



The White-winged Dove is a large, semitropical dove whose range includes Texas, Mexico, Central America, Florida, and much of the Caribbean



Note the black spots on the wing, small head, and long tapered tail of a Mourning Dove

## Brunswick Wildlife Of Collards and Doves

Carefully watch the doves at your feeders this winter. There will be the ubiquitous Mourning Dove, possibly a rare White-winged Dove, and, especially if you live in Southport, the Eurasian Collared-Dove.

Be careful in mentioning the name of that last one. If you slip and call it a “collards dove”, people will laugh at you. Sorry folks this is the time of year, after a couple of heavy frosts, that my mind turns to the green stuff.

Time to cook up a cauldron of collards and invite all of my friends of the northern persuasion to join me. Just kidding about the invite part...no way I am sharing with folks that will never appreciate such fine cuisine.

Excuse me; I just stepped out for a moment. Now back to doves.

Mary Storms, a friend of mine who lives near Holden Beach, called to tell me about her discovery of a White-winged Dove in her backyard. I knew Mary had correctly identified her rare backyard visitor because she was a member of my birding class and we had just seen a White-winged Dove at the aquarium.

Two in thirty days! It is, however, possible that the Ft. Fisher dove had wandered south.

Due to backlighting, my photos of the first sighting were abysmal. Therefore, I hustled down to Mary’s and redeemed myself.

Historically the White-winged Dove was found in southern Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Since 1980 they have expanded their range northward and now may be found breeding throughout much of the southern United States.

White-winged Doves readily adapt to new resources. They forage for fruit in trees and cacti plus they love feeders. My first White-winged Dove sighting was in Arizona. Astoundingly, it had a purple face...from the fruit of a prickly pear cactus. Called cactus figs, according to Wikipedia this fruit is also edible by humans “although it has to be peeled carefully to remove the small spines on the outer skin before consumption.” Duh!

Over the past few decades, increases in citrus groves and other agriculture plus the establishment of ornamental trees in the south has supported northward expansion by providing additional feeding and nesting habitat. Suburbs create savanna-like habitats ideal for dove nesting and farms may offer a year-round food source to support overwintering doves.

In addition to its bold white wing patch, the White-winged Dove has a baby blue eye-ring, a dark mark below the eye, and its long, white-tipped tail is slightly rounded at the end. The White-winged Dove is large and chunky when compared to a Mourning Dove. Also, the Mourning Dove, which is a similar color, lacks white wing patches and has a longer, more pointed tail.

The Mourning Dove is one of the most abundant and widespread endemic species in North America, temperate Mexico, and southern Canada. They are habitat generalists, found in open habitats from mountains to deserts, including farmland, urban areas, and suburbs. As you probably know, Mourning Doves will readily nest in your trees and frequent your seed feeders. They have benefited from human land use changes like the White-winged Dove.

Mourning Doves are our leading game bird in terms of total harvest. Nearly a million hunters harvest more than 20 million birds each year of an estimated population of over 300 million. These doves have short life spans and clutches of only two eggs; however, they compensate for this by breeding up to six times a year.

A Mourning Dove’s mournful sound, for which it is named, is distinct and easily recognizable. In addition to its black spots, tail, and small head, this dove has dark brown eyes bordered by bluish skin, a very thin neck, white tips on its outer tail feathers, and a black mark on its neck. Its pointed tail and paler color also help distinguish it from a White-winged.

The Eurasian Collared-Dove is an even paler gray with a black half collar that has a white border on top. It has a long, squared, white-tipped tail. Compared to the Mourning Dove, it is larger and has a grayer plumage and reddish-orange irises.

The collared-dove is on the march. Its original range was temperate regions of southeastern Europe to Japan. In the twentieth century it colonized the rest of Europe and moved west to Great Britain by 1956. Introduced into the Bahamas during the 1970s, escapees spread to other islands and to the Miami area by 1982. Once established in southern Florida, their expansion continued northward and westward.

While most of the North American population is found in Gulf Coast suburbs, this dove is now found west to California and as far north as British Columbia and the Great Lakes. It is expected to be common across the country in a few decades.

The success of Eurasian Collared-Doves in America can be attributed to year-round availability of food allowing them to inhabit colder regions. Like the White-winged Dove, it derives benefits from human practices, including the wide availability of seed from bird feeders.

The collar-dove's impact on native species is not known. Scientists disagree about whether or not they are displacing Mourning Doves. Some note collared-doves appear to occupy a different ecological niche and others believe their rapid spread is due to occupying the niche once used by the extinct Passenger Pigeon, both theories seemingly supporting the belief that they are not impacting Mourning Dove populations.

Now how 'bout some hog and hominy to go with those collards? Maybe a cactus fig?

I didn't think so.

John Ennis



**The black "collar" with white trim on the top is the definitive field mark for the Eurasian Collared-Dove**



**Eurasian Collared-Dove**