

OBSERVATIONS OF NESTING EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVES (*STREPTOPELIA DECAOCTO*) IN GULF BREEZE, FLORIDA

Rufus E. Rose, Jr., and Merilu C. Rose

INTRODUCTION

The first Florida records of Eurasian Collared-Doves date back to the late 1970's and early 1980's (*American Birds* 41: 1370-1379). The first Florida Panhandle record was a small colony discovered near Fort Walton Beach in 1987 (*American Birds* 41: 1370-1379). The species is now abundant year-round along the northwest Florida coast, but to the best of our knowledge, little has been published on the nesting biology of the Eurasian Collared-Dove in the southeastern United States.

This paper records observations of a breeding pair of Collared-Doves for 41 days from June to August, 1998, in Gulf Breeze, Escambia Co., Florida. Observations of nest-building, incubation, hatching, development of young, and fledging are presented.

METHODS

The dove nest was under overhanging fronds in the stubble of a cabbage palm that had been trimmed in early May. The nest was 24 feet (7.2 m) above ground. The observers' height-of-eye on their second-story balcony was 15 feet (4.5 m) above ground. The palm was 50 feet (15 m) south of the balcony. Observers used unaided eye and 8X binoculars, but the inner bowl of the nest and its contents could not be seen from the observers' line of view. Observations were generally conducted between 0630 and 0830 hr CDT, and occasionally also later when feeding and fledging were occurring. The observers kept daily logs of activities and took one photograph of a juvenile on their balcony railing on the day of fledging.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nest-building. - A pair of Collared-Doves had been cooing to each other on the roofs of nearby three-story buildings prior to nest-building. Nest-building began on 22 June and lasted three days. One bird would bring a twig approximately 6 inches (15 cm) long to the other bird, which stayed on the nest and worked each new twig into the nest structure. On the third day, there was much movement by the two birds in the nest after one brought twigs. This movement could have been twig placement or copulation, with the bird that brought twigs above the other bird. The nest consisted entirely of loose twigs, all roughly the same length and diameter. Nest-building occurred in the mornings.

ALABAMA BIRDLIFE

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*), and House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) visited the same palm tree on most days of observation.

Incubation. - Incubation began on 24 June (day 0). A bird remained on the nest, occasionally changing direction 180° and preening. The second bird was not seen visiting the nest. The body of the incubating bird was almost completely above the lip of the nest; therefore, the nest cup was shallow. On day five, when the incubating bird turned around, small loose feathers were clinging to its body. On the sixth morning, the bird held a short, fanned-out body feather in its bill. It placed the feather carefully under its body, repeating this several times. Thus, the nest appeared to be feather-lined.

The incubating bird appeared to be asleep with eyes closed at 0600 hr. Upon awaking, the individual preened and arranged the nest lining. This 'arranging' of nest feathers may have been the parent turning the egg(s). On day 13 of incubation, at about 0900 hr, the incubating bird was gular-fluttering; high temperatures were in the 90's °F (30's °C) during incubation. At about 0945 hr, one dove left the nest while the other remained. Pigeons and doves often share incubation (*The Birder's Handbook*, Ehrlich et al., 1988); thus the 0945 hr event may have been a changing of the guard. This event may also explain why no food was seen being brought to the incubating bird (i.e., the bird fed when off the nest). On day 13, the incubating bird left the nest for 10 minutes at 1645 hr; then, a bird returned to the nest.

Hatching. - At least one chick hatched on 8 July, day 14 (or day 0 of development) of incubation. Hatching was inferred by a change in the parents' behavior that day.

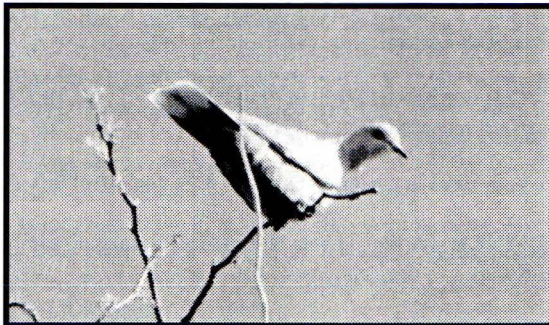
Development. - On the morning of day 1, one bird flew away from the nest carrying a 1 inch (2.5 cm) white sphere, apparently a fecal sac. During development parents took turns sitting on the nest and feeding young, though not continuously. The parents did not bring visible food in their bills; suggesting a nestling diet of pigeon milk. On day 7, two chicks were observed in the nest. They were about 2/3 adult size, dark gray, with black bills and eyes and had some pin feathers on their wings. Chicks were often alone in the nest, with a parent visiting about every two hours, but not always feeding the chicks. On day 9, the chicks were almost fully developed, but their heads were still down-covered and flight feathers were not yet fully-developed. Chicks begged for food when adults approached. Feeding time varied from one to four minutes. On day 12, chicks moved around in the nest, preening their fully-feathered bodies. Flight feathers were almost fully grown, though tails were short and no black collars were visible. On day 13, chicks were active in the nest, preening and stretching their wings over their backs. Most of the down feathers on their heads were gone. Flight feathers were well developed. On day 14, chicks were flapping their wings, acting anxious to fly. Juvenal plumage was the same light gray color as that of the adults. Differences between the older nestlings and adults were that the adults had gently-rounded heads, while chicks

had steep foreheads. Adults had white eye rings, while chicks had no eye rings, and adults had black collars with white borders, while chicks had no collars. One of the two chicks seemed bolder, sitting near the edge of the nest while the other nestled in the nest. On days 14-17, the bolder chick was occasionally poised on the edge of the nest.

Fledging.- On day 16, one chick flew from the outer edge of the nest to two feet (0.6 m) higher in the palm tree, while an adult fed the other chick. The first chick then returned to the nest and was fed. Both chicks left the nest on 25 July, day 17 of development. At 0945 hr, one chick flew down to a palm frond stub about 8 inches (0.2 m) below the nest. At 1430 hr, both chicks were standing on the ends of palm frond stubs, flexing their wings. At 1725 hr an adult flew to the nest, but found no chicks there. The chicks were on balcony railings of next-door apartments. Adults continued to look for and call for chicks until they found and fed them at 1800 hr. After this feeding, one chick flew to the observers' balcony railing where one photograph was taken. The chick did not flush when the flash went off. The photograph showed juvenile features (described above) in profile. Fledglings had black collars without white borders.

On the first day after fledging, an adult dove visited the nest and called, but no chicks were visible within 200 yards (182 m). On the second day, one chick returned to a palm tree about 20 yards (18 m) west of the nest tree. One adult flew over and fed that chick; no second chick was visible. On the third day, adults found and fed two chicks at 1200 hr and at 1207 hr. No chicks were visible on the fourth day. On the fifth day, each chick flew around the area with an adult and then perched in a palm tree. No chicks were visible on the sixth day. On the seventh day after fledging, both chicks and both parents perched together on the one-story pool house roof near the nest tree; one parent fed each chick. Both chicks then flew off to perch in trees about 50 yards (45 m) south of the nest tree by a freshwater pond. This was the last observation.

Rufus E. Rose, Jr. and Merilu C. Rose, 200 Pensacola Beach Rd. #I-3, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561.



Eurasian Collard-Dove. Photograph/Greg Harber