

DOVES

Part 6a – CARING FOR BARBARY (RINGNECK) DOVES

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The Barbary (Ringneck) Dove is an easy bird to keep so there are no strict guidelines for caring and breeding them. That's why I will mention only some general points on this subject.

HOUSING

The most important rule for housing is placing your dove's cage in a bright area that is free from drafts. An enclosed cage with an open front is better than an open cage; the closed sides provide a safe feeling for the dove and of course, having only bars in the front, there will be less draft. The cage for one dove must at least be large enough so it can stretch its wings without hitting the sides. Its tail must not touch the side of the cage when it is perching. Ideally the cage for one dove measures a minimum of 70cm (28 ") long by 50cm (20") high and 40cm (15") wide. For a pair of doves this should be 90cm (36 ") long by 50cm (20") high and 40cm (15") wide. Of course, the larger the cage the better. Barbary (Ringneck) doves can be kept inside as well as outside, but when housed outside you must keep the weather in mind; good as well as bad weather! Doves love sunbathing, so a sunny location is very much appreciated, however, during the hottest hours of the day, the dove should be able to sit in the shade. The birds must be well protected from rain and wind. Moreover the doves should have a proper loft for the night.

Right: Such cages are pretty but hardly suitable, because there is not enough daylight and fresh air.





Left:
Mature Barbary (Ringneck) doves are best housed as separate pairs.

When properly sheltered, Barbary (Ringneck) doves can be kept outdoors during winter but they must be protected from frosts. An aviary with a solid roof is best as this prevents wild bird droppings from falling in. Such droppings may contaminate the flight and cause disease among the birds. Some people prefer part of the roof to be open in order to give the doves a chance to take a 'rain shower'; something they really like. However, spraying the doves with a mist spray or providing a low water bowl to bathe in is just as good, so there is no need to keep any of the roof open.

Breeding several pairs together in one aviary – as is often done with fancy and homing pigeons – is not quite possible. Like most species, doves are territorial birds, meaning that they do not tolerate other birds within a certain area. With Barbary (Ringneck) doves, the cage or aviary is their territory and any other doves are chased away using force. They are also difficult to keep with other species. During domestication the tame Barbary dove became more tolerant, but during the breeding season they can be quite aggressive towards other doves. A pair of Barbary (Ringneck) doves will not cause any trouble in a mixed aviary, e.g. with finches.

When young, Barbary (Ringneck) doves can be kept together without problems, however once the first males mature, fighting breaks out. From then on, the birds need to be housed in pairs or singly. Outside of the breeding season it is possible to house the females together, but mature males fight all year round and can cause injury to each other. Unlike fancy and homing pigeons, the Barbary (Ringneck) dove is not an appropriate bird to free fly. They are easily lost, may starve or be taken prey and they tend to go feral quickly, never returning home.

Right: Spacious cages are very suitable to house pairs of Barbary (Ringneck) doves, although they should not be kept in a dark shed.





Left: (Day) light and fresh air is very important for doves kept inside.

FEEDING

Feed stores carry excellent seed-mixes for Barbary (Ringneck) doves that contain all the nutrition needed. It is important that the doves not only select their favourite seeds, but eat a balanced diet. To avoid picky eating don't feed them more until everything is eaten.

Premixed turtle dove mix is excellent feed for single doves, however once the decision is made to breed, it is important to give a supplement to provide extra protein in order to meet the increased nutritional demands during this time. A suitable supplement is egg food designed for canaries but other supplements are also available in pellet form. Although this pelleted food is designed for homing pigeons it is suitable for doves as well. The positive effects of pelleting are well documented: higher feed density and no feed ingredient separation; however you must keep in mind that protein-rich mixtures should only be used as a supplement to the regular seed mix.

It is best to stick to a regular feeding schedule, so the birds will know when to expect you and their food. Give only enough food they can eat in one day, so the feeder will be (almost) empty when you refill it the next day. If the birds leave a lot of feed, give them less next time. When the feeder is completely empty, give them extra next time. In this way you will soon know the right amount of feed to give your doves. Sometimes the amount of feed eaten may vary according to the temperature, during moulting or breeding season. The exact time of feeding is not really important, providing the doves have the opportunity to eat their fill before dark.

Right: It is not recommended to house different kinds of animals at the same location.



Apart from proper food, grit should always be at disposal. Grit is necessary because as birds have no teeth to grind their food, it provides the necessary mechanical action needed to digest grains. Birds eat little stones to grind up the food in their gizzards. Apart from the stones, grit also contains crushed shells, which provides calcium and other minerals which are indispensable for laying hens and growing youngsters. The so-called 'fine bird grit' is suitable for Barbary (Ringneck) doves. The 'normal' pigeon grit designed for homing pigeons is too coarse.

Another source of calcium and minerals for (homing) pigeons is available in a powdered form. This is willingly taken by pigeons with youngsters, but other pigeons will also take as much as they need. The mineral supplement and grit can be supplied in the same cup, which may be hung on the wire-netting next to the perches. In this way the doves can easily reach it and the contents cannot be soiled by droppings. The cup with minerals and grit only needs refilling when necessary.

As a special treat, doves enjoy canary mix and wild bird seed. As these tiny seeds are more difficult for the doves to eat, they stay active longer during the day while searching for these titbits. They also enjoy bread but tend to not bother with green feed. These extra foods must only be given as complementary food as they don't contain the necessary nutrition by themselves.



Left: Outside cages with sufficient daylight and protection against rain and wind, are the best way to house Barbary doves.

And last but not least, fresh water should always be provided. Because trays are polluted very easily drinking bottles are preferred. Doves drink directly after eating so change the water daily before filling the food containers.

SICKNESS

Barbary (Ringneck) doves seldom get sick and with good management there are few problems.

Because doves don't free fly like homing and fancy pigeons, the risk of catching diseases is much lower; however problems may occur when introducing new doves. To recognise when a dove is sick it is important to know how healthy doves

look and act. (See articles in previous issues.)

When the birds are observed every day, most diseases are noticed early. Some common signs of illness are: sleeping all the time, eating well but staying emaciated, not eating at all, difficulty in breathing, sneezing, watery or green droppings, appearing fluffed up or droopy or having 'wet' eyes.

It is hard to diagnose any disease just by a few symptoms, so when in doubt, it is best to consult a vet who specialises in birds. Many diseases or worm infections are detected by a throat swab and/or droppings analysis can be treated quickly with appropriate medication. Only an avian veterinarian can prescribe proper medication.

Apart from occasional diseases, doves can suffer from parasites as well. There are endoparasites (internal) and ectoparasites (external), with the most common endoparasite being roundworms. By means of a droppings analysis a vet is able to diagnose if the dove is infested with worms.

The most common ectoparasite is the 'long louse' or feather louse. It is not very harmful although in large numbers they can become very irritating for the dove. Feather lice are easily seen on the inside of the wing feathers, when the dove spreads its wings. Other ectoparasites are small lice and vent-lice (not particularly harmful but very irritating to the bird). Scaly leg mite and red mite are both very harmful. To eradicate mites and lice, various insecticides are available. Always remember insecticides are very toxic and must be handled with extreme care, for the safety of the birds as well as the owners. Always carefully follow the instructions on the container.

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