

## SEXING DOVES I. VENT SEXING

by

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Most species of doves and pigeons are notoriously hard to sex by external appearance, and even experts can be fooled by behavior. In the ringneck dove and in pigeons we can utilize sex-linked colors in our mating plans for sexing the young, but otherwise sexing is still a problem (until we get fertile eggs).

About 20 years ago when I was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, I collaborated with another bird man there, Fred Wagner, in working out a method of telling males and females apart by looking in the vent. Vent sexing is a big commercial thing in the poultry business, for baby chicks and ducklings, but we couldn't do anything with baby pigeons and doves. Our success was entirely with mature birds.

Our method was published in 1955 (vol. 72: pages 279-285 of the ornithological magazine named the Auk). The idea is simply to open the cloaca and look for the opening of the oviduct (female) on the bird's left side, or for the openings of the two sperm ducts, right and left (male). The main problem is to find a good tool to spread the vent without damage. We first used a tissue spreader ground down to fit. Then we found a nasal speculum used by medical people. It needed no modification. The smallest size, for infants, was best. It cost \$7.50 in 1963. Johnnie Blaine tested this method recently (Amer. Pigeon Jour. May '74) and found the cost doubled.

In use, the speculum should be clean. A female with an egg in the oviduct may be injured by the instrument's use, so palpate for an egg first. If an egg is there, you know it is a female anyway. Insert the speculum closed, while the bird is held head down, feet on your belt. The last three fingers hold the bird's wings and body; the thumb and forefinger hold back the tail and vent feathers. It may be helpful to pluck some of the vent feathers. Now open the speculum and pull back (tilt) slightly so that the cloaca is wide open. If the light is good and the bird is mature, the oviduct will show as a whitish circle on the bird's left (female), or one of the sperm ducts will stick out as a reddish conical point (male). This method has been shown to work for 30 different dove and pigeon species.

It's easy -- after you get enough practice!

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## SEXING DOVES II. SEXING BY BEHAVIOR

by

Wilmer J. Miller

Most of us do 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 it's head so square, I thought sure it was a male."

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 all of us are experienced. So just what is the behavior that can allow us to infer the sex? I described the essential activities to look for in 1957 in the Journal Animal Behaviour, Vol. 6 pages 1-6, but I won't go into as much detail here. Four or five behavior characters 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 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 males mouth 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 males feet.
- (4) Sex-mount. (Treading) The male repeatedly cranes his neck above the female (which is in a sex crouch). He may sporadically "preen" between wing tips and 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 male flies upward wing clapping, then glides down. Since our birds are seldom free flying, we rarely notice this character.

Certainly, of these sex behavior characters which can allow one to infer sex, the most frequent one is the bow-coo.

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