

# Tropical Pigeons and Doves

*Pale-vented (Rufous) Pigeon*

by Jack Clinton Eitnrear  
McAllen, Texas

Photo by Claudia Wight

With over twenty different species of pigeons and doves in northern Central America (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and El Salvador) you seldom spend much time in the field without at least some limited contact with a couple of species. Although my favorite tropical pigeon is the scaled pigeon (*Columba speciosa*) it was the pale-vented or rufous pigeon (*Columba cayenensis*) that nested in the palmettoes near my base camp in Belize. Only five feet up in a tangled collection of palmetto, vines and grasses, the pigeon could have easily



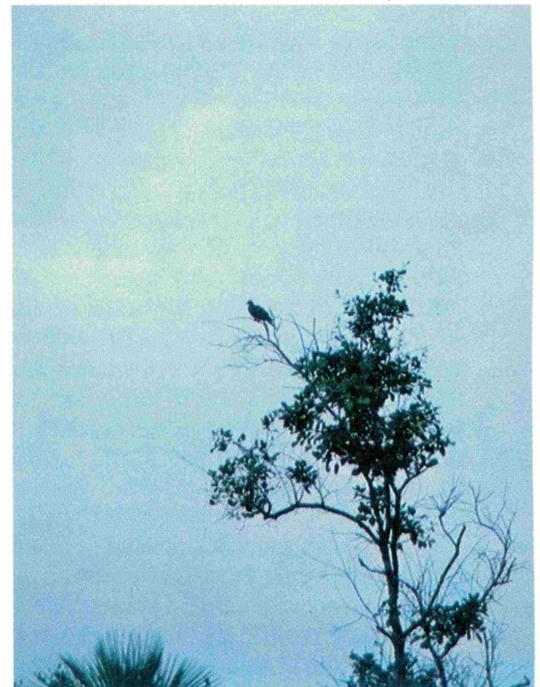
*Adult pale-vented or rufous pigeon hidden among the vegetation on its loosely assembled stick nest.*

*Young squab nearly fully feathered.*



Photo by Jack C. Eitnrear

Photo by Jack C. Eitnrear



*Wary and shy, the pale-vented pigeon can frequently be seen perched in the tops of trees near lagoons.*

completed its complete reproductive cycle and never be discovered. I'm not certain as to the conditions surrounding its ultimate discovery but soon afterwards I placed a small observation blind within easy viewing of the nest. Being shy and wary birds, you seldom approach any of the tropical pigeons close enough for viewing with anything but binoculars. The nesting pale-vented pigeon would, therefore, provide the opportunity to observe and photograph a bird much closer than under typical field conditions.

Usually stated as being aboreal and rare, the pigeon inhabits open woodlands and can frequently be observed perched in trees near lagoons in the pine-palm savannah. With a large range it can be found from the southern portions of the State of Veracruz, Mexico south to northern Argentina in South America.

A large dark pigeon the pale-vented resembles the more northern ranging red-billed pigeon (*Columba flavirostris*) except that its bill is black and it has a pale or whitish abdomen. Because its foreparts are a deep maroon-brown it is frequently called the the rufous pigeon. Since the red-billed is also rufous in color the name pale-vented appears to be more appropriate.

Constructing its nest from twigs and pine needles the pigeon prefers the smaller palmettoes but will nest in the larger pines if no palmettoes are available. Height does not appear to be an important factor as nests have been found from four feet from the ground to forty feet high in a pine tree. Unlike the familiar rock dove or domestic pigeon the pale-vented pigeon lays only one white egg.

With only one young squab to feed, the adults kept their young well fed. Although I was unable to periodically weigh the young pigeon it appeared to grow at a much greater rate than the typical two squab clutch I was familiar with in raising domestic pigeons. The squab soon was puffing up and vocalizing when I entered the blind. Within a few days the pigeon would join its parents once again making observation distant and difficult.

Few if any tropical pigeons and doves are being imported today. Fortunately for aviculture, several individuals have specialized in the family *Columbidae* therefore providing a limited and costly supply of wild doves for interested aviculturalists. Whether these birds will be available in the future depends greatly on the success in breeding the present supply. This is one situation where aviculture cannot afford the luxury of having a couple of unmatched exotic pigeons in every aviary just to add a tropical cooing to the atmosphere. ●



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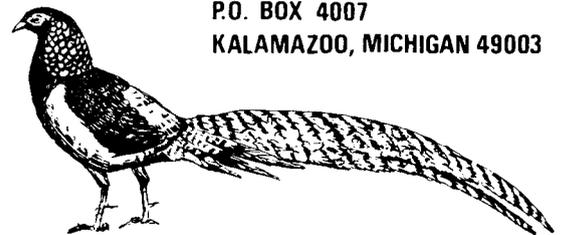
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