

# BEGINNER'S BIT

## MASKED DOVE

*Oena capensis*

**Introduction:** The Masked Dove is also known as the Cape Dove, Namaqua Dove, and Long-tailed Dove. There are two recognized sub-species. *Oena capensis capensis* is found through-out most of the species range. *Oena capensis aliena* is found in Madagascar and is slightly darker and grayer.

**Description: Adult male:** Forehead, face below the eye, throat and breast are black, giving the bird a mask-like appearance. The top of the head, nape, face behind the eye and the back of the neck are pale bluish-grey. Iris is blackish-



Male Masked Dove

brown. The orbital skin forms a narrow greyish eye-ring. The bill is reddish at the base and on the cere, however the tip is orange-yellow. Mantle, scapulars, tertials and inner secondaries, three innermost greater wing feathers and lesser wing feathers are pale sandy-brown. The back and rump are a duller greyish-brown grading to a blackish brown on the tips of the uppertail feathers, forming a narrow bar across the top of the tail. There are two narrow blackish-brown bands on the mid-back separated by narrow pale greyish band.

The outer greater and median wing feathers are pale bluish-grey. If the wing is folded, the primary wing feathers are not visible. Primaries are dark brown with the top edged white. Extended primary wing feathers show an extensive chestnut panel edged dull brown. The top of the outermost primary feathers are dull brown. The basal portion of the innerweb is bright rufous. Outerwebs of sixth to ninth primaries are edged brownish. The innerwebs are tipped dull brown but are steadily less so. The rest of the innerwebs are bright rufous. Five innermost primaries feathers are rufous with narrow brown tips. The three outermost secondaries are rufous with narrowly edged dull brown on the tips. The rest of the secondaries are increasingly pale, sandy-brown. Primary feathers are bright rufous with blackish subterminal spots, mainly on tops. The tail sharply graduates; inner feathers are greyish-brown, next pair have bluish-grey bases with black tips, and the following two pairs have bluish-grey bases with broad black. The outermost tail feathers with entire outerweb white, innerweb bluish-grey basally with subterminal black bands and terminal bluish grey-spot. The lower breast

and belly, flanks and vent are clear snowy-white. Undertail feathers, undertail and wing linings are black. The feet and tarsi are purplish-red.

**Adult female:** Females lack the black mask of the male. The head is dull greyish-brown with whitish forehead, face and throat and dull brown line from gape to eye. The bill is uniformly purplish-brown. Otherwise the female is like the male but rather duller greyish-brown overall. The outer greater and median wing feathers are more greyish-brown.



**Juvenile:** Juveniles are generally pale greyish-brown. The head is greyish with pale edgings on the top. The face

has a blackish spot behind the eye. The bill is dull grey on the base and cere with black at the tip. Some feathering above bands on back and uppertail coverts are buff tipped with black subterminal bands. Below, the juvenile is like the adult female. Wings are similar but duller than in adults. Innermost secondaries, tertials and scapulars are broadly tipped buff-brown with black subterminal bands on secondaries and tertials. Scapulars have only a black subterminal spot. The greater and median wing feathers are greyish brown, broadly tipped whitish with blackish subterminal black bands followed by buff bands. Inner wing feathers are a mix of white-edged grey feathers and black feathers broadly tipped buff.



**Distribution:** This bird is found in Africa from Senegal, the Southern Sahara and Red Sea Coast south to Cape Province, Socotra Island, eastern and southwestern Arabia, and Madagascar.

**Habitat:** The Masked Dove is usually found in dry, open habitat with some scrub vegetation which is used for cover. Sometimes they are found in dry wooded areas. Like many other doves they can be seen in villages and towns in gardens and parks, and also in cultivated areas.

**Feeding:** Feeds on small seeds where the ground is bare in open spaces among thorn scrub, roadsides, paths, and in gardens. The bird walks and runs about very quickly while feeding. These birds are also very swift fliers.

**Nesting:** A shallow platform constructed of roots, twigs, and coarse grasses is located in a low tree or shrub. The two, creamy white eggs are incubated for 13 days by both parents. The young leave the nest when around 16 days.

Sexual maturity is reached at 6 months. Full adult plumage will be obtained by about 6 months of age but will be fuller and brighter at one year.

**Aviculture:** Masked Doves need an enclosure that gets plenty of direct sunshine with some overhead cover to provide shade and rain protection when they want it. Tall trees and shrubs planted around the perimeter will give both shade and nest sites. There should also be a large area of open dry ground where they will spend a great deal of time searching for food and taking sun and dust baths.

They may successfully be included in mixed collections of other small PEACEFUL dove species and finches. In smaller enclosures (less than 100 square feet), one breeding pair per flight is recommended but more may be kept in larger aviaries. They do not do well in small cages as their tails quickly become frayed and their faces battered on the wire.

**Diet:** A good quality small parrot mix with small millets added and turkey crumble make a good diet for Masked Doves. They prefer to feed directly off the ground and like most seed-eating doves will throw most of the seed out of a dish or hopper, then proceed to forage for it from the dirt. This habit encourages rodents to free-feed and their droppings mingled with the seed on the ground are a significant source of parasitic infestation in doves. Giving smaller rations more frequently in a tall-sided dish close to but off the ground is the keeper's best hedge against this problem.

No special diet is required during breeding.

**Breeding:** Masked Doves can be encouraged to nest in large wicker or wire canary nest cups. These may be hung on wire walls or attached in forks of trees and shrubs. They should be placed where they will have protection against sun and rain from overhead and where they will be safe from predators outside the enclosure (i.e. not hung on outside wire walls). Fine roots and twigs should be supplied for nest construction, no lining material being used.

Masked Doves are reliable breeders and good parents. In smaller enclosures, adult males may begin to fight with juvenile cocks as they begin to color up which happens when they are around 4 months old. The process takes about two months to complete and they reach sexual maturity at 6 to 8 months of age.



**References:** <http://www.dovepage.com/species/exotic/capedove.html>  
<http://tfn.net/~helenw/bird12%20Cape.htm>  
[http://www.honolulu zoo.org/masked\\_or\\_cape\\_dove.htm](http://www.honolulu zoo.org/masked_or_cape_dove.htm)

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