



Mourning Dove

Black - the eye and bill

Pink - the face, throat, breast, and belly

Light brown - the crown, nape, back, and rump

White - the edge of each tail feather

Gray - the tail (except for the white edges), and the primary and secondary wing feathers

Turquoise blue - the eye ring and a touch on the crown and neck

Mourning Dove

Length: 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

Habitat: Common resident in woodlands and grasslands

Field marks: Long, pointed tail has white edges in flight

Field notes: Their soft, drawn-out calls sound sad, as if they are in mourning for someone who has died. When taking off or landing, their wings make a sharp whistling.

Mourning Doves raise more clutches during the year than any other North American bird. A **clutch** is a group of eggs that a bird is raising at a given point of time. Several things help them raise young so quickly. The nest only takes a few days to build because it is so flimsy. It is usually a few crossed sticks supported by branches with some fine material to cushion the eggs.

The female lays only two eggs usually. These eggs are sat on and kept warm all the time. The father sits on the eggs throughout the day; the mother sits on them throughout the night. As a result, the young hatch out in only two weeks.

These babies grow very fast because they are fed **crop milk**. The crop is an expandable pouch near the throat. A milk that is high in protein and extremely nutritious is made there by both the mother and the father. The

baby sticks its beak down its parent's throat and drinks this milk. The baby pigeons eat only crop milk for the first week after hatching.

Adult doves eat only seeds. But rapidly growing baby birds need lots of protein. Most seed-eating birds provide a protein supplement by feeding insects to their babies. But not the doves and pigeons. The adult bird's crop concentrates the protein within seeds into a highly nutritious milk which helps babies grow so fast that they fledge in just two weeks. Then the nest can be reused or a new one is quickly built for the next clutch.

A final reason why doves can raise so many clutches is that their nesting season extends longer into the hot, dry summer. Not having to feed their babies insects allows doves to keep having babies during the full heat of summer when insects are not common, but seeds are.

Mourning Dove Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- Identify a Mourning Dove. The male and female look similar.
- See the long pointed tail edged in white.
- Hear the whistling sound of its quickly flapping wings. Mourning doves can also fly silently.
- See their close, pointed-in footprints where they've been walking in the dust. "Pigeon-toed" means that your feet point inward instead of forward. Pigeon toes are common in little children.
- Hear the long coo with 5 notes, "Coo-OO-oo-oo-oo." The second note is stressed higher. Males give this call in the spring to attract a female.
- Hear a male give a three-part call while building a nest: a coo-OO-oo, highest in the middle.

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