



Klamath Network Featured Creature

February 2011

Rock Dove (*Columba livia*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

Often simply referred to as “pigeon” (or other, less flattering terms), the ubiquitous rock dove is recognizable to many. It is highly variable in appearance, due to centuries of domestication and selective breeding. Of the multicolored forms, the escaped and feral birds that most closely resemble their wild ancestors have a dark gray head and iridescent neck with a lighter bluish gray back, two black bars on the inner wing, a white rump, and a black band at the end of the tail. Color variations in both sexes range from all white to piebald to rusty to all black. Flocks will often be comprised of variegated plumage patterns, unlike other pigeon species, such as the Band-tailed Pigeon. The rock dove grows to about 13 ½” (34 cm) and has a chunky body with a short rounded tail. Their call is a soft, guttural, rolling series of coos.

Habitat and Range:

The rock dove was introduced from Europe by settlers in the 1600s and is now widespread in most of North America, from central Canada southward. The wild ancestral stock lives on rocky cliffs along the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Europe. Rock doves are among the world’s most successful birds in terms of distributions and densities. City-dwellers are sure to encounter these non-native birds in urban surroundings, where the birds have become comfortable and prevalent. Rock doves are also commonly seen in farmlands and along rocky canyons and sea cliffs. They avoid forests but are found in open areas and small towns in otherwise forested areas.

Where to See It in the Klamath Parks:

Rock doves are found in all six Klamath Network parks and many locations in between.



<http://www.nycgovparks.org/kids/index.php?page=library§ion=birds>



http://www.birding.in/birds/Columbiformes/Columbidae/rock_pigeon.htm



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/79811980@N00/139031966/>



Rock dove global distribution.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_Pigeon

Feeding and Getting Fed on:

The rock dove forages during the day, mainly on food refuse, spilled grain, weed seeds, and other forms of public handouts. To a lesser extent, the birds also eat wild grasses, forbs, and seeds from wild plants. Wintering hawks, peregrine falcons, and golden eagles will prey on rock doves, especially on conspicuously marked, weak, or injured individuals. There have also been reports in Oregon of ravens team-hunting feral rock doves, driving them into water to capture them. The rock dove was probably first domesticated for human consumption 5,000-10,000 years ago in the eastern Mediterranean. These birds are still commonly raised as food, pets, messengers, and racers around the world.

Reproduction and Development:

Single and colonial nests and roosts for the rock dove are chiefly on high ledges and overhangs, cliff ledges and high rocky outcrops, and human-made structures that mimic these conditions (bridges, barns, etc.). Mating pairs are monogamous and both parents are invested in the nest building, incubation, and care of the young. Over most of their range, breeding may occur at any time and multiple broods produced each year. Within the sheltered roost, two white eggs are laid in a somewhat haphazard nest of sticks, feathers, droppings, and grasses. Young hatch after a 12-15 day incubation. At first naked except for a few bits of down, they quickly develop and reach sexual maturity as early as six months of age.

More Information:

Kindschy, R. R., and D. B. Marshall. 2003. Rock dove (feral pigeon) *Columba livia*. In D. B. Marshall, M. G. Hunter, and A. L. Contreras (editors). Birds of Oregon. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, Oregon.