

Columbina talpacoti (Ruddy Ground Dove)

Family: Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

Order: Columbiformes (Pigeons, Doves and Dodos)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Ruddy ground dove, *Columbina talpacoti*.

[http://www.azfo.net/gallery/2009/html2/RGDO_Patons_Baxter_20090619.html, downloaded 5 December 2016]

TRAITS. *Columbina talpacoti* is a tropical New World dove (small short-tailed pigeon) which is sexually dimorphic. Adult males have a pale grey head and neck while their upper body is a rich brownish red and the wing-coverts are black spotted (Fig. 1). The underside is a paler brown, the underwings are black and brown and the tail is edged with black. The females have grey-brown upper bodies and there is less contrast between the body and the head, as opposed to the males (Fig. 2). They are approximately 17cm long and generally weigh about 47g (Pereira, 2008).

ECOLOGY. The ruddy ground dove is a resident breeder over most of Central and South America, including Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, and northern Argentina, and also Trinidad and Tobago (Fig. 2). Individual birds have been spotted in the southern USA, mainly during winter (IUCN, 2016). This species of bird is versatile when it comes to habitat, they occupy riparian areas to suburban yards and open areas with bare ground (Neotropical Birds, 2016). It has also

been observed in logged areas and humid habitats (Del Hoyo et al., 1997) and typically avoids dense forests (Skutch, 1956).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION. Single species flocks can include 200 or more individuals. Ruddy ground doves have strong pair bonds. While on branches they are observed resting next to each other (Fig. 4). Members of the pair typically stay close to each other at all times with the most noted exception occurring when brooding young or one is sitting on eggs. This strong tendency to stick close to each other can cause anxiety in males when separated by more than 3-4m. They begin to actively seek out females by either flying or running to them. The most common sign of anxiety is wing-flickering. This pair system seems to stand as the primary and almost the only social structure. No other group besides that of the groups for foraging is formed (Johnston, 1964).

FORAGING BEHAVIOUR. Open and bare ground is the foraging grounds for this species of bird. Their main diet is seeds that range between 2-15mm long, but it can sometimes include snails and small insects (Cintra, 1988). Foraging often occurs in groups of about 20 but feeding groups can be as large as 200 (Skutch, 1956; Del Hoyo et al., 1997). Their food is captured by the pecking of seeds off the ground (Cintra, 1988). For all members of the columbids food is temporarily stored in their crops. In their gizzard grit is then used to grind food at a later time (Sibley et al., 2001). This allows for brief periods of foraging allowing the ruddy ground dove to return to cover as quickly as possible. When food is abundant, they typically spend long periods resting in between short and active foraging periods. Due to the amount of dry food this bird consumes, there have been sightings of the ruddy ground dove taking in a high quantity of water. This is done by immersing their bill under water and sucking.

COMMUNICATION. Nonvocal forms of communication have been observed. They make whirring sounds when taking off from the ground after they have been disturbed (Rowlett, 2003). Males also clap their wings repeatedly during courtship which produce sounds (Haverschmidt, 1953). Vocal forms of communication have been expressed in both males and females, however with the males having a much lower pitch than the females. The call that they make is described as a low per-woop or h-woop (Peterson and Navarro-Siguenza, 1996) or sometimes a series of bisyllabic coos of cu-whoop cu-whoop cu-whoop (Schulenberg, 2007). This can be repeated as much as 10 times in a space of 7 seconds. For pairs they are able to call their mates using a low coo call to mates (Stiles et al., 1989). Throughout the year this species can be heard due to the fact that their breeding cycle is year round (Sibley et al., 2001). Males are generally seen calling from perches while females can be seen calling from the nest (Skutch, 1956). Vocalization can also be used in territorial defence, pair bond maintenance and as well as courtship displays. It has been found that these doves are hard-wired to the development of their call meaning that this is genetically determined and not learnt from parents or other doves which may be nearby (Lade and Thorpe, 1964).

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR. Ruddy ground doves are a monogamous species (Haverschmidt, 1953; Skutch, 1956) and they have a strong pair bond. While on branches they typically rest next to each other and also share mutual preening behaviour (Skutch, 1956). There have been recorded sights of recognition displays when pairs meet near their nest which consists of them twitching and bobbing their heads up and down. Males participate in a courting display in the

absence of a female. What can be observed is the male cooing while pumping his tail up and down in time with the sound; he would then take off from where he perches when finished. He would continue to fly upward while clapping his wings a few times which would make an audible sound, then soar downward before resuming a more normal flight pattern. Copulation involves vigorous wing flapping, wing preening and billing (Haverschmidt, 1953).

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Author: Kayla-Marie Stuart

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Fig. 2. Female ruddy ground dove.

[<https://www.flickr.com/photos/lipkee/725481168/>, downloaded 4 September 2016]

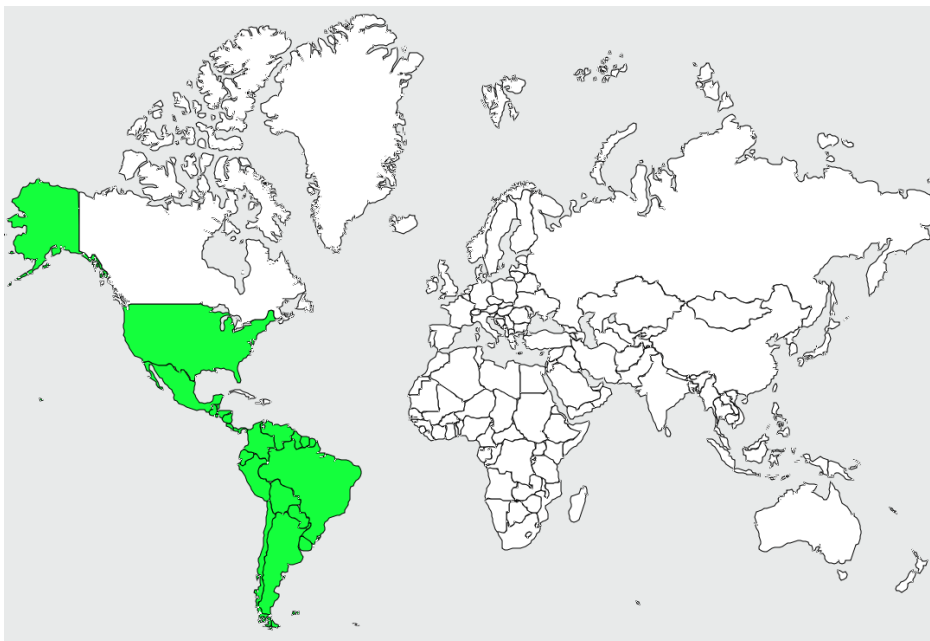


Fig. 3. Ruddy ground dove geographic distribution, by country.

[<http://maps.oiseaux.net/ruddy.ground.dove.html>, downloaded 4 September 2016]



Fig. 4. Male and female ruddy ground dove resting on a branch.

[<http://www.arthurgrosset.com/sabirds/ruddyground-dove.html>, downloaded 4 September 2016]

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