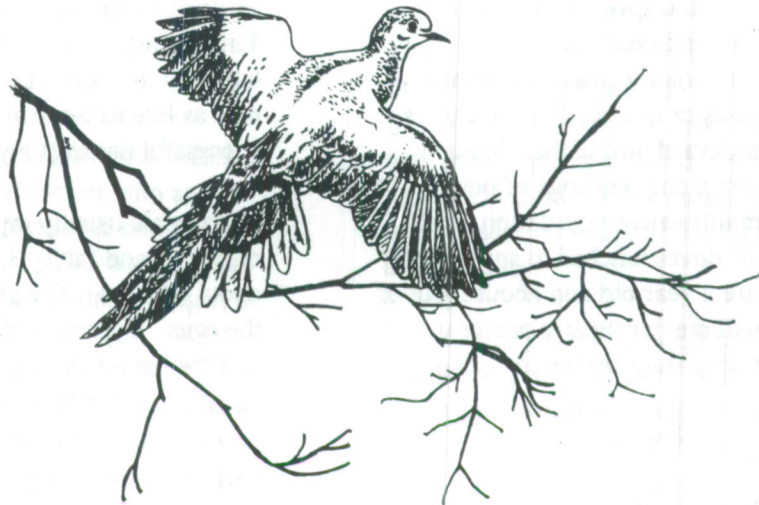


Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*)



Description

The mourning dove's name comes from the soft, mournful-sounding mating call or "coo" of the male. They are streamlined birds about 12 inches long with pointed wings that span about 18 inches from wing-tip to wing-tip. The pointed tail consists of central feathers 5-7 inches long and shorter, white-tipped feathers on the sides that are visible in flight. Body feathers are grayish-brown on the back and pinkish-buff on the undersides. Adult doves have black spots on the wings and behind each ear. Adults weigh 3½-5 ounces.

Distribution & Abundance

Doves are found throughout the continental United States. The birds are migratory and annually range from southern Canada and south to central Mexico, Cuba, and Haiti. Doves are found in all parts of Illinois but occur in greater numbers along the state's major rivers.

Habitat

Mourning doves inhabit both rural land and

towns. They favor field borders, hedgerows, clover fields, grasslands, orchards, croplands, fallow fields, and landscape plantings in towns. Doves reside where there are trees for cover, seeds for food, and open water for drinking. They are as common in some urban areas as the robin and often come to backyard bird feeders.

Habits

Doves begin migrating southward in small flocks in late August and early September. Most doves migrate slowly, seldom flying more than 20 miles a day. Migration picks up when nighttime temperatures fall into the low 40's. Adult doves migrate later than juveniles. Some remain in Illinois all winter, migrating only far enough south to obtain enough food and night roosting sites.

Many mourning doves hatched in Illinois and states further north migrate to Texas and the Gulf Coast. Some spread east to Georgia or Florida. In late winter, they begin a gradual return to their breeding territories. Sometimes heavy snowfall with ice and cold temperatures may delay migration and cause some dove

mortality during the early spring.

High winds sometimes blow dove nests out of trees. If storms are widespread and occur during nesting, they can reduce production and population levels. Cold spring rains can kill early-nesting doves and nestlings.

Trichomoniasis or canker disease sometimes contributes to losses of doves. This disease is aggravated by backyard bird baths. Many predators eat the eggs and nestlings of doves, but predation seldom influences population levels. About 6 out of 10 doves hatched in spring will die before they are a year old and about 5 out of 10 adult doves will die during any one year, regardless of whether they are hunted or not.

Foods

Doves eat mostly seeds. Corn, wheat, millet, lespeche, sunflower seeds, grain sorghum (milo), and buckwheat are favorites. They also eat grass seeds including those of the foxtails, crabgrass, blue grass, and panic grasses. The seeds of pokeberry, wood sorrel, ragweed, smartweed, evening primrose, wild hemp and other plants round out their diet. Doves drink from shallow ponds and streams, often in the late afternoon.

Reproduction

Males establish territories as soon as they arrive in the breeding area. A male selects an overhead power line, high tree branch or other conspicuous perch and coos to attract a female. This behavior also serves notice to other males that the territory belongs to him. A dove will defend his territory against intruding males by cooing and by flying over the intruder and striking at it with his wings. Before and during nesting, a male will perform a mating flight. This involves flying high into the air, turning, and with rigid wings, gliding back to his perch.

Few doves nest on the ground in Illinois. Most build nests in trees, usually 5 to 25 feet off the ground. The nest is a flimsy platform of twigs, gathered by the male, and built by the female by

pressing the twigs into shape with the weight of her body.

Nesting begins as early as the first week of March in southern Illinois and the second week of April in northern Illinois. Peak nesting is in June and early July. Nesting is generally over by late July, but less than 1 per cent of the doves nest as late as September. Doves average 2-3 successful nestings a year in Illinois.

The female usually lays 2 eggs, but sometimes only one, and rarely 3. The incubation period is about 14 days. The pair takes turns incubating the eggs. Typically, the male sets during the day and the female during the night. The young, or squabs, are fed "pigeon milk", a fluid regurgitated from the crops of the adults into the mouths of the young. When the squabs get older they eat seeds. The young stay in the nest 10-15 days. Soon after the squabs leave the nest, the adults nest again. About one month is required for the complete brood cycle. In Illinois, a pair of doves will produce an average of 3-4 young per year.

Conservation

Habitat management practices for doves include establishing farmstead shelterbelts and windbreaks for potential dove nesting sites. Managers should establish or maintain a border of coniferous trees around woodlots, and woody cover in hedgerows, odd areas and around ponds. Red cedar, pines, spruces, and hawthorns are preferred nesting trees. Development of ponds and pits or dugouts for watering areas are valuable for doves. Fields of sunflowers, millet, wheat, or corn harvested for silage are attractive to doves and are excellent hunting sites as are. Doves prefer to feed in fields with a lot of bare ground. Habitat management for doves also benefits gray catbird, brown thrasher, common yellowthroat, field sparrow, northern cardinal, rufous-sided towhee, American goldfinch, northern bobwhite, indigo bunting, and Carolina wren.

The mourning dove, primarily because of its

abundance, wide distribution, and adaptability, is a familiar bird in Illinois. The population has increased during recent years because of habitat change. The same factors that have caused a decline in some other species of upland wildlife, have had little effect on doves, which can nest successfully in developed areas and around houses.

DNR's Division of Wildlife Resources offers technical assistance to landowners who are interested in establishing mourning dove habitat on their properties. Call 217/782-6384 for the name of a District Wildlife Habitat Biologist in your area.

Local Pheasants Forever and Quail Unlimited chapters will assist landowners with dove habitat management. To learn more about Pheasants Forever, request habitat management assistance,

or join a chapter, call 217/446-2958, or visit <http://www.pheasantsforever.org/>. To find out about Quail Unlimited, request assistance, or join a chapter, call 812/536-2272, or visit <http://www.qu.org/>.

The USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) offer assistance to landowners with planning and establishing filter strips, riparian buffers, and farmstead and field windbreaks. There is a SWCD office in nearly every county.

Private non-profit organizations can apply for grants from the Illinois Wildlife Habitat Fund for habitat projects that benefit dove populations. Contact the Division of Wildlife Resources at 217/782-6384 for an application.

Selected References

Ecology and Management of the Mourning Dove by T. S. Baskett, M. W. Sayre, R. E. Tomlinson, and R. E. Mirarchi (eds.). *Wildlife Management Institute Book*. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, PA. 1963. ISBN 0-8117-1940-5

North American Game Birds by P. A. Johnsgard. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London. 1975. ISBN 0-8032-5811-9

The Birds of Illinois by H. D. Bohlen. Illustrated by W. Zimmerman. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis. 1989. ISBN 0-253-31560-3

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov> (agricultural conservation programs)

<http://dnr.state.il.us/prairie/table.htm> (prairie establishment and landscaping)

<http://www.state.ia.us/government/dnr/organiza/fwb/wildlife/pages/updove.htm> (dove management)

Wildlife Conservation in Illinois - Ten Ways to Make a Difference

- ◇ Hunters and trappers contribute millions of dollars toward habitat conservation. Areas purchased or managed with these funds provide homes for hundreds of species. Even if you don't hunt or trap, you can join in by purchasing a **Habitat Stamp** (\$5.50) or **State Migratory Waterfowl Stamp** (\$10.50) at the sporting goods section of most discount stores. Sporting a "Sporting Series" license plate on your car or truck is another way to support habitat conservation. For information, contact the Secretary of State at 1-800-252-8980 or visit <http://www.sos.state.il.us> and select the "Online Facility".
- ◇ Turn your backyard into a more friendly place for wildlife. For tips on how to put out the welcome mat, order "**Backyard Conservation**" by dialing 1-888-LANDCARE or visiting the website at <http://www.nhq.usda.gov/CCS/Backyard.htm>.
- ◇ Hundreds of laws help protect wildlife and their habitat. You can assist your local Conservation Police Officer in keeping an eye out for poaching, pollution and other threats to the environment by participating in DNR's **Resource Watch Program** (217-782-6431).
- ◇ Participate in DNR's **Acres for Wildlife Program**. A wildlife biologist will visit your property, prepare a management plan tailored to your goals and help you get started by providing access to planting equipment and no-cost or low-cost grass, trees and shrubs. Call 217-782-6384 to get the name and phone number of your local biologist.
- ◇ Help monitor Illinois' streams and forests by becoming a trained Citizen Scientist. For information about the **EcoWatch Network**, call 312-814-4747 or visit <http://dnr.state.il.us/inringif.htm>.
- ◇ Illinois law requires young people to take a special training course and pass a test before they can purchase a license for hunting or trapping. You can help teach them about laws, safety, ethics and wildlife conservation by becoming a certified instructor in DNR's **Safety Education Programs** (1-800-832-2599).
- ◇ Teach others about the environment. Be a **volunteer facilitator** for Project WILD, Project WILD Aquatic, Project Learning Tree or Project WET (217-524-4126).
- ◇ Contribute to the **Wildlife Preservation Fund** on your state income tax form. Interested in making a donation for a specific project? Contact the **Illinois Conservation Foundation** (1-312-814-7237).
- ◇ Join a **conservation organization** like Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Quail Unlimited, or the National Wild Turkey Federation. Membership fees support wildlife conservation and some local chapters offer a chance to get involved with "on the ground" projects in your area.
- ◇ Take someone with you the next time you go **hunting or trapping**. These activities are highly regulated and can help keep wildlife numbers at acceptable levels, reduce damage to human property, provide funds for conservation, and obtain many different materials and products for human use.

Gettin' Wild in Illinois is a series produced by the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife Resources.

"Mourning Dove" was written by Larry David and John Cole.

The dove line drawing by Olin Harris.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources receives Federal financial assistance and therefore must comply with anti-discrimination laws. In compliance with the Illinois Human Rights Act, the Illinois Constitution, Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the U.S. Constitution, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, religion or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility, please contact the Equal Opportunity Officer, Department of Natural Resources, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62701-1787, 217/785-0067 or the Office of Human Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240. TDD customers may call 217/782-9175, or the Ameritech Relay Number at 800/526-0844.