

Columbina squammata (Scaled Dove)

Family: Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

Order: Columbiformes (Pigeons, Doves and Dodos)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Scaled dove, *Columbina squammata*.

[<https://www.flickr.com/photos/24201429@N04/6987943663>, downloaded 7 March 2017]

TRAITS. *Columbina squammata*, commonly known as the scaled dove, is a tropical or subtropical bird. Males and females are generally similar, although males are slightly larger and more colourful than females (Hilty, 2003). They have a distinct scaled appearance which is attributed to the darkened edges of the bird's feathers which produce reptilian-like scales (Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 2010). The scaled dove (Fig. 1) has greyish-brown feathers on its upper back, a grey face and breast, short black bill, short pinkish feet, and long scaled pointed wings with darkened edges. The wings contain a conspicuous white patch. Scaled doves can grow to an average length of 18-22cm with a weight of 48-60g (Elliott et al., 2013).

DISTRIBUTION. *Columbina squammata* occurs in two areas (Fig. 2), in Colombia, Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago in the north, and in Paraguay, Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil in the south (Elliott et al., 2013).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Scaled doves are found in subtropical and tropical dry or moist shrublands and wet lowland grasslands, in savannas and open ground with scrub and tree cover (Elliott et al., 2013). Habitats include urban areas and degraded forest (IUCN, 2016). The scaled is diurnal, generally solitary but are also commonly seen in pairs or small groups. Scaled doves can be seen perched on trees and electric wires and are not uncommon in fields and roads (Amaro, 2012).

FOOD AND FEEDING. Scaled doves are not infrequently seen feeding in small groups that can range to about 12 birds (Elliott et al., 2013). These doves are granivorous, feeding typically on seeds gathered from the ground (Fig. 3) (Camfield, 2004), and occasionally they eat small insects and snails (Dias, 2006). Granivorous species have specialized physiology such as gizzards, esophagi and intestines that assist them in properly digesting grains and seeds. In order to digest these, a lot of water is required. Scaled doves submerge their bill and suck water up (Camfield, 2004), unlike most other birds.

POPULATION ECOLOGY. In countries such as Venezuela, Columbia and Brazil and Paraguay these birds can be seen in large populations, but in Trinidad and French Guiana they are recorded as rare. Although information is not available on the lifespan of *Columbina squammata*, the lifespan of a close relative, *Columbina passerina* (common ground dove), is 7.2 years in the wild (Elliott et al., 2013).

REPRODUCTION. Like many pigeons and doves, scaled doves are generally monogamous having the same single mate. Males perform displays to attract a female (Camfield, 2004). Breeding activities are initiated by the availability of food at that period. Building of nest last 2-4 days and occurs during the period of March-August in Columbia and January-June and September-October, in Venezuela (Elliott et al., 2013). Scales doves build their nests in small trees. Clutch size is on average one or two eggs (Fig. 4). Both males and females participate in egg incubation, which last 11-30 days, though females are more heavily involved. Due to short breeding cycles a pair can produce approximately five offspring per breeding season (Camfield, 2004). When hatched, the chicks are fed from mother and father, receiving crop-milk for approximately three days before they are introduced to seeds and grains. The parents continue to feed their young for 30-40 days (Camfield, 2004).

BEHAVIOUR. Although these birds fledge in 10-36 days due to highly nutritious crop-milk, they receive food and care for approximately 30-40 days after, with no need to forage. At 6-12 months, they are considered sexually mature (Camfield, 2004). Scaled doves are sedentary and tend to maintain their foraging and nesting sites. During breeding periods they can be observed to become aggressive as they defend their nesting territory (Camfield, 2004). In other interactions however, aggressive behaviour is uncommon (Dias, 2006). Both male and female scaled doves call throught the day (Camfield, 2004), to communicate with their mate. The calls are rhythmic and monotonously repeated, causing the head and body of the dove to rock and move as they call out (Hilty, 2003).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. *Columbina squammata* is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN (2016). This status was deemed appropriate due to the large range of this species; the population is large enough to not be considered globally threatened.

REFERENCES

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Posted online: 2017



Fig. 2. Scaled dove geographic distribution.

[<http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/map/?cn=Scaled%20Dove&sn=Columbina%20squammata&sc=scadov1&species=174421>, downloaded 7 March 2017]



Fig. 3. A scaled dove walking and searching for food.

[<https://bobzeller.wordpress.com/tag/photography-blog/>, downloaded 7 March 2017]



Fig. 4. Scaled dove nest containing two eggs.

[<http://www.todarophotowork.com/keyword/egg/>, downloaded 7 March 2017]

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