

CREATURE FEATURE**Mourning Dove** – *Zenaida macroura*

By Elizabeth Hanrahan

Two methods of feeding nestling mourning doves: Tubing & Bottle feeding

Description: Doves are mid sized (12”), trim bodied birds with a small head and long tail. The larger of this species are called pigeons, smaller ones doves. All are strong, fast flyers. The wings produce a fluttering whistle or "wing whorl" when they take off. The monomorphic adults have black spots on the upper wings, pinkish wash below. In flight they show white tips on the outer tail feathers. Juveniles have heavy spotting, or scaled effect on the wings. They are monogamous.

**Weight Range:** 95 to 140 grams**Range:** Common throughout the U.S., our most abundant dove is found in a variety of habitats.

Natural History: Breed from deserts to open woodlands, in agricultural areas with scattered trees and in suburbs. They nest on the ground and up to 40 feet high in trees. They have 2-3 broods per year and have been documented to have as many as 6 broods in one year. They may breed year-round in the south. Though often considered non-migratory, it has been documented that mourning doves do migrate, south, west, and north, in circular migrations; some going as far south as Panama.

Adult Diet: Granivore. 99% of the diet is seed including waste grain from cultivated fields. The diet also includes some native berries, fruits and insects, eaten while foliage gleaning. Micronutrients are provided from dirt picked up while ground gleaning. In wildlife rehabilitation offer a good quality commercial seed mix. Varieties of seed include: millet, thistle, cracked corn, sunflower seed, rolled oats, canary seed, alfalfa sprouts, berries, and grit or ground oyster shell. Some small insects may also be offered.

Nestlings: Altricial and downy. The short white down is sparse & stringy, with yellowish skin showing through. The young DO NOT gape. Young are tended by both parents and fledge at 13-15 days. They are fed regurgitant, “crop milk”, sloughed cells of the adult crop, by both parents for the first 3 days. Then they are fed “crop milk” mixed with seeds. By days 6-8 they are fed entirely seeds regurgitated by both parents. In wildlife rehabilitation offer seeds mixed with the hand feeding formula and put a pan filled with dirt or sand sprinkled with seed in the cage to encourage self feeding skills. Preferred formulas for feeding young doves include, but not limited to: Exact, MACMilk, diluted FoNS diet.

Fledglings: Mourning doves fledge at day 13-15 and eat on their own within 24 hours. They are supplemented, occasionally, by regurgitated seeds from both parents. Juvenile plumage is attained by day 13.

Juveniles: Though they are independent at this age in the wild, they will beg from parents and the wildlife rehabilitator. Seed can be sprinkled on the bottom of the aviary for self feeding. In wildlife rehabilitation they will frequently beg to be hand fed long after they can eat independently. Doves require dishes more than 1” deep as they drink through their nares. Continue to supplement and monitor weight daily. Young mourning doves are completely independent by day 25-27.

Rehabilitation Notes: Activity Aviary requirement=16’ x 8’ x 8’. Provide shelves as well as natural branches for perching.

Common Problems:



Trichomoniasis (canker). Always check the mouth of mourning doves and pigeons. “Trich” presents as a white or yellow-white cheesy substance in the mouth. It is easily treated, with carnidazole, in the early stages. Monitor weight and keel for starvation or emaciation, secondary to Trichomoniasis.

If parents have been killed or died with Trich, young birds may leave the nest searching for food. Emaciation/dehydration frequently results. Treat appropriately.

Doves and pigeons are prone to crop stasis; the crop does not empty. This may be from: overfeeding, incorrect formula, cold formula, or formula that has soured.

Because they forage in suburban lawns, they are prone to pesticide or fertilizer poisoning.

Mourning doves will lose their tail feathers, “Fright Molt, when grabbed by a predator. Capture doves with a towel to prevent fright molt.