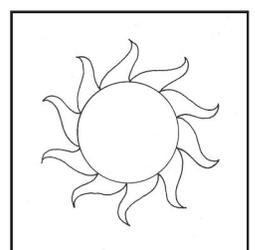
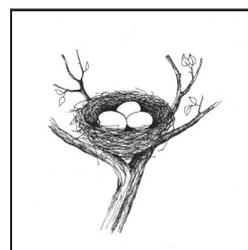
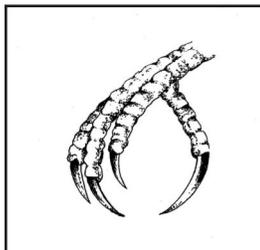
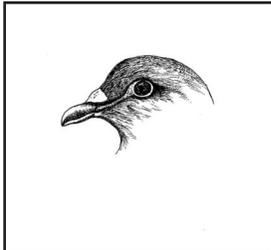
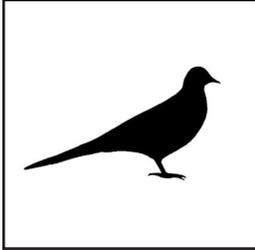




Doves & Pigeons

Order Columbiformes
Family Columbidae



Both doves and pigeons belong to a family of birds that is large and found worldwide. The mourning dove is native to North America, while the rock dove or pigeon originated in Europe, Africa and Asia. The pigeon has long been associated with human settlements and migrated with people as they spread across the globe.

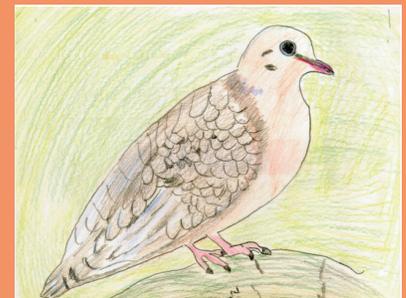
These birds are seed eaters, though they do not have a large seed-cracking bird like grosbeaks. They feed on smaller grains and seeds, occasionally eating some small fruits, insects or crustaceans like snails.

Both pigeons and doves are fast, strong flyers. Doves can reach speeds of 50 mph and quickly change course mid-flight to escape a predator. Pigeons can maneuver quickly too, but despite their speed and agility in flight, pigeons are the primary prey for our city-dwelling peregrine falcons in Pennsylvania.



Mourning Dove

Zenaida macroura



The beloved mourning dove is **elegant and slender-tailed**. Their soft brown plumage and mournful cooing make them a favorite backyard bird, yet they are one of the most popular game birds in the state. Often seen perching on telephone wires or searching the ground for small seeds, mourning doves are **capable of extremely fast flight**. They burst into the air on whistling wings flying **in straight lines** to their next destination. Up to 13 inches in length, but smaller than a pigeon, their head is small and their bill is short and black. As with most groundfeeding birds flashes of white feathers can be seen on their tail when they fly. Each dove has a **pale blue ring around its eye and a single dark teardrop mark below each eye**. The legs and feet are red.



The male dove's poignant *cooing* serves to attract a female for whom he will repeatedly perform a mating dance to win her favor. The display consists of high flights and a fluttering descent. On the ground he will follow her while fanning his tail.

Their **nests** are somewhat haphazard - not much more than a **platform of sticks** placed horizontally on a limb, easily displaced in heavy winds.

Sometimes the female will use an abandoned robin nest, sometimes just lay her eggs on the ground. But **despite this casual attitude toward nest-building, doves are devoted parents.** The male broods the young throughout the day and the female takes over this duty all night. The **nestlings, or squabs, are fed “pigeon milk” by both parents.** This healthy liquid is secreted from the crop of both the male and female and regurgitated to the young. As the young mature they begin eating seeds, small worms and insects. **Prolific breeders**, one pair of doves may raise 5-6 broods each season.

Doves regularly roost in small flocks and begin their fall migration by mid-September. While **mourning doves may be found anywhere**, they prefer farmland with scattered trees and shrubs, woodland edges and suburban gardens.

Rock Dove (domesticated pigeon) *Columba livia*



Rock doves, or pigeons, are undoubtedly the most common bird found in our towns and cities where they mob streets in search of surplus food or birdseed. Like house sparrows and starlings, the pigeon was brought to North America from Europe centuries ago and have prospered ever since. Large & plump compared to mourning doves, **their wings are pointed in flight and their tails are broad and round.**

Pigeons come in an array of colors – one of the reasons they have been a popular pet for ages. Their throats have iridescent feathers and wings are often barred with black marks. During nesting season, **multiple broods of young are raised on “milk,” similar to doves.**

Pigeons characteristically move in flocks, whether searching for seeds on the ground or walking. **When they take flight they do so in unison, circling in the air several times as one large unit** until they settle down again.

Both pigeons and doves need to drink water every day and **have an unusual way of drinking.** Unlike other birds that need to lift their heads in order to swallow water, members of the Columbidae family simply **submerge their beaks into water up to their nostrils** and drink with their heads down – **as if inhaling through a straw.**



A Simple Review of Doves & Pigeons

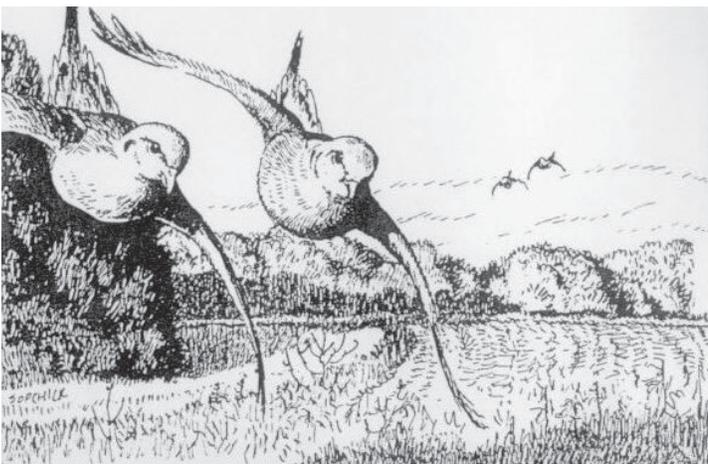


Doves and pigeons are ground-feeding birds that are among the first birds most children learn to identify. Both are known for their **cooing calls**, but the mourning dove's is more mournful and drawn out. When gathered in groups their flock is called a bevy. Pigeons, especially, travel and feed together. The mourning dove is most familiar to those living in the country or in suburbs while **the pigeon is the most common bird found in cities.**

They are both strong fliers, but will use their wings to beat against one another if fighting over food or a mate. **Grains, seeds and fruit** make up most of their diet. In order to help them digest the hard seeds they eat, pigeons and doves **swallow tiny pieces of gravel**. The pebbles go into their **crop** (a pouch inside their throat) and help to grind up the seeds.

When they drink they only need to place their bill in water. **They sort of inhale the water**, using their bill like a straw. Other birds need to lift their heads after they take a drink so they can swallow water, but not doves and pigeons.

Rock doves or pigeons come in a wide variety of colors and patterns. This is probably because domestic pigeons have bred with wild pigeons over many centuries. **Pigeons have a unique ability to find their way back home**, no matter where they are. For this reason they have been used by people throughout history to deliver important messages – especially during war. Biologists believe the birds find their way home using the sun or the earth's magnetic field.



Both birds are believed to mate for life.

Their **nests are flimsy patches of twigs** that can be placed just about anywhere. Sometimes doves don't even build a nest. They just lay eggs on the ground.

Once the chicks have hatched, **both male and female parents feed the nestlings** a special cheese-like substance they regurgitate called "**pigeon milk.**"