



## **Starting out with Diamond Doves**

Diamond Doves *Geopelia cuneata* are ideal birds for a junior or beginner to start off birdkeeping with, as they breed easily and may be mixed with other seed-eating birds, without too much trouble. These Doves are native to the semi-arid areas of Australia where they frequent waterholes, however they have been bred in captivity for many generations. Diamond Doves are about 7 1/2" (19cm) long, including their long pointed tails, making them an ideal size for keeping in aviaries. Their quiet nature is also ideal for those keepers with close neighbours.

The normal "wild" Diamond Dove is mainly bluey-grey in colour with small white spots on their wings giving them their name. The underparts are a lighter grey with white on the abdomen and under-tail. Both sexes are similar, but you can tell them apart by the pinky orange eye ring, which is larger and brighter in colour on the cock bird when in breeding condition. At this time the male bird will puff himself up and "dance" around the female – gently circling her whilst cooing gently.

In the 1970's when I was breeding these birds for the first time, there were only the normal and silver colour variant available, but nowadays there are several new colour variants such as white, white-rumped and red to name a few of the commoner ones. I have used both large cages and aviaries to house them and they breed in both with no difficulties. I provide a Canary nest pan, which would be lightly filled with bits of twigs and grass. As is general in the Dove and Pigeon family, the nest is not well constructed and left to their own devices, success would be less assured.

They generally lay two white eggs of which the incubation period is about twelve days, both adult birds taking turns to sit on the eggs. Within ten days of hatching the young birds (squabs) will have feathered up and be ready to leave the nest. The young are a brownish grey with no bright eye-ring or white spots on the wing. They also have a slight barring on the head similar to those seen on a young Budgerigar.

As with most of the Pigeon family if the 2 young are raised, they are invariably a cock and a hen. However, in my experience if only one youngster is raised then this has usually been a hen. The next round of eggs could be started as soon as two or three days after the chicks fledge, with the younger birds helping with incubation of the eggs and in some cases they will feed the young. Caged birds should have the young removed when the next round are about ready to fledge, but in flights they can be left. If pairs are kept together they can breed continuously and five rounds in a season is not unknown, although not good for the birds. Either nests should be removed or the pairs split up to give the adults time to recuperate.

Diamond Doves can live for quite a long time and mature quite young. One young male I had started a family with an older female at only 5 months old. They produced 2 young as is normal. In 1979 I raised a male Diamond Dove, who produced 20 young before he died in October 1994.

The diet fed to my Diamond Doves consists of Canary seed, Panicum Millet and a chick crumb mixture – all mixed together in the one dish. This is generally scattered all over the place as they tend to stand in the dish when feeding. Originally the chick crumbs were added to the diet for some Chinese Painted Quail that shared the accommodation, but the Doves were soon taking this. Doves do not do very well on the show bench, but if you do want to show them, then the ideal show cage size would be that similar to the Australian finch cage.

Many birds are shown in a small finch or Budgerigar cage. These cages are too small as they do not give the bird any room to move about, which leaves the bird just sitting on a perch or on the floor looking sad, whereas the larger cage gives them more room and as a result the birds look more lively and stand a better chance of winning an award.

Written by Peter Gallimore