

# SEXING DOVES VIA BEHAVIOR

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Most of us depend on behavior to distinguish sexes in doves and pigeons. Experienced fanciers need only spend a few minutes observing behavior among a group of birds to decide which is what sex. But we get fooled. That bird which we thought was a young female was a little too young, and turned out to be a male a little later. Or, "It was so big and its head so square, I thought sure it was a male."

*But most of us are not experienced*

If the birds are adjusted to their cage and in an appropriate part of the reproductive cycle, usually one observation period will allow an accurate differentiation of sex. **But not of us are experienced.** So what is the behavior that can allow us to infer the sex? Four or five behavior characteristics can be used for the Ringneck dove, *Streptopelia risoria*. *??*

1 - The bow-coo. Only males give bow coos under ordinary conditions, however, females long isolated from males may do so irregularly. This is the fastest coo in courting behavior, and is always directed at a particular bird with an accompanying head bow. The feet often alternate in "stamping". Perch coos and nest coos are always slower and softer and the nest coo is always accompanied by wing "flipping". Perch coos and nest coos may be given by both sexes.

2 - Billing. The female may put her bill inside the mouth of the male after squab-like begging movements and be fed token amounts.

3 - Sex crouch. To culminate courtship in mated pairs, the female will squat down, tuck her head in close and raise her shoulders preparatory to supporting the male's feet.

4 - Sex mount (treading). The male repeatedly cranes his neck above the female, which is in the sex crouch. He may sporadically "preen" between the wing tips and the rump, fluff rump and posterior feathers, then mount the female, both facing the same direction. The tail of the male bends and swings and his wings flutter to maintain balance. Within seconds the cloaca meet in quick copulation. The "laugh" or challenge note normally is given immediately after copulation by both sexes. A long isolated pair of females may mount each other.

5 - Driving. This is much less obvious in Ringnecks than in domestic pigeons and generally is not suitable for inferring sex.

6 - Display flight. The males flies upward wings clapping, then glides down. Since our birds are seldom free-flying, we rarely notice this characteristic.

Certainly, of these sex-behavior characteristics which can allow one to infer the true sex, the most frequent one is the bow coo. It's easy --- after you get enough practice!

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Jan/Feb 1996