

## *Columbina minuta* (Plain-breasted Ground Dove)

Family: Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

Order: Columbiformes (Pigeons, Doves and Dodos)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** Plain-breasted ground dove, *Columbina minuta*.

[[http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p\\_p\\_spp=173941](http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=173941), downloaded 21 February 2017]

**TRAITS.** *Columbina minuta* is a species of ground-dwelling dove which measures 14.5-16.0cm long and weighs 26-42g (Soberanes-Gonzalez et al., 2010). It has reddish eyes, and dark grey and brown feathers, with the wings paler and with dark violet spots (Fig. 1) and mostly rufous (reddish) underwings. Tail feathers to the centre are grey-brown with the outer being very dark and narrowly tipped white. Pink legs. There is a distinction between males and females. Male: blue-grey nape and crown with bill being grey and tipped black. The neck, face, chest and belly areas are grey. Female: overall appear duller than males. Nape and crown are grey. Grey bill. Neck face and chest are pale grey with the area of the throat and belly being much paler. Juveniles display similar characteristics to females. This species may be confused with the ruddy ground dove *Columbina talpacoti* and the common ground dove *Columbina passerina* but there are distinctions, with the former being duller and not as rufous and the latter having a speckled neck and head.

**DISTRIBUTION.** Although it has a very wide distribution, it is very discontinuous and occurs from the south of Mexico, through Central America to Colombia, over the north of South America onto Trinidad and the Guianas. They also occur in central Brazil continuing to the northeast of Argentina and also on the Pacific coast of Ecuador and Peru (Fig. 2). This species tends to reside in arid locations and are observed to be found in areas up to 2100m above sea level, but are more commonly found in lowlands and foothills (Soberanes-Gonzalez et al., 2010).

**HABITAT AND ACTIVITY.** This species tends to be found in lower lying regions, typically open areas and pastures and although there has been sightings at higher elevations this is not a common occurrence (Ruiz-Esparza et al., 2012). Preferred habitats are dry savannas, subtropical and tropical shrubland, high altitude shrubland, flooded lowland, grasslands and heavily degraded forests (BirdLife International, 2016). These birds are most active during the day with peaks in activity during the mid-morning and afternoons with a decline later in the evenings. They are inactive at night (Ruiz-Esparza et al., 2012). This bird is a granivore as it feeds on seeds and fruits only, and tends to forage in grasslands (Fig. 3) and lightly forested areas. They avoid the humid conditions of heavily forested areas.

**FOOD AND FEEDING.** Specially adapted bills are small, and soft at the base, making it ideal for the collection of seeds found on the ground and removal of fruits, nuts or seeds from trees and shrubs. These birds store this gathered food in their crop where it can go to the gizzard to be macerated with the aid of stones. This trait of food storage in the crop in a relatively large amount is very beneficial as it enables rapid foraging in locations where predators may be present and then having the food processed in a location of lower risk. To obtain water there is an adaptation where the bill is dipped into the liquid and the bird is able to suck the water into the bill. This decreases the amount of time needed to be spent at water sources which lowers the exposure to predation (Soberanes-Gonzalez et al., 2010).

**REPRODUCTION.** This species is monogamous. They are observed either in pairs or singly (Planet of Birds, 2017). Males attract females by the performance of courtship displays in order to capture their attention. This is done by a tilt of the head and doing an expansion of the neck and chest feathers while they make quiet calls. To build nests materials are gathered and held in the bill and are inserted into the nest by small, trembling lateral movements. Once eggs are laid and hatched the chicks are cared for by the males during the day and the females during the night. Both keep the nest clean by removing stool although shells may be left in the nest for days before being discarded. For the first few days chicks are fed with crop milk and they get food from the bill of the parents. Once they can leave the nest juveniles either follow the parents or are visited and fed by the parents until they can gather their own food. Nests are usually made on the ground and are large with a minor concave shape. Otherwise nests are made on twigs with a diameter of about 5cm. They tend to have one or two eggs per nest (Fig. 4). Eggs are white and measure 21.4-22.2mm in length and 16.3mm wide (Soberanes-Gonzalez et al., 2010).

**BEHAVIOUR.** Although little study has been conducted with respect to territoriality apart from nesting, it appears that these are fairly sociable because even though they are usually found either in pairs or in solitude when observed at feeding sites they are seen near other species. Little to no interaction occurs here. To defend nesting territory, they tap their wings around the area (Howell and Elliot, 1997).

**APPLIED ECOLOGY.** This species is categorised as Least Concern (LC). The reasoning for this is the species is found over a very large range and so does not come close to the thresholds for being vulnerable. The population appears to be stable and large (IUCN, 2017).

## REFERENCES

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**Fig. 2.** Plain-breasted ground dove geographic distribution.

[<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/plain-breasted-ground-dove-columbina-minuta/distribution>,  
downloaded 21 February 2017]





**Fig. 3.** Plain-breasted ground dove active in grassland.

[[http://antpitta.com/images/photos/pigeons/Ecuadorian-Ground-Dove-male-ayampe\\_5324.jpg](http://antpitta.com/images/photos/pigeons/Ecuadorian-Ground-Dove-male-ayampe_5324.jpg), downloaded 21 February 2017]



**Fig. 4.** The nest of the plain-breasted ground dove.

[[http://calphotos.berkeley.edu/imgs/512x768/1073\\_3283/3179/0061.jpeg](http://calphotos.berkeley.edu/imgs/512x768/1073_3283/3179/0061.jpeg), downloaded 21 February 2017]