

## DOVES.



HE bird-fancier watches the bird in its haunts from a loving interest in its habits; but the student spies it out for material for his note-book, for reference when he shall have killed it, stuffed it with tow or the like, and added it to his collection of stiffs or skins.

The knowledge each gains differs as widely as his methods. The fancier recognizes the higher order of the scientist's work and respects his use of the alphabet — possibly because beyond him; but, though he may be a trifle awed that the simple bird of his love is considered worthy of it all, his appreciation and application of it ends there.

In the great family of the *Columbidæ* the scientist finds the *Columbinæ*, *Lopholaminæ*, *Turturinaæ*, *Zenaidinaæ*, and more. These he breaks into subfamilies, varieties, and subvarieties, until there are names for almost the individual specimens. But dropping to plain prose and the vernacular, he seems lost. He says pigeon and dove, it is true, but it is a distinction without a difference. He plainly considers the terms synonymous. Thus the three most careful observers in America, Baird, Brewer, and Ridgeway, say, "the white-headed pigeon," and then refer to it as "this dove"; and "the Carolina dove," with a period between, becomes "this pigeon," and "the ground doves" "these pigeons." But this is no new thing. A half century ago Bonaparte complained of the lack of system in the use of these, the commonly used names. "The name dove," he said, "is applied to all the small pigeons, whilst the larger doves are known as pigeons. Even this distinction, however, does not seem to be agreed upon, as we find authors calling the larger species doves and the smaller ones pigeons, and sometimes applying both appellations to different ages and sexes of the same species."

This is all very abstruse and very absurd to the bird-lover. He recognizes a grand division of doves and pigeons for the entire family, and with the line of demarkation so distinctly drawn upon structural difference and natural habit that he cannot understand where there can be margin for doubt or uncertainty. This, of course, is because he knows only his one little way and cannot see beyond it.

The word "dove" conveys to his mind the impression of a slender, delicately built bird,

timid and solitary by nature; monogamous in habit; its feet formed for grasping; its tail feathers long, graduated, and rounded; its roost upon a perch; its nest in trees or shrubs; and its wings so formed that it is incapable of extended flight. Its love is of mate, but for home, fond as it is of it, it knows only the present place of nesting and resting; in domestication it must be kept within bounds.

The pigeon is altogether to the contrary. True, it is monogamous, but it is also gregarious, and never content unless in a crowd. Its foot is flat; its tail feathers short, of even length and cut straight across; and its roost and nest is, from choice, a broad, flat surface. Its love of mate is secondary to the love of place; and, once domiciled, it may be trusted with its liberty. The dove is shy and timid; but the pigeon — and the bird-lover will quote Willis —

Alone of the feathered race  
Doth look unscared on the human face.

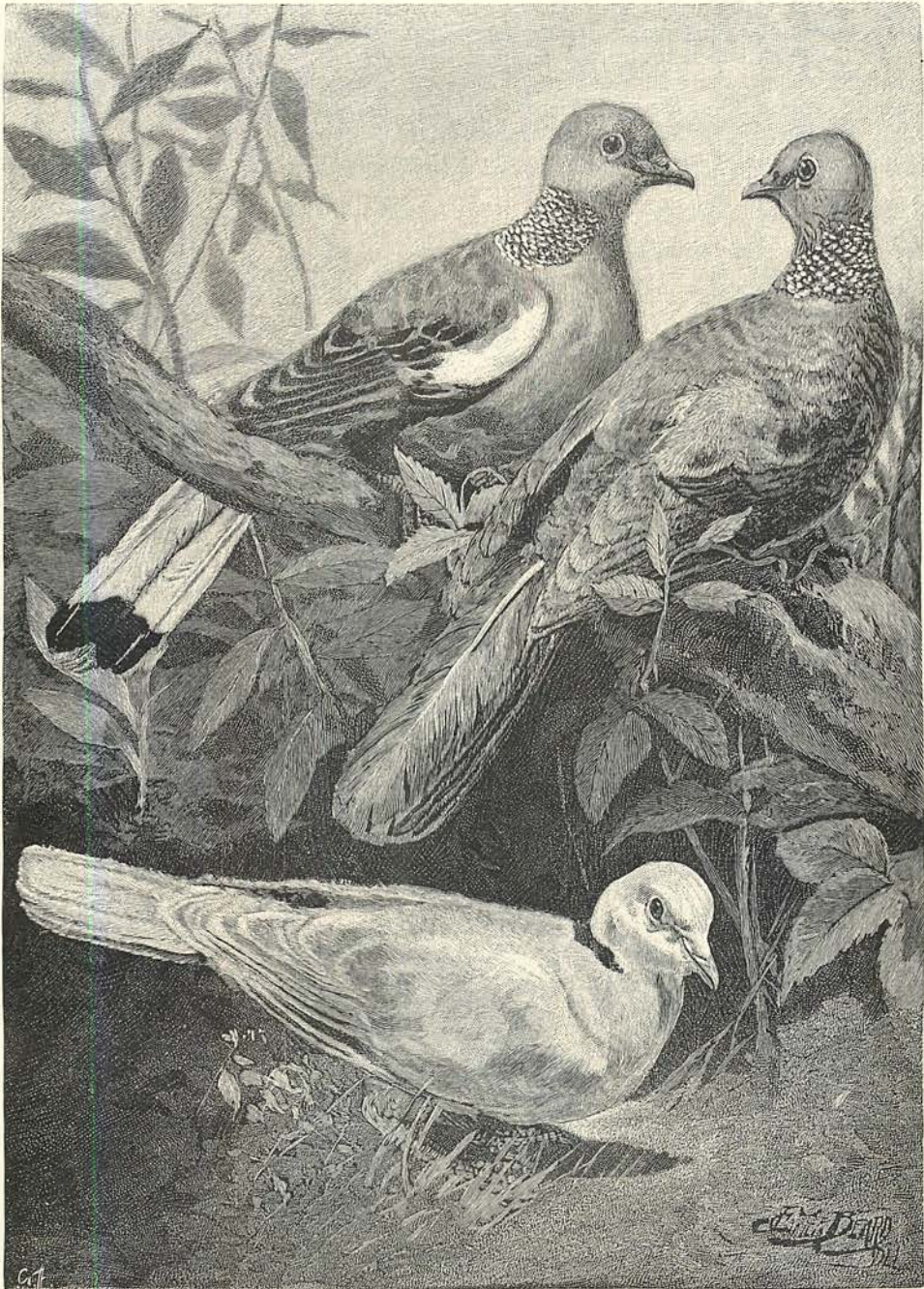
But the fancier finds still another difference, and this to him is conclusive. The doves or the pigeons, in all of their several varieties, may be mated and the offspring are fertile; but all his attempts to mate the pigeon and the dove are futile.

The pigeon, except as it is made a thing of beauty or grotesqueness by the artist breeder, or is enlisted in man's service or for his sport, holds but little to interest. But the dove attracts attention from the traditions and superstitions by which we know of it through all the past, and because of its intelligence and its pretty, curious ways.

The turtle-dove is the best known of the family. Of this there is the common; the collared; a cross of the two which is nameless, although resembling neither and reproducing its own peculiarities; and the white, which is a spot from the collared.

The common is *la Tourterelle* of Buffon. It is English, and although plentiful is not well known. Where other birds suffer from the harrier and the gunner, a superstition protects this. Every English lad knows that, "Molest the turtle-dove or disturb its nest, and the death of the dearest will be sure before the year is done." The plumage of *la Tourterelle* is of a rich dark brown and black above; the underfeathering of reddish brown at the throat, shading to fawn beneath. The wing coverts are black, tipped with brown. The peculiar





TURTLE-DOVES AND RING-DOVE.

marking is a patch of rich velvety, white-tipped black feathers at each side of the throat, but which do not appear until after the first molt.

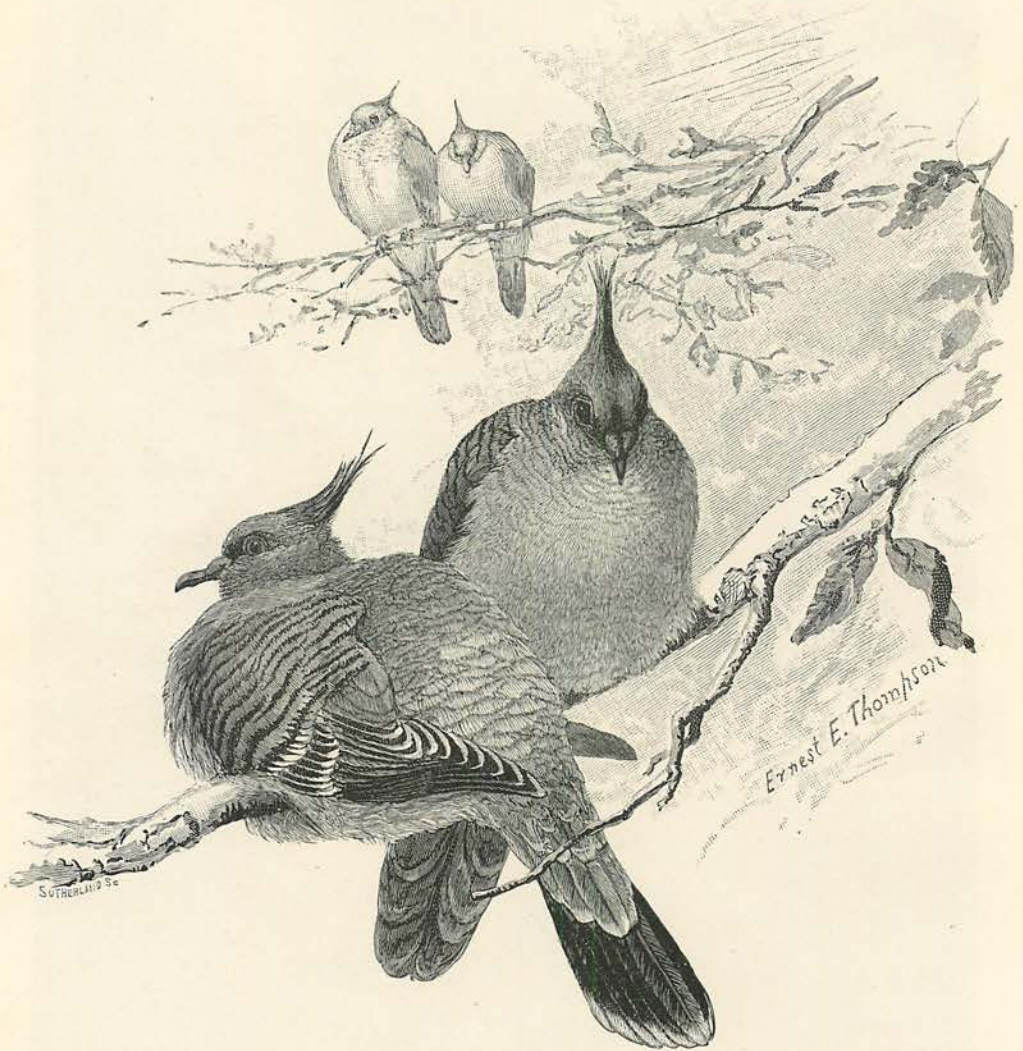
The collared turtle or laughing dove is usually catalogued as the ring-dove, but this name belongs by right to the "cushie doo," or quest, the largest of the European doves. The col-

lared turtle, despite its mournful note, is the interesting member of the family; and, with its presence indicative of good luck and prosperity, it is a welcome guest everywhere, but especially among the middle and lower classes of Great Britain and Germany. Old mothers tell of it as a charm for illness if hung in the



patient's presence, borne out by the fact that the bird, naturally sensitive to atmospheric influences, quickly succumbs to the close air of the sick-room, when it is said to have "taken the disease." If the patient recovers, the bird has the credit; if death ensues, it was inevitable — "nothing could have helped."

above and white beneath. The neck is encircled with a white-edged band of black feathers not quite meeting at the throat. Its cooing is peculiar in the sound being deep, prolonged, and followed by a full stop in which the bird makes a deep obeisance. The bird can be so trained that when spoken to, or when a stranger



AUSTRALIAN CRESTED DOVE.

But the dove has had its place as a curative agent. "The eating of dove's flesh," says an old authority, "is of force against the plague, inasmuch that they who make it their ordinary diet are seldom seized with pestilential disorders. Some commend it against the palsy, or trembling; others, that it is of great use to them that have weak sight."

The collared turtle is of light fawn color

enters its presence, it will coo its welcome and make its courtesy, than which nothing can appear more absurd. This bird is very susceptible to atmospheric changes, and in its actions will predict the approach of storms or of clearing weather before the barometer will show it. In the autumn, as the light lessens, the dove, and especially this variety, even if bred in captivity, will become very uneasy, and if it can





WHITE-HEADED DOVE.

gain its liberty it will disappear. No amount of domestication or training can make the season of autumn migration other to it than a period of unrest and excitement.

"Gentle is that creature and pure," wrote St. John Chrysostom of the dove; ample proof that the good man had taken the bird on trust. Had he been a close observer of the dove of the aviary, and the turtle-dove in particular, he would not have been favorably impressed with the "dove-like disposition." It is not only quarrelsome, but cruel. When two or three are together there are bickerings, with blows for words, and all apparently for the love of the strife. So much for a fair appearance and a paper reputation.

During the nesting period milord is home-loving and paternal, and would be gentle, gracious, and loving if madame was not perverse, disobedient, and a gad-about. But the little lady has no fondness for home duties or the seclusion of the nest place. She likes better to sit in the sun preening her feathers, or to go

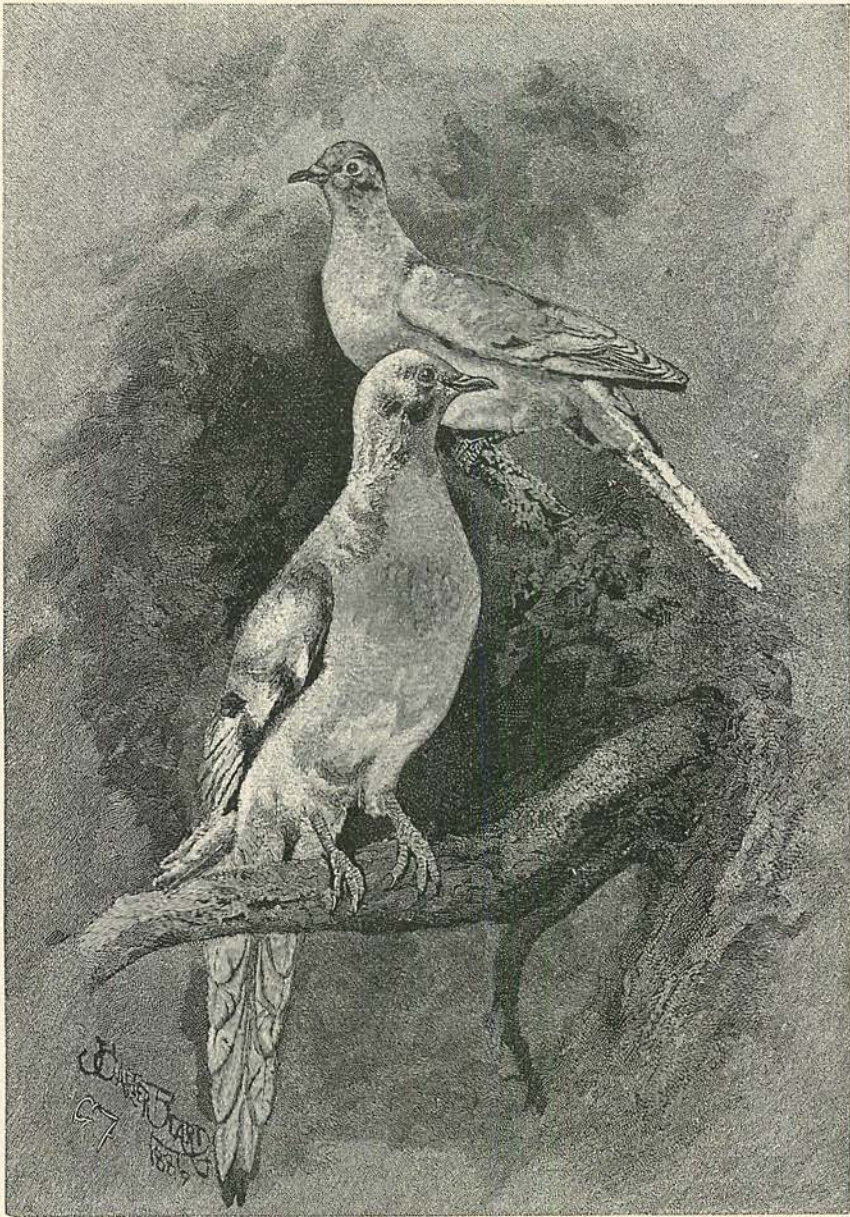


BAND-TAILED AND GROUND DOVES.

picking among the grasses or in the sand. The little fellow meantime sits patiently among the few twigs of his home furnishing and calls his mate. When she does not respond he seeks her out, and "his loving lessening not his ruling of her," he spares neither efforts nor blows to drive her to her home and to keep her to her duties.

The American birds most favored for the





PASSENGER PIGEON — CAROLINA DOVE.

aviary or the cage are the Carolina and the ground-doves. The former is about the size of the common turtle-dove, but is more hardy. Reared in confinement it is docile and affectionate, and may be taught many pleasing tricks and ways. Its plumage is modest, but at each side of the throat is a beauty spot, showing sometimes a deep red, and at others green and blue. This bird must be sheltered during the frost season, and be especially guarded during the period of autumnal migration.

The ground or moaning dove is scarcely larger than a sparrow, and at home is quite as fearless, although not as quarrelsome or impudent. It is hardly more than six inches in length. It may be bred successfully in the outdoor aviary in summer, or as a cage bird in-doors throughout the year. It requires but little care, and will make return in affectionate recognition. The little love whisper in which it responds when caressed is sweeter than any song.

Of the entire *Columbidæ*, the passenger of



our own United States has excited the greatest interest, and simply because of its gregarious habit, the entire species being assembled in the one flight. It is not local except as food attracts, but through the year ranges from the lakes to the gulf, and to the lakes again. March and April find the flight moving towards the breeding-grounds in the north, and in October it is journeying by slow stages to winter quarters in the south again.

This bird is as national in the colors of its plumage as in the limit of its range. Its head and back are blue, its throat and breast red, and its underfeathering white. The marking of the wing coverts, flights, and tail feathers is of black, the two middle feathers of the tail being wholly of that color. The neck, especially in the spring, is rich in iridescent hues. The eye is bright red, and the legs and feet purplish. The bird is the largest of the family, measuring fully sixteen inches. It breeds readily in confinement, and although quite hardy must be sheltered during the winter. Many attempts have been made to mate it with the blue-rock and other of the pigeons, in the hope of combining its endurance and supposed speed with their known intelligence and love of home, but without success, thus proving it to be not a pigeon, but a dove. It has, however, been bred with the Carolina dove, and the young, mated again with the Carolinas, have proven to be fertile. The naturalist Wilson is the authority for the wonderful speed with which this bird is generally credited; his assertions being based upon the condition of the food found in the crop hundreds of miles from the vicinity in which that food could have been obtained by it, and the rapidity of the pigeon's digestion. But this the racing pigeon has refuted in furnishing the proof that the food remains almost unchanged during the time the bird is on the wing; that is, the process of digestion and assimilation is stayed, or nearly so, during the time of flying.

In 1874 the flight of this variety centered in Benzie County, Michigan, for the breeding season, occupying a district about twenty miles long and five miles wide. At least such was the area of devastation caused by its immediate presence. There every branch and twig held a nest, and in every crotch sufficient to stay a few straws or sticks was a parent and egg or young. All verdure disappeared with the coming; and viewed from a distance, instead of a forest there was a dark moving mass, sometimes rising like smoke and again settling like a pall.

Previous to the nest building the air was continually alive with the flyers in the wild frolic of the mating season. As the building

began order was established to a degree, but it was not until the eggs were laid that a regular system prevailed. Then the males would take wing together at sunrise, rising from their roosts in a column, then spreading like a cloud through the air. Then an instant's delay and all were flying easily and steadily in the direction of the chosen feeding-grounds. Thousands of hens and eggs were ensconced in the branches, but not a bird rose above them, and all was still. A few hours later and the advance returned: then another flight and another, until finally the main body appeared, hovered over the forest for an instant, then each bird dropped to the perch beside the nest and mate. In the dense thicket of nests and birds each seemed to know its own. In a moment the whirl and rush of wings told that the hens had left the nest. There was the same column and cloud with which the males departed, and the same course was taken — no confusion, no delay, no apparent hesitation. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon these returned and the males again took wing, to be absent until near sundown.

But all that went out did not return. The roost in its season and the breeding-place is the choice of the birds and beyond human control; but the feeding-ground is where food is to be found, and in the selection of this man takes part. If birds are in the vicinity of a brook or spring, the waters of this are salted and the ground about is strewn with grain and salt. This the stragglers quickly find, and for a few days they are allowed to come and go at will, and as the food is eaten more is served. At each feeding-time the guests arrive in greater numbers, until finally the vast armies of male and female accept the spot as feeding-ground, and no amount of slaughter, driving, or fighting can keep them from it. Then the killing begins. Thousands and thousands fall victims, but the numbers in the flight are so great that the loss is not noticed. Later, when the market is glutted, man is wearied, beast has eaten to satiety, and the ground is hidden in the mass of debris and ungathered dead, the cloud that rises and settles above the roost seems just as dense and the area upon which it rested just as great, but the whirl of the wings has a softer sound. The mass is mainly of the young birds.

This mighty host came north early in the spring, while yet in New York and Michigan, where it settled, there was snow upon the ground. Nothing of seed, grain, or berry kind comes amiss with the passenger as food, and yet what was there in these States at this season in sufficient quantity to serve them? The question is one of exceeding interest.