

## GREEN SCENE

### A Tale of Two Doves

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Mourning doves with their black spotted wings are found at Colony Farm Regional Park during the summer months.  
*Hilary Maguire photo.*

I occasionally get phone calls from people who want to have a bird in their backyard identified. While I am no expert (I seem to lack the good musical ear most birders use to identify birds), my birding buddies keep me in touch with what's happening. One bird that is provoking some interest, especially in Port Coquitlam and Coquitlam, is the growing abundance of Eurasian collared doves, a relatively recent addition to the local bird population. These birds are now prevalent in areas also frequented by the mourning dove. This is another bird species that has also increased in local abundance, albeit far more slowly, over the past few decades.

To complete the scene, we also have two related pigeon species which belong to the same bird family as the somewhat smaller doves. First, there is the ubiquitous rock pigeon (formerly called a rock dove). These are the common city pigeons found throughout cities everywhere people are fond of feeding them. Long ago, they nested on coastal cliffs in western Asia but they have readily adapted to nesting on taller buildings especially those with ledges that provide perfect habitat for them. These pigeons, first introduced to North America in 1606, are now found in cities around the planet. They were domesticated as homing pigeons and by pigeon fanciers who bred them for their unusual feathers. Finally, there is my favourite, the far less-common band-tailed pigeon. They are a species at risk in BC and are the closest living relative to the now extinct passenger pigeon. Band-tailed pigeons, found in forested areas, migrate here each spring but return further south along the coast once the autumn rains arrive.

Mourning doves have been in BC for a relatively long time. While these doves are native to the Americas, their population numbers have been slowly increasing in north-western North America over the past few decades. They are our smallest dove with a *coo* somewhat reminiscent of a sad lament – hence their name. They have black spots on their wings and a long pointed tail with white and black markings. Their *coo* consists of 4 syllables. Although mourning doves can remain year round in the lower mainland, it appears many migrate further south in the winter. For example, mourning doves banded in BC have been captured in Nevada and Arizona. They tend to be mostly ground-feeders but will come to backyard feeders to eat seeds. Like rock pigeon and Eurasian collared doves, they are often seen roosting on telephone wires and power poles.

Eurasian collared doves, as their name suggests, are not native to the Americas. They are slightly larger and heavier than the mourning dove with a black crescent on the back of their necks. In flight, their tail is broad rather than pointed. They have a very characteristic three syllable *coo* with an accent on the middle *coo*. This dove is thought to have originated in India. Records indicate by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it reached Asia Minor and the Balkans.

Because this dove thrives in areas settled by people, it quickly spread throughout Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1970s, it was imported to the Bahamas for sale in a pet store but apparently escaped during a hurricane. It arrived in Florida in 1982 and the rest, as they say, is history. The first record of these doves in BC was in the southern Okanagan in the early 2002. They arrived in the Fraser Valley a few years later and on Vancouver Island by 2008. They remain here year round and show no inclination to migrate. They favour the agricultural-suburban interface which probably explains their abundance in Port Coquitlam. However, recent reports indicate they are now in the Westwood Plateau area in Coquitlam.

All four of these pigeon and dove species can be seen at Colony Farm Regional Park over the summer months. There, the band-tailed pigeons as well as many other birds are attracted to the plentiful red elderberries in the Park. By fall, the band-tailed pigeons will be gone and the mourning doves will be less plentiful.

Initially, there were concerns the arrival of the Eurasian collared dove would have a negative impact on the mourning dove population as they tend to use the same type of habitat. Now it seems that the two dove species appear to be able to co-exist fairly successfully. However, it may take a longer time for any population impacts to emerge. Certainly, there is likely to be some competition for food. My main concern about the arrival of the Eurasian collared doves is that they might have an

impact on the far less common band-tailed pigeons, a species at risk. Band-tailed pigeons are shy birds which rely on coniferous forests in which to nest. They come down to the mudflats in Port Moody's Shoreline Park to eat calcium-rich salt from the mudflats. Unlike the other three species, they are never seen roosting on power lines. I hope their critical habitat will remain unattractive to their three invasive cousins.