

from the
field. . .

by Jack Clinton-Eitnrear
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Ruddy Ground Doves

A collared aracari darts among the foliage, finally resting on a bromeliad-covered branch amongst which is cradled the nest of a ruddy ground dove. Using its beak like "chop sticks," it devours the dove's two eggs. Of 21 ruddy ground dove nests observed by naturalist Alexander Skutch, he was able to document forty eggs of which only twenty hatched. Of the twenty hatchlings, further study revealed that eight survived to fledging (from five nests). Thus, 20 percent of the eggs yielded young and 24 percent produced at least one fledgling.

Although one would generally want to attribute such losses to predation, it does not appear to be the case. Infertility, losses of eggs due to their falling out of the nest (often because of climatic conditions or other factors) and nest abandonment seem to be the major reasons. It would appear, however, that even with only 24% of the nests producing young, with no mention as to how many survive the first year, it must be a sufficient contribution as the species is abundant where it occurs. While aviculturists protect nesting pairs from many of the factors that cause mortality, upon losing a young bird to disease or misfortune we should recall that "mother nature" only rears 24%.

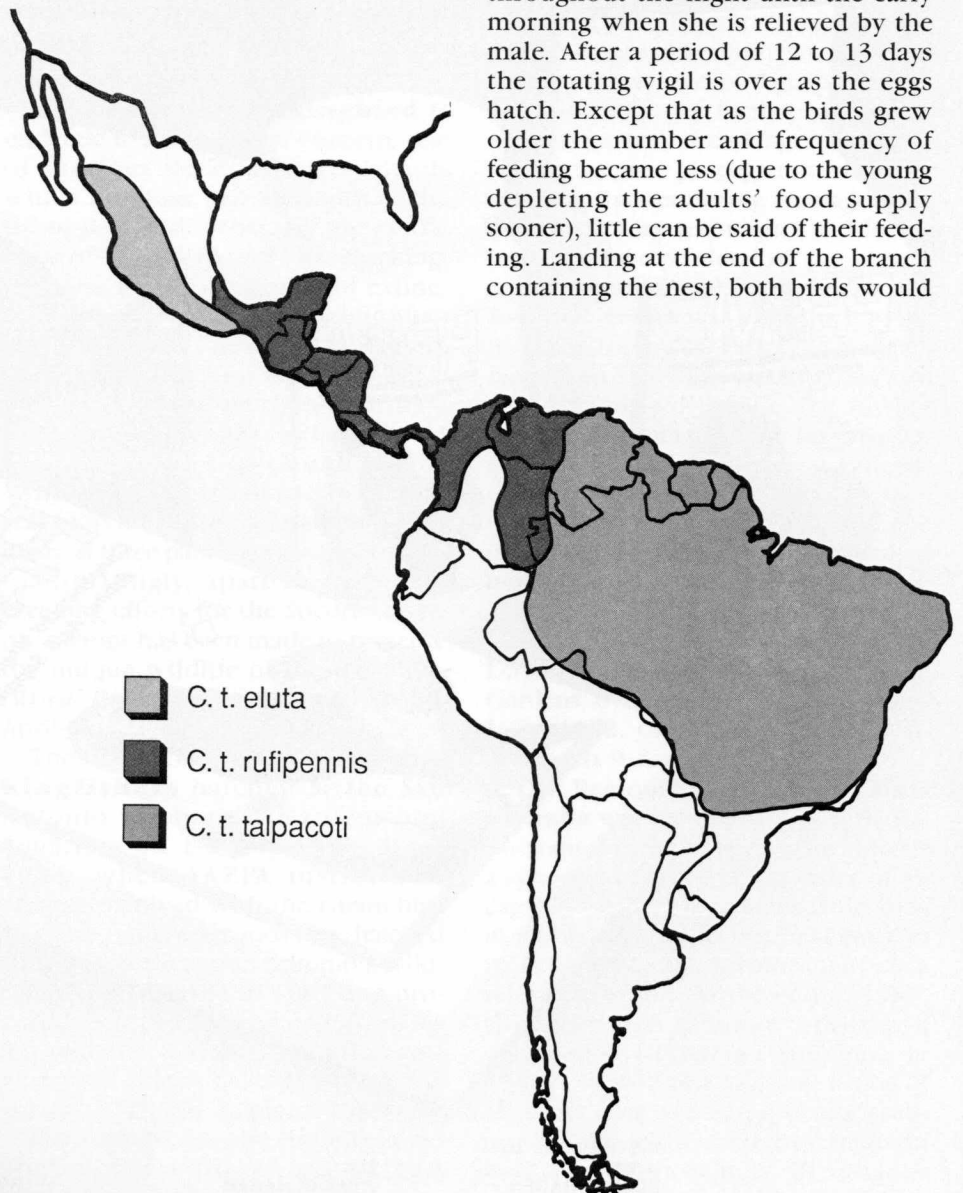
Despite these rather minimal reproductive percentages, the ruddy ground dove (*Columbina talpacoti*) is one of several frequently encountered ground doves of the New World tropics. Occurring from southern and western Mexico, south through Central America into South America, it often shares its range with the common (*C. passerina*) and blue ground doves (*Claravis pretiosa*). Three subspecies are often




cited generally due to the paleness of the plumage, the west Mexican race, *C. t. eluta*, being the palest and the South American race, *C. t. talpacoti*, the most brilliant. The ruddy seems to prefer medium rainfall, lower elevations, with sparse vegetation. On the other hand, the common is more abundant in arid areas, with little or no vegetation, and the blue in more humid areas, especially amongst forest clearings. It is interesting to note that the same area in the dry season may be inhabited by ruddy ground doves whereas in the rainy season only by blue ground doves.

In general, the ruddy is a medium-sized dove only slightly larger than a diamond dove. The males are more colorful than the females having light blue-gray heads. The overall coloration of the bird is cinnamon-brown on the

top with pinkish-cinnamon on the underparts. The doves' wings are a delightful, warm reddish chestnut color with contrasting black barring. To top this "earthy" coloration the birds' eyes are a glowing, brilliant red.

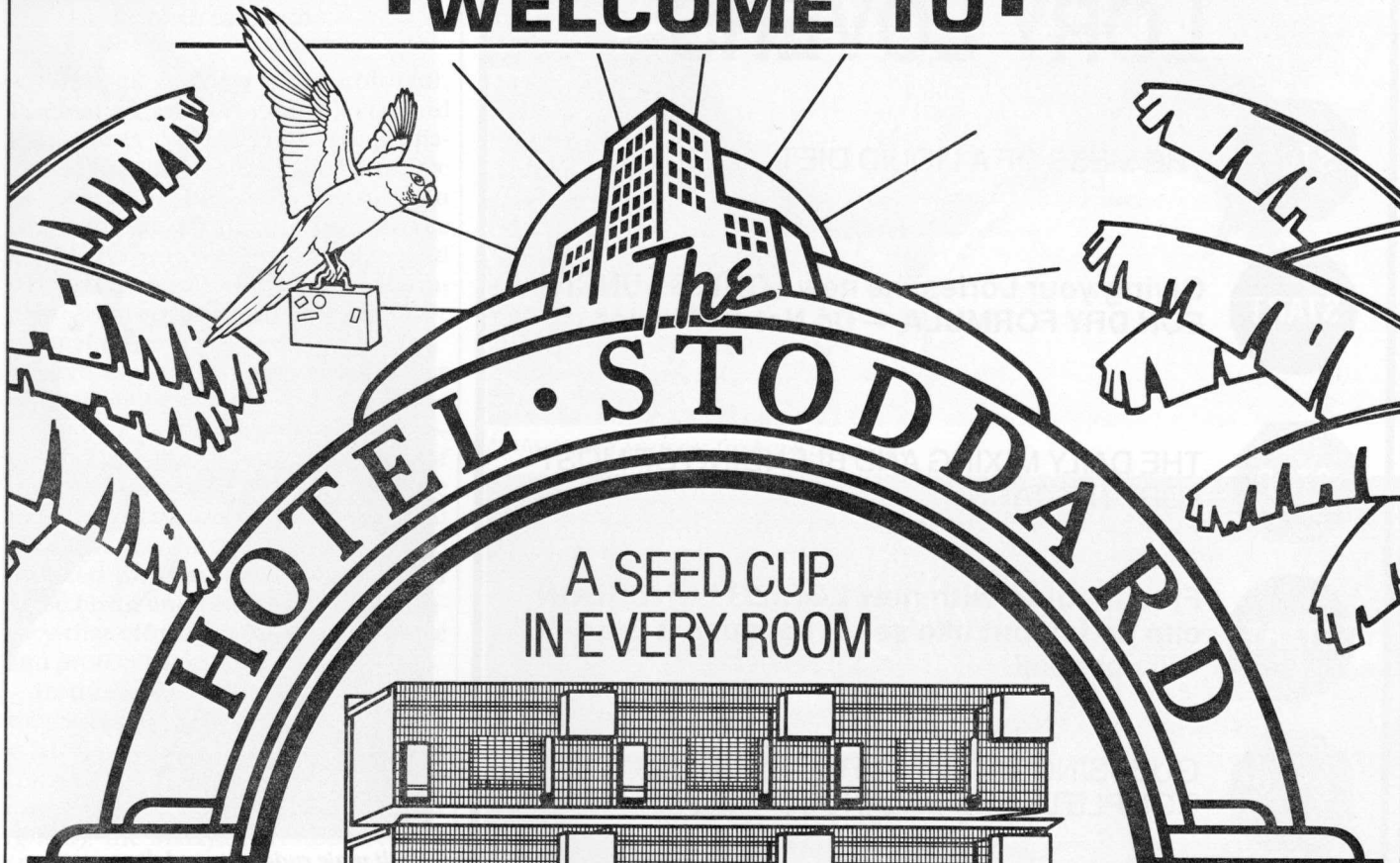
Unlike the common and plain-breasted ground doves, the ruddy does not nest on the ground. Nests have been recorded in everything from building eaves, banana plants, old tanager nests and pineapple plants. Most are from 4 to 8 feet above the ground although Skutch notes one that was 125 feet up in a Sura tree. The nest itself is constructed by both the male and female. The male plays the role of stick collector and the female that of arranger. Two ellipsoidal eggs are then laid in the doves' shallow, saucer-shaped nest. During incubation the female sits from the afternoon throughout the night until the early morning when she is relieved by the male. After a period of 12 to 13 days the rotating vigil is over as the eggs hatch. Except that as the birds grew older the number and frequency of feeding became less (due to the young depleting the adults' food supply sooner), little can be said of their feeding. Landing at the end of the branch containing the nest, both birds would



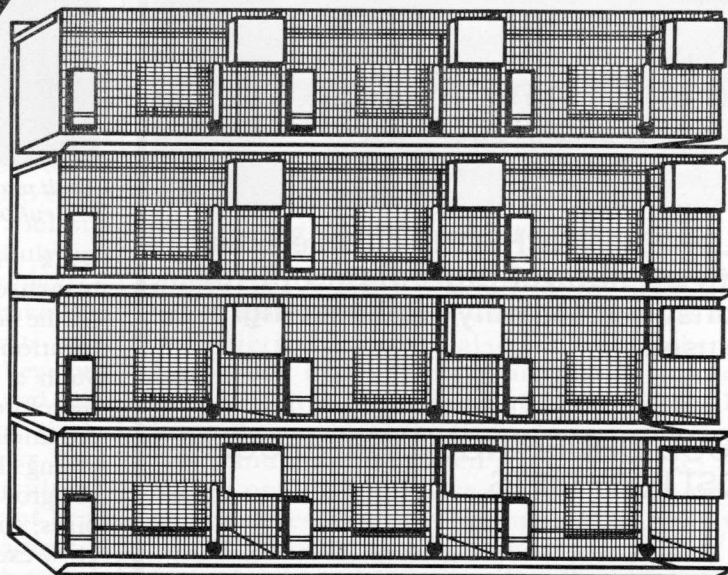
-  *C. t. eluta*
-  *C. t. rufipennis*
-  *C. t. talpacoti*

Range of the ruddy ground dove (*Columbina talpacoti*)

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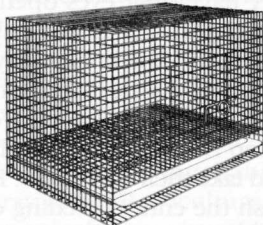
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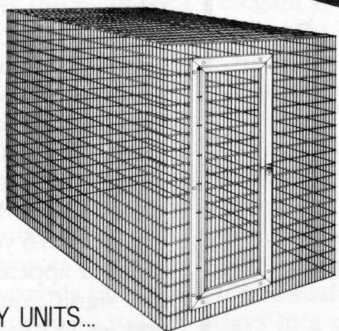
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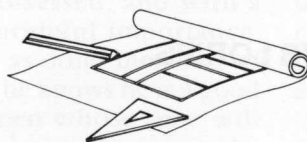


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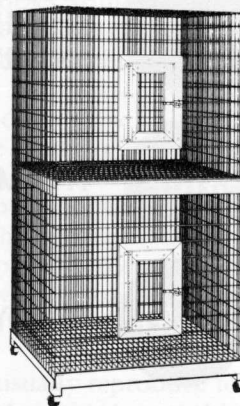
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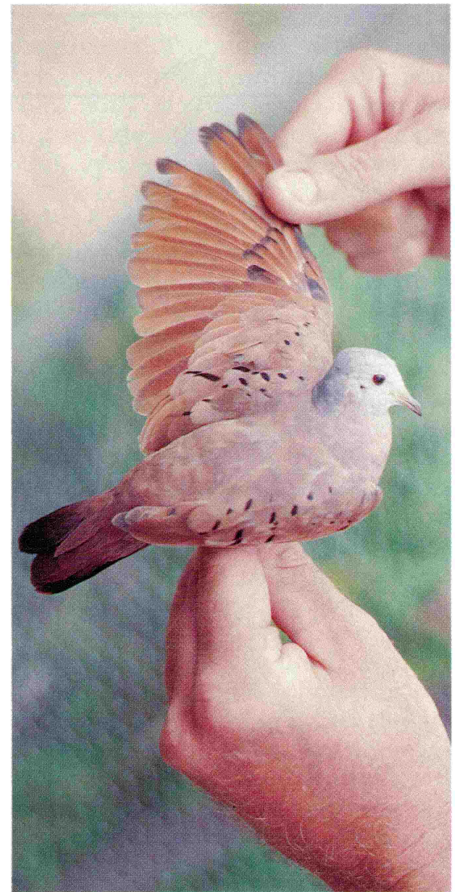


Photo by Jack Clinton-Eitnear

*Adult male ruddy ground dove,
C. t. rufipennis.*

walk, tight-rope style, down the branch to their young. Landing directly on the nest would undoubtedly give its location away to possible predators. Such a roundabout approach has, therefore, become an innate behavior enhancing the survival of eggs and young. For individuals familiar with the growth and development of larger birds, the ruddy ground dove chicks grow exceedingly rapidly. By day three or four they have their eyes open and by day five pinfeathers are appearing. Hardly older than a week, nine-day-old doves will leave the nest if alarmed. Normally, at day twelve they would gradually hop their way up an adjoining limb and take their first flight. From start to finish the entire breeding cycle takes about five weeks. Due to this, several clutches could be reared annually. In most situations, however, only two nests are completed per year. Returning to our 21 pairs, whose nests were analyzed at the beginning of this article, the addition of a second clutch would result in 16 young being produced or .76 young per pair. While this number appears low to the aviculturist, it is significant enough to maintain the species in the wild, even after allowing for an occasional meal from an opportunistic roving ramphastid. ●