

BIRD OF THE MONTH

THE BROWN PIGEON

(Macropygia amboinensis)

By Josie Pyle

Other names: Brown Cuckoo-dove, Pheasant Pigeon

Despite their lack of showy colours, Brown Pigeons are nevertheless a graceful and attractive pigeon with a subtle beauty of their own. Biologically they belong to the group of fruit pigeons, but can be kept on a diet of seed, with provision of a supplemental supply of fruit.



Summary Table

Habitat	Highland and lowland rainforests
Size	38 - 43 cm.
Breeding Season	Any season – peak July to January
Nest	Platform of twigs – may need support
Eggs	2 white eggs
Incubation Period	16 -18 days. Both sexes. Fledge 16-18 days. Nest abandonment common in some pairs
Feed	Seed mix + fruit
Compatibility	Compatible – cocks aggressive Planted aviaries.

Description: Length: 38-43cm. Brown Pigeons are a coppery brown colour above and a buffish brown colour below. Adult birds have a pale blue iris with red eye-ring. Legs and feet are red.

Male: Breast tinged pink. Green and mauve iridescent wash on nape of the neck

Female: Lacks the iridescent wash on the neck and has less pink colour on the chest. The overall body colour is slightly darker and she has a subtle scalloping pattern on the breast.

Sexing: Generally pairs are visually identifiable although older females may develop similar plumage to males. Young males develop characteristic breast colouration at approx. 3 to 6 months of age.

Chicks: Are covered by yellow down on dark brown skin. The eyes open from 3 days and immature birds have a brown iris.

Distribution and Habitat: The Brown Pigeon inhabits the margins of highland and lowland rainforests, as well as thickets of lantana native tobacco and secondary growth where weedy shrubs provide fruit and seeds. Brown Pigeons range from the eastern coast of Australia from Cape York to lower New South Wales. It is nomadic within local areas.

Both this species and others in the same family are found throughout Indonesia, New Guinea and the Philippines.

Voice: Brown Pigeons utter a repeated high-pitched “cuckoo-rork”.

Avicultural Notes: The Brown Pigeon is compatible in a mixed collection although its size and heavy flight may be a hazard to smaller birds. It is best kept in a planted aviary with plenty of cover. Use of berry producing plants (see below) will provide a supplemental food source for the birds. Brown pigeons exhibit an acrobatic climbing ability in deep foliage. Although colony breeding is successful at times, in other instances cocks have become aggressive in the breeding season.





More than other pigeon species, the Brown Pigeon appears prone to *Trichomonas* infection (canker).

Feeding: In the wild the diet of the Brown Pigeon is about 80% fruit and 20% seeds. They tend to prefer juicier fruits, especially those coloured black, as well as red, white and

green. However in aviculture Brown Pigeons live happily on a diet of commercial Finch or Budgie mix, supplemented with fruits such as sultanas (esp. soaked), plain cake, peas and corn as well as Passwell™ pellets or crumbles. Native fruits such as Tobacco Lilly Pilly, or Inkweed are usually appreciated. Insect food is also appreciated by some birds.

Nesting: Brown Pigeons breed mainly between July and January, although breeding may occur at any time of the year. Pairs tend to be erratic – several unproductive seasons may suddenly be followed by a successful year. Courtship is initiated by the cock with a display flight and



bowing to the hen. Nests are constructed as a platform of twigs and vary considerably in substance. Often the nest site needs to be supported with a wire or wooden platform, placed in the area the birds have chosen to nest. One glossy white egg is laid and incubated for 16-18 days by both parents. The eyes may be open at birth, or soon thereafter. Squabs grow rapidly and full feathering is achieved at 12 days per age, with fledging as early as 16 days. Nest desertion is common. Squabs have been successfully raised by Barbary doves or may be hand-raised.

Summary: The Brown Pigeon is kept in low numbers in aviculture. With more interest in the species by aviculturists experienced in pigeons, more knowledge and therefore more success in keeping and breeding these interesting birds may be anticipated.