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BOOK REVIEW

"DOVES: A Complete Pet Owner's Manual", by Matthew M. Vriends, 1994. Soft-cover, 115 pages (6½"x8"), many color photos. Published by Barron's, 250 Wireless Blvd., Hauppauge, NY 11788 (Printed in Hong Kong.)

This is one in a long list of Barron's books for pet-shop sales, and Vriends is the author of others such as "Lovebirds" and "Beagle Dogs", plus a 1989 book on fancy pigeons. In this "Doves" book Vriends has completely jumbled species of doves and pigeons. Vriends is a Dutchman, and in Holland doves and pigeons all are called "duiven". So be prepared for a wild ride!

Because of the good illustrations, including a number of drawings (none by the author!), and also because of the price -- under 7 bucks! -- this book is likely to appeal to most dove and pigeon fanciers. Therefore we think it needs a critical examination here, and we have found many flaws.

Vriends gives hardly any overview of the taxonomy. Various species are haphazardly presented in the rear half of the book, without maps to show natural ranges. Readers interested in such questions should consult a better authority, Goodwin's "Pigeons and Doves of the World". A majority of the species described by Vriends are what we would call pigeons, but he excluded the Rock Dove (our common pigeon). Well, some other interesting species are omitted also (e.g., Bandtail).

Several labeling problems need notice. The triangular-spotted pigeon is discussed well on pages 54-56, but the nice photo of one on page 104 is erroneously labeled "imperial pigeon". A photo of a gold-billed ground dove (not discussed in the text) is wrongly labeled "inca dove". The 4 full-page cover photos haven't any identification (front outside is a white ringneck; front inside shows a pair of Senegals; inside back is a pied blond ringneck; outside back shows a pair of diamond doves). And horrors! the page 16 full-page color photo of ringnecks has this label: "pied, pearl, orange and ivory mutations of the collared pigeon"! And there's a similar error on page 40. Vriends, how could you??

The first half of the book deals with various general topics. Under behavior Vriends says (page 4) "the healthy bird usually sits on one foot" -- sits? On page 7 he says that if the hen has to leave the nest "she will hide the eggs by covering them with moss or twigs." Not so!

On page 6 Vriends says that the two nestlings are "usually one of each sex". Plenty of studies have proved that like-sexed clutches are just as frequent. On page 36 he says that the only way to "determine gender" is "by blood test or endoscopic examination." He is unaware of cloacal look-see with a small nasal speculum, and certainly ignorant of sex-linked colors in ringnecks! And sexing in many cases is easy by behavior. Or if a bird has laid an egg or fertilized one!

Regarding "housing" (cages), Vriends thinks aviaries are necessary, even for "Barbary" (ringneck) doves. We disagree. The birds are far more tractable in small cages. Vriends does not stress the fact that many doves and pigeons are likely to panic when startled, so are very difficult to manage.

Vriends says everything in the cage should be "spotlessly clean". We say the droppings of healthy doves are practically odorless and quite OK to let lie and dry for a week or so. On the other hand, Vriends fails to warn against keeping ringnecks and exotic species with domestic pigeons which may often be carrying pathogens and parasites.

And about feeding: Vriends goes for complex mixes of many kinds of many sorts of high-priced seeds, plus supplements such as green food and fruits. Ridiculous, at least for ringnecks! He does not emphasize the need for vitamin-D supplement if the birds don't have direct sunshine. Also nothing about raising babies by hand for tameness.

Nothing about leg-rings (bands)... We could go on and on. Well, you just need to keep a questioning mind as you read. Fortunately the page margins are wide so you can mark corrections and comments.