 93444. (805) 489-7730.

AUSTRALIAN FINCHES: Owls \$120 pr., Diamond sparrows \$100 pr., Heck's shafttails \$70 pr. All birds bred here in my aviary. Micky Senior (206) 745-4310, evenings & weekends (Seattle, WA)

MOLUCCAN COCKATOOS surgically sexed and very compatible pair, acclimatized to outside aviary in North Carolina. Moving, must sell—\$1500. (919) 946-7978.

SUN CONURES surgically sexed pair acclimatized to outside aviary in North Carolina. \$650. Call (919) 946-7978.

BOOKS FOR SALE—Parrots of the World, Forshaw & Cooper, Doubleday—1973, \$550. The Birds of Paradise & Bower Birds, Forshaw & Cooper, Collins-1977, \$180, BIRD PRINTS—William To. Cooper, 14 1/2" x 20 1/2". Gang-gang cockatoo, Hyacinth macaw, \$150 each; Rosella, ringneck (Barnardius) \$125 each. Terry (714) 270-5475, evenings.

FOR SALE: male Australian greater sulfur crested cockatoo. \$2500 or trade. (602) 898-3892 or (702) 870-3500.

"I LOVE" BUTTONS \$1 each. I love \_\_\_\_\_ cockatiels, finches, parakeets, parrots, and pigeons. Postpaid "BUTTONS," P.O. Box 8483, Baltimore, MD 21234.

SUN CONURES—surgically sexed pair (sexed by Dr. Max Weiss) immatures hatched 11/81 and 12/81, unrelated and banded, \$750. Ralph Lima (213) 709-0707, Canoga Park, CA.

FOR SALE: HOUSE: BUSINESS zoned on heavy traveled street; 2 bedrooms 1 1/2 bath, large kitchen, new central air w/heat pump, large dining room easily converted to small pet shop; on fruit tree lot 100 x 200 aviary 10 x 15 cement block building with four flights, excellent condition, under \$400.00 taxes, Melbourne, Fla. Call (305) 259-0676. \$63,000.00



