DOVE CULTURE

II. DIFFERENCES IN BABY RINGNECK DOVES

by

Wilmer J. Miller

Are you afraid to handle newly-hatched doves? Well, the parents might startle you with a minor peck or wing blow, but they won't hurt you. And with gentle care you aren't likely to hurt the babies. Unlike some nervous wild species, these doves stand lots of attention very well. In experimental studies, the earlier we get the data the better, because death or other loss may occur and the record lost.

Pick the babies out of the nest and examine them under a good light. Let's start with ordinary blond (fawn) birds. Note the medium-length and slightly yellowish down, the dark eyeballs, and the dark beak-ring behind the whitish tip.

Next look at white babies--the down is short and sparse, the eyeballs pinkish, and the beak all pink (no dark ring).

Darks (wild color) are just the opposite--longer profuse down, very dark eyeballs and beak ring, and even the skin is dark, but the difference from blond becomes less after some growth.

Albinos are even more extreme than ordinary whites--extremely little down (almost bare), completely pink eyes and beak. The skin remains pink.

Pied babies practically always lack the bill ring, but the dark eyeballs will distinguish them from whites.

Rosy babies are not easy to distinguish from blonds, so that only long experience can be a guide. But rosy blonds (peach) have a faint bill ring, and look a bit more ruddy than plain blond.

Ivory babies also are difficult to distinguish from blonds. However, the blond-ivory baby has a blanched or bleached appearance of the down, their eyes are a dark pink, and the bill ring is faint.

Silky babies may have slightly fuzzy down. But I have been fooled so often that it is better to delay a decision until the pin-feathers spread out.

Another down characteristic occurred in an X-ray experiment long ago at the University of Wisconsin in which I got a "beaded" down hatchling. It looked like a sprinkling of tiny beads on the skin surface. It was just getting out of the pin feather stage when it died.

I recently noticed that some babies have no down on the back of their head--"bald squab". Head down is sparse anyway, so it usually is best distinguished later. At 2-6 weeks of age the feathers on the back of the head are delayed about two weeks. I notice it occurring especially in my ivory lines, but it is not limited to ivory types. I might have noticed it sooner, but I kept confusing it with "feather picking" by the parents. It might take me many years to determine how "bald" is inherited, even if I don't lose the character. So, if you have a chance to examine your squabs for this character, keep a record. More important, keep a record of the progeny of squabs that have been definitely diagnosed as having "bald heads". This little project, if put together by several breeders, might take only two or three years.

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DOVE CULTURE

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 it's 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 <u>often</u> 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.

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