

Mourning Dove

By

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The Mourning Dove is one of the most common birds in North America and occurs from southeastern Alaska as far south as Panama (Farrand, 1989; Kaufman, 1996; Sibley, 2003). These birds occur in open and semi open habitats such as forest clearings, farmland, suburbs, deserts, and prairies. The name of these birds comes from their mournful cooing. The adult birds call before first light and begin flying well before dawn. The adults feed almost entirely on seeds such as those from cultivated grains, grasses, ragweed, and many other plants. The birds occasionally eat snails or insects. The birds mostly forage on the ground but sometimes perch



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on plants or other objects to get at seeds. The adults have large crops that they quickly fill with seeds and then digest while resting. Many an owner of a bird feeding station has watched in dismay while a Mourning Dove rapidly empties it of seeds.

Mourning Doves are monogamous and some pairs may remain together for more than a single breeding

season. A pair may produce multiple broods each year, sometimes as many as four to six. The male leads the female to potential nest sites, and she chooses one of them. The chosen site is usually in a tree or shrub but also sometimes on the ground, buildings, or other structures. The female builds a flimsy platform of twigs with material brought by the male. She lays two eggs that are white in color. Both parents initially feed the young with “pigeon milk”, a milky fluid secreted by the walls of the crop and rich in fat and protein. The adults gradually begin to add digested seeds to the diet. The young birds seek food by inserting their bills into the corner of the parent’s mouth and then feed on the regurgitated substances. The young leaves the nest after about 15 days and usually wait nearby and are fed by the parents for one or two weeks.

Recognition Characters: (Sibley, 2003). Adult Mourning Doves are subtly colored in brown and gray and with black spots on the top of the folded wings and have relatively long tails.

References

Farrand, J. Jr. (ed.). 1989. 2 Gulls to Dippers. The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding. Borzoi Book. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. 398 p.

Kaufman, K. 1996. Lives of North American Birds. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. xxv+675 p.

Sibley, D. A. 2003. The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America. National Audubon Society. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. Chanticleer Press, Inc. 471 p.