

## *Columbina passerina* (Common Ground Dove)

Family: Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

Order: Columbiformes (Pigeons, Doves and Dodos)

Class: Aves (Birds)



**Fig. 1.** A pair of common ground doves, *Columbina passerina*.

[<http://www.larryditto.com/wordpress/2009/09/07/around-south-texas/>, downloaded 29 September 2011]

**TRAITS.** *Columbina passerina*, or the common ground doves, are brown in colour and only about 6½ inches long. They have an average wingspan of approximately 7½ inches and an average weight of 31 grams. These doves got their name from their foraging behaviour; they are often seen foraging on the ground for small berries as well as seed and sometimes even insects (Shaw Creek Bird Supply, 2003). The bills of these doves are orange-red in colour with a black tip and a pink base. In both males and females, the eyes are red. The male ground dove is scaled on his breast and head. His body contains a pinkish-grey crown, breast and under parts along with a stubby tail. The back of the male dove's neck is blue as can be seen in Fig. 2. The female dove is darker gray and shows some scaling. Compared to the male, her throat and under parts are much lighter. Both the male and female have a tail that is brown in the centre with some black feathers and some white corners. They also have rounded wings; a bright chestnut colour is visible on the primaries and under the wings when they fly. The legs of both sexes are light pink

or flesh coloured and there are dark markings on the wings. These characteristics mentioned above could be seen in figures 2 and 3.

When the ground dove walks there would be a bobbing action of the head, much like that of another type of bird, the pigeon (Bird-Friends, 2000). They are considered to be the world's smallest pigeon and are very fast fliers (Nebraska Bird Library, 2011). These birds have similar flight patterns as pigeons in that it is very fast and direct and with regular beats as well as sharp flick of their wings. The juvenile ground dove resembles the adult female with gray on his crown, breast and under parts.

**ECOLOGY.** Ground doves are seen in brushy woodland edges, gardens, fields or even farmlands where they forage for seeds, tiny berries and sometimes insects (Bird-Friends, 2000). These birds do not migrate since they would stay with the same mate throughout life (Peques, 2009). These doves are found in other territories such as the southern tip of United States, the Caribbean Islands, most of Mexico as well as the northern tip of South America (Wikipedia, 2011).

**SOCIAL ORGANIZATION.** With respect to social organization, the most important aspect is the pair-bond relationship that a couple would share. Ground doves would either behave as individual units (before searching for a mate) or pairs (after the mate has been found) but never move around in groups. If there are other types of doves close by, they would never associate with them, even if it's temporary or to get away from danger (Johnston, 1964). These birds have a sort of gentle behaviour in that they feed relatively close to humans and do not fly away quickly when they are approached by these humans (Peques, 2009). If there is, for example, a passing hawk over the foraging grounds of the common ground doves as well as other types of doves, the common ground dove would not associate with this other species of dove in order to defend themselves. This is so because they tend to behave strongly as individuals or pairs and not as temporary members of another group with other species (e.g. ruddy ground doves) (Johnston, 1964).

**MAINTAINANCE OF THEIR TERRITORY.** If a particular territory is occupied by a pair during and after the mating season, the couple would try to maintain their territory by the assertive behaviour of the male in the pair to other intruders. However, this is not so at all times. If the male holder of the territory happens to see an intruder, he would stand still, have his body parallel to the surface of the ground and start to flick its wings. Following this behaviour, the male dove would give a two syllable note. He would then fly towards the intruder and launch an attack. These pre-attacking behaviours are usually done approximately two to three times in order to warn the intruder. However, if the intruder did not take such hints, the dove would fly into the air and then start chasing the intruder until it leaves the territory (approximately 100 yards away). On the other hand, the bird that was attacked shows either one of two responses. The attacked bird would show fear before it is attacked or it could try to defend itself while it is being attacked (Johnston, 1964).

**COMMUNICATION.** The call of the common ground dove is a "coo – oo – coo – oo" that usually rises in inflection.

**PAIR BOND MAINTAINANCE.** The pair bond relationship stands as the primary social unit of this species. Ground doves are amazing creatures in that they find one mate and form permanent pairs. The two members of the pair usually stay close to each other at all times except when one is sitting on the eggs to incubate it until its ready to hatch. The attraction of the couple to each other is very strong. For example, as stated by Richard (1964), if a pair of ground dove is foraging along the side of a dirt road and one of the bird is separated from the other by a mere ten to twelve feet distance apart, the male would pursue the female by either flying or running towards her. If another male ground dove tries to approach a female that already has a mate, her mate would intrude and try to separate the second male from his female. After the mating male chased the second male away, the pair would have a moment of sudden emotions or excitement and would fly away together (Johnston, 1964).

**SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR.** There are two types of categorised actions that the ground dove performs and are frequently seen in the summer; these are the head bobbing and the bow-coo. The male birds would bow by bringing their bodies to an angle of 30° to the horizontal plane. They would then flick their wings and give a loud call to the female bird. If the female decided to move away from the male, the male bird would continuously follow her trying to impress her. As the name suggest, ground doves mate on the ground. In other words, the male usually chase the females and try to impress her by bobbing his extended neck and flicking his wings as can be seen in Fig. 1 above. He may also try to serenade her by singing his ‘cooing’ sounds to her all day long if he is able to.

**NESTING.** The nesting cycle usually requires about one month and these doves usually lay two to three white eggs in a nest (as can be seen in Fig. 4), that is occasionally on or close to the ground. They usually build their nest on low shrubs, palms or even cactus (Bird-Friends, 2000). This nest is hidden in a bunch of various materials such as feathers, hair, grass, small twigs which is held together at the base or it could even be hidden among weeds on the ground. Both the male and female doves take care of the eggs and its incubation period is approximately twelve to fourteen days. The nestling care is about twelve days and the recycling period is about six days. The young ground dove are fed ‘pigeon milk’ which is a secretion from the crop of the parent dove. Fledging usually occurs in about eleven days; this is where the young dove learns how to fly. When these young dove reaches approximately 3 months of age, they are capable of breeding and carrying out the entire process which their parents underwent when they were being nurtured. In other words, the common ground doves mature rapidly (Shaw Creek Bird Supply, 2003). The male and female couple/pair or the parent doves can sit on or incubate several sets of eggs per year, in other words they usually have several broods per year. Approximately 79 days after hatching, the common ground dove can become sexually active again (Passmore, 1984).

## REFERENCES

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**Fig. 2.** A male common ground dove. The back of the dove's neck is slightly blue in colour.

[<http://www.pbase.com/tgrey/image/133200467>, downloaded 29 September 2011]



**Fig. 3.** A female common ground dove. Her throat and under parts are much lighter compared to the male dove.

[<http://www.pbase.com/tgrey/image/133200467>, downloaded 29 September 2011]



**Fig. 4.** The nest of a female common ground dove made with small twigs and dried grass with two of her eggs contained in it.

[[http://www.art.com/gallery/id--b26069/bird-eggs-posters\\_p4.htm](http://www.art.com/gallery/id--b26069/bird-eggs-posters_p4.htm),  
downloaded on 13 November 2011]



**Fig. 5.** A pair of common ground doves resting with raised wings.

[<http://stokesbirdingblog.blogspot.com/2009/10/common-ground-dove-in-new-jersey.html>,  
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