

# PIGEONS & DOVES



## **PART 5a: BEHAVIOUR OF THE BARBARY (RINGNECK) DOVE**

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**In this article I will describe the most important behaviour of the Barbary (Ringneck) dove. It is important for the bird keeper to know the normal behaviour of his birds, not only to help him understand why a dove reacts in a certain way but also to discern problems and disease in time. When normal behaviour is known and understood, abnormal deviations in behaviour will be noticed sooner.**

Behaviour is a complex of many different displays, which makes the behaviour look very complicated. However, the various displays and postures are often related to the same aim. This makes it easier to understand the different actions and subdivide them. The most important form is the reproductive behaviour, which consists of many different displays. Also displays, which you would not expect to be directed to the reproduction, like cooing. Young birds show various actions that will disappear as soon as the birds are independent. This is the so called 'immature behaviour'. Another form is the aggressive behaviour. The latter two will be described in part 5b, together with some remaining important subjects on behaviour.

### **Reproductive Behaviour**

**Cooing.** Doves are no singing birds, but still many species mark out and protect their territory by means of their call. Coarsely the cooing of doves can be divided into three categories: standard coo; courtship coo and nest coo.

In some species the three types of coos are almost the same, with only a difference in tempo and volume. This is for instance the case with the Barbary (Ringneck) dove. In other species, like the rock dove, there is a clear difference between the three coos.



### 1. **Standard coo**

(Perch coo) This sound of the Barbary (Ringneck) dove can be described as a long cooc-r-r-r-r-oooo.

The average continuance of a coo is three seconds. The standard coo is mainly a sign for congeners/rivals to show their presence. For single birds this call is also meant to show that a suitable partner is welcome. In this way, the

call is comparative to the function singing of the singing birds. On single doves, both male and female, this is the most occurring call. On paired doves it is mainly the male that calls this coo. The standard call is repeated several times with short intervals and is never obviously directed at any particular bird in sight.

### 2. **Courtship coo**

(Bow coo) At the Barbary (Ringneck) dove this coo is made always together with a bow and meant to impress. So it is always directed at a particular bird. The courtship coo is about the same as the standard coo but repeated quicker, with shorter intervals.

**Below: The courtship-coo (Bow coo) is always directed to or at a particular bird.**





**Left:**  
**The Courtship coo,**  
**step 1.**

**Right:**  
**The Courtship coo, step 2**

Head and body are held high, and then the head is brought low suddenly with the bill pointed at or touching the ground. The first 'note' of the call usually starts immediately as the head comes down. At the 'rolling r' in the middle 'note' the body is raised again and the song is completed, often with a strident, low noise, as if the bird is regaining its breath or redistributing its air. Between the coos



the male may stamp his legs or step towards the female dove. This courtship coo is given by the males, but can be called by unmated females. However, never by mated females.

### **3. Nesting coo**

The notes of this call are nearly the same as in a bow-coo, but the call is softer, less forceful, and more intermittent. It is always accompanied by wing 'flipping'. Both doves are cooing, but only at a potential nest site; the male gives this call more frequently than the female. While cooing he keeps his head down to the ground and this tail upwards. When the pair has chosen a nest site, the female may give this coo more frequently. The cooing has a positive influence on the ovulation.

### **The 'Laugh' Call**

The 'laughing' sound of the Barbary (Ringneck) dove is a so called 'agitation call'. This call is characteristic to most Collared doves species, although it differs on the various species. It is completely different from the coos. The call is mostly given in agitation; this could be by seeing an 'opponent' or a would-be partner. Both sexes give this call. The Barbary (Ringneck) dove never 'laughs' during flying, this as opposed to the Collared dove that will laugh during the flight.



### **Mutual Preening**

Mated doves may preen each other especially about the face and neck or head, as a dove cannot reach its own head and neck feathers. Mutual preening tightens the bond between the two partners. The psychological effect is more important, so the act may be somewhat ritualized and the preening movement is often more cursory than a 'real' preening.



**Above: Mutual Preening**

### **False preening**

To start the ritual that will lead to pairing, the male starts 'false' preening. While sitting next to the female, he pecks his shoulder feathers, pretending he is preening. Meanwhile he will watch her, sometimes keeping his bill half open. If she is in for his advances, she will put her bill into his and then follows the billing.

### **Billing**

When the male reciprocates he takes the bill of the female in his and apparently feed her as she would a young. As this is a ritual act, it is not clear whether or not food is actually passed. The female may also shake her wings rapidly like young doves do. The billing can be initiated by both male and female; in the first case the male starts with the false preening, in the second case the female starts with preening the head and neck feathers of the male.

### **Pairing**

After the billing, which is mostly repeated several times, the female will sit in pairing position. She squats, lowers her head, and raises her shoulders which will support the feet of the male. When the female is in the sex-crouch, the male will not hesitate for long to mount her, bending his tail under her's for copulation. He maintains his balance by fluttering his wings. The pairing takes about 5 to 10 seconds for completion. Normally, the pairing is always followed by the "laugh" call by both sexes. Females very rarely try to mount mature males but may mount a partner frequently if paired with another female. Same holds for two males.

## **Right: Pairing**

### **Display flight**

Many species have a territory that they will defend to others, especially in the breeding season. By calling the standard coo, the dove will show its presence. Next to this, most species practice a typical intimidation or courtship flight. This flight that is only done by the males, is mostly

done to impress rivals and only seldom to pay court to the female. Well-known examples of this kind of flight we see on the rock dove, urban dove and wood pigeon. Also the Collared dove has an imposing display flight. Sitting at a high point, the male flies upward wing-clapping, then with the wings and tail spread widely he glides down, often in a half-circle, back to his sitting place. The display flight cannot be seen by caged birds as there is no room for that. But it is known that the Barbary (Ringneck) doves in the wild practice this flight, same as the African collared dove. Their display flight resembles the flight of the Collared dove.



### **Nest Building**

Either sex, but more often the male, may walk around the ground picking up suitable nesting material; this can be little sticks or feathers. He takes them up with his bill and shakes them to check if useful or else will be discarded. The sticks are carried, a single stick at a time, to the nest site and placed near the partner. The female builds the nest with the material brought in by the male. However, a reversal of the roles occurs to some extent. Frequently the partner will 'grab' the stick before it is placed and a short 'tug-of-war' usually results.



**Left: The preening of the tail feathers.**

### **Egg Laying**

During lay, the female will stand and slowly raise the fore body. The tail is held horizontally and backwards. She appears to be straining for perhaps half a minute before the egg drops. The eyes may be partially closed. As the egg drops, she throws the head up and back. Straight after laying she lowers down to her usual horizontal stance. The bird usually 'rests' five to ten minutes standing over the egg before leaving the nest, or before starting incubation, if the second egg was laid. Usually the female will lay the first egg in the afternoon and the second egg about 42 hours later.

### **Incubation**

Both parents brood alternate. The parent crouches over the eggs that are, if needed, rolled in the correct position with the aid of the bill and the sides of the legs. Then it fluffs the ventral feather which exposes bare skin, and then settles down on the eggs. The male of the Barbary (Ringneck) dove sets six to ten hours during the middle of the day, normally from halfway the morning to late in the afternoon. The female parent sets during the rest of the time. The length of the incubation period to hatching is 14 days. At the moment of hatching, often both parents set on the nest. If for whatever reason the male cannot set during the day, then the female will take over. However, the male will (almost) never set during the night.



**Links:**  
**Alerted dove,**  
**looking at some-**  
**thing 'strange'**  
**under its roost;**  
**the plumage is**  
**tightened close**  
**to the body**

**Right:**  
**Curious dove, the**  
**feathers smooth**  
**down and**  
**relaxed, looking**  
**at 'something**  
**interesting' at his**  
**roost.**





### **Retention of the droppings**

During incubation, the droppings of the settling dove are retained until it leaves the nest. As soon as the bird has departed from the nest, a relatively enormous load may be released.

### **Hiding**

When a brooding bird is startled or feels threatened, it will make itself as small as possible. The head is drawn in, the bird is as flat on the nest as possible, the feathers held tightly. This may be an alternative to the fight-or-flight stance and characteristic for any nesting bird that feels threatened.

### **Disposal of the egg shells**

After emergence of the young dove from the egg, one of the parents will remove the two shell parts. It will pick up the shells one at a time with the bill and flies some distance from the nest before dropping them. This is to avoid attracting predators. Because our caged doves cannot fly far from their nest, you may see them sitting on the roost for a while with the empty shell in their bill before dropping it.



**Left and below:  
Preening.**

### **Regurgitation Feeding**

Both parents feed their youngs by taking the bill of the one young or of both young together, in its bill. Next the parent lowers its head as it "pumps" food from its crop to the throat, where the youngs can take it.



This is attended by violent shivering of the wings and crop. Most of time the 'initiative' comes from the young: it waggles its head and searches the bill (see also part 5b, infantile behaviour, in our next issue.) This is sometimes initiated by a parent, especially at the newly hatched. The youngs are very gently peeked or preened to stimulate the searching of the bill. During this process the head of the parent is often lowered and the bill partly opened. At older youngs, the parents will first call the standard call on reaching the nest. If the youngs don't react immediately, the cooing will stimulate the begging behaviour.

**Right:**  
**Preening and (sun) bathing.**



**This was: Part 5a – BEHAVIOUR OF THE BARBARY (RINGNECK) DOVE**

**Part 5b, from the BEHAVIOUR OF THE BARBARY (RINGNECK) DOVE is in the February 2007 issue from [www.aviculture-europe.nl](http://www.aviculture-europe.nl)**