

## THE BARBARY DOVE



The Barbary Dove, Ringneck Dove, or Ring Dove, *Streptopelia risoria*, is a domestic member of the dove family: Columbidae.

Although the Barbary Dove is normally assigned its own systematic name, as *Streptopelia risoria*, considerable doubt exists as to its appropriate classification. Some sources confidently assert that it is a domesticated form of the Eurasian Collared Dove, *S. decaocto*, but the majority of evidence points to it being a

domesticated form of the African Collared Dove, *S. roseogrisea*. It appears that it can hybridise freely with either species, and its status as a species must therefore be regarded as doubtful. However because of the wide use of both the common and systematic names, it is best to consider it separately from either of the putative parent species.

Barbary Doves have been domesticated for 2000 to 3000 years. They are easily kept, and long-lived, in captivity, living for up to 12 years, and are noted for their gentle nature. In recent years they have been used extensively in biological research, particularly into the hormonal bases of reproductive behaviour, because their sequences of courtship, mating and parental behaviour have been accurately described and are highly consistent in form. Dove fanciers have bred them in a great variety of colours; the number of colours available has increased dramatically in the latter half of the twentieth century, and it is thought that this has been achieved by interbreeding with *S. roseogrisea*. One of the earliest mutations is completely white, and is commonly used by magicians. White Barbary Doves have also been traditionally released at large public ceremonies, since they are a peace symbol in several cultures, and "dove releases" are sometimes conducted at weddings and funerals. However, the released dove is, in fact, usually a homing pigeon, as Barbary Doves lack the homing instinct and generally do not survive in the wild. The release of Barbary Doves, white or otherwise, is illegal in South Australia.



BARBARY DOVE MUTATIONS  
COME IN MANY COLOURS AND  
FEATHER TYPES

The "coo" of the Barbary Dove is created by muscles that vibrate air from the lungs. These muscles belong to the fastest known class of vertebrate muscles, contracting as up to ten times faster than the muscles vertebrates use for running. This class of muscles is usually found

in high speed tissue such as a Rattlesnake's tail. Barbary doves are the first bird species to have been found to have this class of muscle.

Feral populations of Barbary Doves establish themselves readily as a result of escapes or release from captivity. The feral population in the Adelaide metropolitan area is spreading fast, in some areas flocks of several dozen birds can be found. Because of their innate tameness single birds, or pairs are, unfortunately often "adopted" by families and supplied with food on a regular basis. Single birds soon attract a mate, and two soon becomes four,



INDIAN LACE-NECK DOVE

Photo: J.M.Garg

and four becomes eight, as they are prolific breeders. The Adelaide population grew so rapidly that attempts to eradicate them were soon abandoned as futile, and it looks as if they are, like the Lace-neck Dove, *Streptopelia chinensis*, here to stay.

When a pair of compatible (rarely a problem) adults of 9-12 months of age are placed together it takes anywhere from a couple of weeks to a couple of months for them to begin to breed. However, the pairing process starts almost as soon as the birds are put together, as the male does all he can to impress the female.



Photo: Mark Baluk

Barbary Doves do very well breeding in relatively small aviaries. The minimum suggested size being 1m X 1.2m X 1.8m high (3' X 4' X 6'). As they are not natural community breeders one pair per flight is advisable. However, if the flight is large enough for separate territories to be established, several pairs will usually settle down with only occasional minor territorial disputes.

Doves, in general, are not known for their nest building expertise. Barbary Dove are no exception, and their nests are generally flimsy structures of just a few twigs thrown together. Therefore it is important to help them by



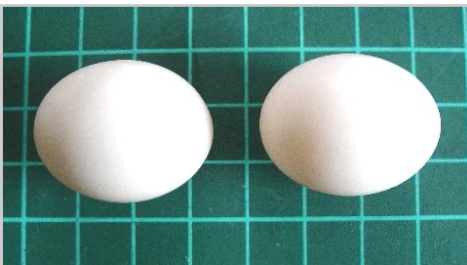
placing nesting containers in the flight. Like most doves they build platform nests, so the containers can be fairly simple. They can be constructed of wood or wire mesh, an old dish or even a plastic bottle. Nest building is carried out by the male and takes place throughout the breeding season.

Male Barbary Doves attempt to attract a female by making a long drawn-out cooing sound. This cooing generally takes place in three phases, all of which form part of the courtship display. The initial phase is when the male simply sits on the perch and coos to let other doves know he is ready

to breed. The second phase occurs when the male has spotted a female of interest and he begins to “show off” to convince her he is a suitable mate. This phase is known as the “bow coo.” The male coos with the same sound as the first phase but accompanies it with a rhythmic bowing in front of the female. Once he has the female’s attention, he settles into the nest and coos with the same sound again, but he now flutters his wings very lightly to keep her attention and to let her know he has found a suitable nesting sight.

Copulation takes place between the bow coo and the wing fluttering. Until the eggs are laid the male is constantly “driving” the female to the chosen nesting site. This usually looks rougher than it is, but an occasional injury may result, so it is wise to watch closely at this time.

Barbary Doves lay two eggs which hatch after fourteen days. The young are then fed by the parents with “crop milk”. As the name suggests, crop milk is produced in the crop of the parents and the young put their beaks into the parents’ throats and slurp it down. Within a few days the parents add seed to the young ones diet.



Barbary Dove eggs on a grid of 1cm squares

The young leave the nest three to four weeks later. It is not uncommon for some pairs to lay all year

round, producing a new clutch every six weeks or so. However, it is not recommended that this unbridled breeding be allowed as it would be deleterious to the health of the birds. Feeding and taking care of young is a huge drain of energy for the adults. Therefore it is recommended that only three or four clutches per year be allowed, either remove the nesting materials or separate the birds.



TWO DAY OLD BARBARY DOVE  
Photo: Mark Baluk

Cleanliness is of prime importance or the aviary will become a breeding ground for disease. The aviary should be cleaned on a regular basis to keep diseases at bay. If the aviary floor is dirt it should be raked at least weekly, and the dirt turned over and limed each spring. If the floor is concrete it should be washed down on a regular basis. Food and water dishes should be kept clean at all times. Many diseases are undetectable by those new to bird-keeping, so cleanliness is extremely important. There are a number of products available to keep disease down. A common method is to use a solution consisting of 1 part bleach to 25 parts water.

Reference: 1. Wikipedia  
2. “DovePage”