

# PIGEONS & DOVES

## Part 3 – BARBARY- or RINGNECK DOVE

By: Hein van Grouw



Our domestic Barbary dove (Ringneck dove) is not a separate Species but descended from the African Collared Dove , *Streptopelia roseogrisea*. For a very long time the origin of the 'pale brown Turtle Dove' kept in domestication since before the 17th century was not clear; with it's old name in mainland Europe of 'East Indian Turtle Dove' it was thought it originated from Asia, as there were no 'Wild' doves with this particular colouration to be found in Europe. Some have thought that it was a domesticated form of the Eurasian Collared Dove , *S. decaocto*, but this would be highly unlikely as this species did not start it's explosive migration into Western Europe until the early 1900's, 300 years later than the first 'appearance' of the little domestic Dove.

Latin: *Streptopelia roseogrisea domestica*  
English: Barbary dove, Ringneck dove (American)  
French: Tourterelle rieuse  
German: Lachtaube  
Dutch: Lachduif



As I said, the domesticated Barbary (Ringneck) Dove, is descended from the African Collared Dove, (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*) and is classified in the Family of Turtle Doves. All 16 varieties in this Family are characterised by a collar or neck marking.

**Barbary (Ringneck) dove, white (crème-ino).** Due to its tameness the Barbary (Ringneck) dove is a nice pet. Photo H.J. van Grouw.

The scientific Family name is *Streptopelia*, combined from the Greek words, *streptos* = collar and *peleia* = dove, so the 'turtle' doves are 'collared' doves. The second part of the name is Latin, *roseus* = rosy or rose coloured and *griseus* = grey so together, *Roseogrisea* and refers to the colouring on the head of this dove, as will be explained in the colour description of this dove.

Other names the domesticated form is known by are, 'Laughing Dove' from its call, hence the German and Dutch names of 'Lachtaube'(D) and Lachduif(NL); literally 'Laughing' Pigeon or Dove. In America and Canada it is known as the 'Ringneck Dove' and in France as 'Tourterelle Rieuse' (translates as small pigeon that laughs or is 'merry'; 'tourte' is a dialect French for Pigeon, (so the English Turtle = Tourte). Although the official Dutch name is 'Laughing Dove' the name Turtle Dove (tortelduif) is more often used. In English it is known as the 'Barbary Dove'; this because Northwest Africa was called Barbary in former days. The Whites are often called 'Magicians Doves'.



**Fawn (blond) Barbary (Ringneck) dove. Picture 44 from 'Histoire Naturelle Générale de Pigeons' by C.J. Temminck, 1808.**

Over the years the Barbary (Ringneck) dove has had many different names in the Netherlands. Most names were regional, and referred to certain 'qualities' of the bird or where the bird may have come from. The name 'Turtle Dove' was the most common and used extensively in Northern Holland. In some parts it was known as the 'East Indian Turtle Dove' as it was often brought by sailors from the Dutch East India Company, while the white variety was often known as the 'West Indian Turtle Dove' maybe in reference to the Dutch West Indies.

Some other old Dutch names are:

Roepduif = Calling Dove,

Koerduif = Coo-ing Dove

and Koekeroe (Coo-ke-roo); the last two names being very popular.

All kinds of mythical powers were attached to this little dove and its coo-ing voice, depending on which part of the Country, it could prevent misfortune and horrible diseases, specifically skin conditions like shingles and hives! it was even believed the feather 'powder' or dust had a beneficial effect! so the cage was often hung above the entrance door to the house, so that all who entered would benefit from passing under the cage! That is why in some parts of Holland it is also known as 'The House Dove'.



**White Barbary (Ringneck) dove. Picture 46 from; 'Histoire Naturelle Générale de Pigeons' by C.J. Temminck, 1808**



**African Collared Dove, male (cock). Photo: W. Moed.**

As it is a domesticated form of the African Collared Dove, its scientific name is the same with the addition of '*domestica*'. Officially the full name is *Streptopelia roseogrisea domestica*, although the added *risoria*, from the Latin, *risoris* = laugh, is often used, so simply '*Streptopelia risoria*'. This is incorrect, because in science domesticated animals are never given a 'personal' name, just the species or sub-species name with '*domestica*' added.

### **Appearance**

Regarding the resemblance of the Barbary (Ringneck) Dove to its wild ancestor, the African Collared Dove, *S. roseogrisea*, the body shape has hardly changed over the many years of domestication. Neither has the voice, although the Barbary Dove calls far more often than its wild counterpart, especially the hen. On an average the domestic form is an inch or two longer than the wild species; this length accounted for by the longer tail and is also less slender in build, the stance is slightly deeper, less upright as well. It is however still smaller than the Eurasian



Collared Dove, *S. decaocto*. Naturally the domestic form has become far more 'tame' and confiding than it's wild ancestors.

**Left: African Collared Dove, females (hens). Note the white vanes of both outer tail feathers.**

**Photo H.J. van Grouw**

The colour of the African Collared Dove, *S.roseogrisea*, is as follows: Wing shields, back and tail feathers are a greyish-brown, with more accent on the brown. The flights are a greyish black with a paler lacing along the top edge; at the wing-butts the brownish colour changes to a light grey. On the neck is a half moon shaped ring deep black in colour with a luminescent white edge.

The head, neck and breast are pale grey with a pale purple-rose sheen; this colour changing towards the belly to a pale creamy-grey. The under tail coverts are white. Most noticeable is a very pale almost white area at the throat under the beak.

The two middle tail feathers are brownish like the back colour, the others greyish, the underside dark grey with a white tip/edge to each

feather; the outer feathers darker underneath with a more distinct demarcation line between the dark grey and the white tail feather tips. Both outer tail feathers have a white albescent strip; the darker grey colour is on the inner feather webbing only. (see photo)

The African Collared Dove has a blackish dark grey beak, dark red legs, greyish white eye-ceres and carmine red eyes. The difference between the male and female is minimal, the female being a little 'brownier' in tone, especially the head, neck and breast, with less purple sheen. Young birds look more like the female but with no purple sheen and they lack the characteristic black neck ring.

The original colour of the African Collared Dove still occurs in the domesticated breed (= Barbary or Ringneck Dove) and apart from having a slightly more 'rosy' tint to the head and breast there is little difference between it and the 'wild' colour.

A whole lot of colour mutations arose in the Barbary (Ringneck) dove. Some of these colours already exist for a long period. In his book '*Ornithologica*' (1599) the Italian physician and biologist, Aldrovandi, was already describing 'fawn' (blond) coloured Barbary (Ringneck) doves, so this colour mutation that is considerably paler than the 'wild' colouration, already existed in the 16th century.

Even by 1758, some other biologists such as Linnaeus, only knew of this one colour. This has been the cause of the mix-up about the origin of the Barbary (Ringneck) dove; one simply knew no other 'ringneck dove' species with such a brownish colour and 'colour mutations' were unknown in those days. The domestic

Ringneck dove was marked a species apart for so long, because one thought that the fawn was the original colour. It was given a proper scientific name by Linnaeus: *Columba risoria*. Also the white (= crème-ino) mutation existed already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, however, Aldrovandi, on describing the Collared Dove in the 16<sup>th</sup> century describes the females as 'White' and the males as 'Reddish-brown'. According to Gesner in 1669 ('Vollkommenes Vögelbüch') "the White Collared Dove is a different species which mostly occurs in Poland and other cold lands". Another naturalist, Temminck also knew of them, according to picture 46 in his book '*Histoire Naturelle générale des Pigeons*' from 1808. Temminck named the bird *Columba alba*. This shows that he as well did not know that this was a colour mutation and that he thought it was a separate species. In his book there is also a picture of the 'common' Barbary (Ringneck) dove, *Columba risoria* on picture 44. This is a fawn.

About 1860 white (crème-ino) Barbary (Ringneck) doves were also kept in the Pescadores Islands (Taiwan) and South China. In Taiwan these doves were a reminder of the Dutch occupation of these Islands (1624 -1662). The Dutch traders brought in these white Ringneck doves from Java. In China these white doves were known as 'White Pescadores Doves' and it was believed they were endemic to the Island of Taiwan.

At that time this white dove was very popular in China, widely bred and very expensive!

Today we know that this scientific labelling was simply a colour mutation of the African Collared Dove *S.roseogrisea*. The fact that these two mutations arose and still hold, shows that one did a fair job on breeding those doves. For a long time the colours were restricted to these two mutations and it seemed that the Barbary (Ringneck) dove had no further colour mutation possibilities, nothing could be further from the truth! In the last 75 years the Barbary (Ringneck) Dove has showed us what it had been 'hiding'!

**Below: Wild colour (dark) silky Barbary (Ringneck) dove, female (hen).  
Photo H.J. van Grouw**

### Occurence



The native habitat of the African Collared/Turtle Dove is to the north and south of the Sahara, in a broad strip from Senegal and Mauritania and eastwards to the coast of the Red Sea in Sudan and Ethiopia, also the far south of Egypt and into south-west Arabia.

The natural habitat is dry, open scrubland with thorn bushes and acacias as long as there is water nearby. They also occur on agricultural land and around towns and cities, especially in parks.

The habitat of the Barbary(Ringneck) Dove is in captivity, all over the world. That habitat is very diverse, it can be a small cage, barely large enough to turn around, to large aviaries with plenty of room to fly and anything in-between. As a Breed it is not fussy about its living space but sufficient light, air and room to fly should always be offered. Unfortunately this is not always the case.

There are also feral populations of Barbary (Ringneck) Doves, descendents of escapees or birds deliberately released. These breed and increase as long as the circumstances are ideal; feral populations (fawn colouration) occur on the Islands of Tenerife and Mallorca and also California, also some parts of Australia and New Zealand.

In my next article I will describe the Eurasian Collared Dove, *Streptopelia decaocto*, to avoid further confusion with the Barbary(Ringneck) Dove. Then I will describe the keeping and breeding of the Barbary(Ringneck) Dove.

Something fun to see: (wmv files, each 1 MB download)

[Pied male dove courting](#)

[http://home.comcast.net/~gws\\_1963/Pied\\_Dove\\_Coo\\_2.wmv](http://home.comcast.net/~gws_1963/Pied_Dove_Coo_2.wmv)

[Pink male dove courting](#)

[http://home.comcast.net/~gws\\_1963/Pink\\_Dove\\_coo.wmv](http://home.comcast.net/~gws_1963/Pink_Dove_coo.wmv)

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Photo background: Dirk de Jong

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