

EARLY DOMESTIC DOVES IN THE NEW WORLD
(before Columbus?!)

I was fascinated by a very brief ancient account* of doves raised by Indians of the Yucatan (Mexico). Among the domestic fowl were these doves, said to be as tame as "doves" of Spain and to multiply rapidly. The Maya name was mucuy. The translating editor believes they may be Ground Doves, (Columbigallina rufipennis Bonaparte). But I have a hard time placing this older name with modern usage as in Goodwin's book on Doves and Pigeons of the World. The synonymy (list of various names used for a species) does not seem clear. I can guess it is Columbina talpacoti subspecies rufipennis (ruddy ground dove) from Goodwin's ranges and description. But why would such a small dove be mentioned as domestic fowl. I would think the white-fronted dove, Leptotila verreauxi, is more likely.

The author was a Bishop (Landa) writing in Spanish about 1616, telling of things Yucatan". Landa also mentions "two kinds of very attractive little turtle doves and some of these are very small indeed and easy to tame". After discussing (probably) wrens, mot-mots, Jays, magpies, swallows, and woodpeckers, Landa returns to pigeons. "There are many birds of the fields all good to eat for there are 3 kinds of very handsome little pigeons". The translator believes one of these is the red-billed pigeon, Columba flavirostris, called in Mayan ix cucut cip or cucut ci.

Since this account was written slightly over 100 years after Columbus discovered the New World, there is time for Columba livia, the domestic pigeon to have been introduced. But, evidently, there is no record of this in Spanish America. Levi's earliest cited introduction is by 1606 in Nova Scotia some 5,000 (?) miles away. Moreover, the common pigeon would not have elicited this kind of recording of "things Yucatan" by Landa.

I guess that the New World's early domestic dove is a mystery!

*Tozzer, A. M. 1941. (Bishop) Landa's Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan: a translation edited with notes. Papers of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology Volume 18. (Original about 1616).

Nov/Dec 1986

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