



SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHAT'S A DOVE

by W. F. Hollander



The 1966 "Birds of North America" by Robbins et al. (Golden Press, N.Y.) includes the Rock Dove. You would call it just plain common pigeon. But the authors of this book are not uneducated or stuffed shirts. So who is right? Both. Now ain't that a mess?

Blame it on the old English language. If you lived in Mexico, for example, there would be only one name: paloma. And in Sweden, only one word: dufva. Those languages make no distinction. But English grew not in isolation but by mixing. First the ancient Celts, then Roman invasion, Germanic invasions (Angles, Saxons), Scandinavian invasions (Vikings, Jutes), Norman French invasion, religious and trade terminology, and probably Shakespeare's influence all contributed to the richness of our language. Richness, but also some confusion. We got the word dove from the North countries, and the word pigeon from the French, both meaning the same birds.

But that isn't the worst of the mess at all -- as the exploration of the globe proceeded after the Middle Ages, the sailors went around Africa, to India, China, the New World -- both North and South America -- and the Caribbean islands, New Guinea and Australia. Great: everywhere they went, they discovered new sorts of pigeons or doves. Hundreds of kinds, never imagined to exist. Even that gigantic flightless wonder, the dodo (dove-dove?), which was so good to eat that pretty soon none were left alive. All sorts of pigeon and dove names were casually assigned, such as quail-dove, green pigeon, nutmeg pigeon, diamond dove, bleeding-heart dove, bronzewing pigeon, passenger pigeon, etc. etc.

To make sense of this superfluity of diversity, scientific names were gradually worked out, so that each kind would have a fixed monicker that

everybody agrees on. The latest compilation is a big volume (over 400 pages): "Pigeons and Doves of the World" by Derek Goodwin, publication No. 663 of the British Museum of Natural History. It hit the bookstores in 1967, and few dove breeders bought it because it cost almost as much as a pair of doves. Anyway, this book uses the name Rock Pigeon instead of Rock Dove, and our old pal the common pigeon has the dignified scientific name Columba livia. The first part of the name is the genus, and the second is the species. All together, some 40 different genera have been identified, including around 400 species. Memorizing all of them is a challenge. Many of these species are terribly wild and hard to satisfy in captivity.

Now where does the silky dove fit in this scheme? Well, we know the history of this critter -- it was found as a mutation among ordinary ringneck doves (Streptopelia risoria). So it is not another species but rather a subdivision, and such subdivisions do not rate a scientific Latin label. We can call established mutant types breeds or varieties within the species. New breeds and varieties can also be bred from crossing of previous ones. So we have such combinations as rosy silky, pied silky, white silky, etc., just as we have silver Fantail pigeons, black Fantails, white Fantails, etc., all in Columba livia. It helps to remember that species are our interpretation of natural divisions, while varieties and breeds are human contrivances.

So now you know? Like the Dove of Peace, man?

—American Dove Association Bulletin
June 1975

PIGEONS - DOVES

Greek: Peristera, Peleia, Phassa, Phatta, Treron

Latin: Palumbus, Columba, Turtur

French: Pigeon, Biset, Palombe, Turturette

Spanish: Paloma, Tórtola

Italian: Piccione, Palomba

Hungarian: Holub

Russian: Golub

Swedish: Dufva, Skvabb

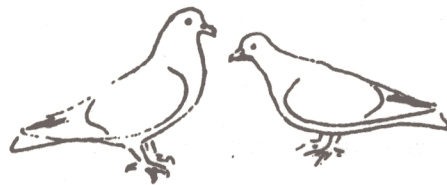
Danish: Due

Scotch: Doo

Dutch: Duif

German: Taube

English: Pigeon, Dove, Turtle, Squab



Taxonomy

