

## III. DIFFERENCES IN JUVENILE RINGNECK DOVES

by

Wilmer J. Miller

How many of you dove breeders can distinguish the juvenile from the adult at a glance? At about three weeks of age the squab loses its still adherent down which tip the head and shoulder feathers and increases its tail length to near adult length at 4-5 weeks of age. Then the casual observer, new fancier, novice, or just plain inexperienced person cannot tell the immature or juvenile apart from the adult. We experienced (ahem!) dove breeders have learned to distinguish them by several criteria.

1. The juvenile feet are pale red rather than the deep red to purple of the adult.
2. The bill is still fleshy and only beginning to shrink toward the adult hardness.
3. The base of the bill is bare, or at 5-6 weeks the feathers are still filling in the smooth contour characteristic of the adult.
4. The eye pigment is incomplete.
5. The general feather contour or outline is less neat and finished--less "packed".
6. Most of the obvious feathers of the bird, especially the wing shield, have a dilute, rather attractive lacing or edging on each surface feather not to be found in the adult. (I've often wondered if the growth hormone or low level sex hormone controlled the normal juvenile lacing effect.)

It takes additional experience to distinguish some of the juvenile color mutant effects.

White cannot be distinguished from albino until about three weeks of age or more. Then, in whites, the pink eye takes on a grayish appearance and later the undertail of whites shows that brownish shadowing of pigment to about halfway out the feather length. Clear whites (rosy white) won't show even that except as the faintest detectable effect in the adult.

Rosy varies a bit, and it often cannot be distinguished surely from blond until at about 4-6 weeks. The additional contour feathers of the head start to come in in that beautiful lavender or mauve color, temporarily giving the head a mottled appearance.

Ivory in the squabs and juveniles mimics the blond rather well until the contour feathers fill in well. By three months of age the light, almost whitish, forehead and eye area feathers of the ivory is readily evident. The tail feathers' undersurface may show a mottling of lighter pigment reminiscent of opal in pigeons.

American Dove Association Newsletter July-Aug 1977

Pigeon Science and Genetics Newsletter 8:8 1978