

PIGEONS AND DOVES — FAMILY COLUMBIDAE

Domestic Pigeon, Rock Dove, or Rock Pigeon
Columba livia

Native to rocky cliffs in the Old World, the Rock Dove has been domesticated for millennia. Domestic Pigeons were brought to North America by the earliest French and English settlers (Schorger 1952) and spread in tandem with western civilization. Historical data on their establishment in southern California are practically nonexistent, but the pigeons have been abundant here for decades. In San Diego County they nest on buildings almost exclusively; in natural habitats only occasional wanderers are seen flying overhead.

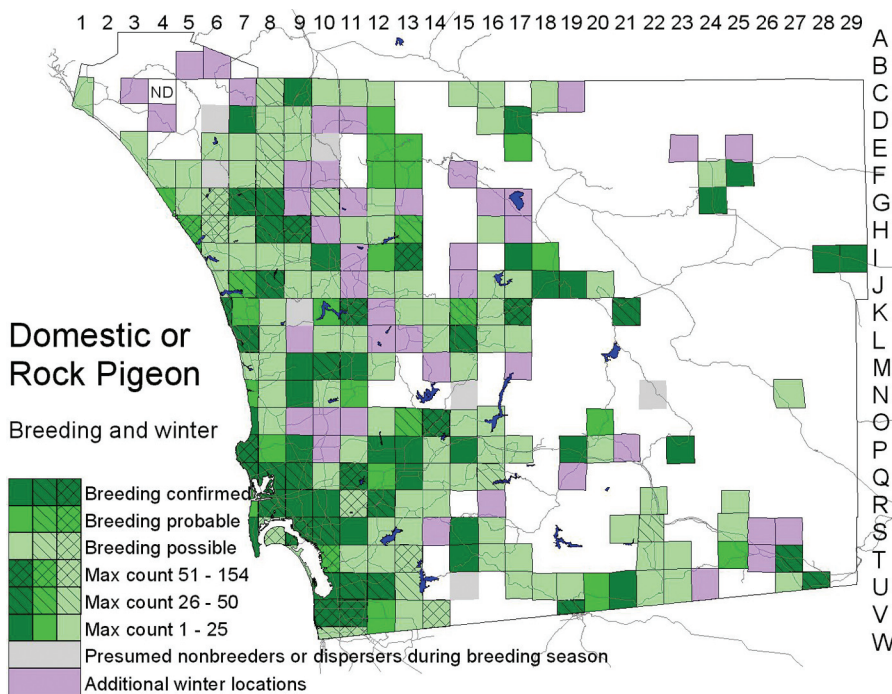
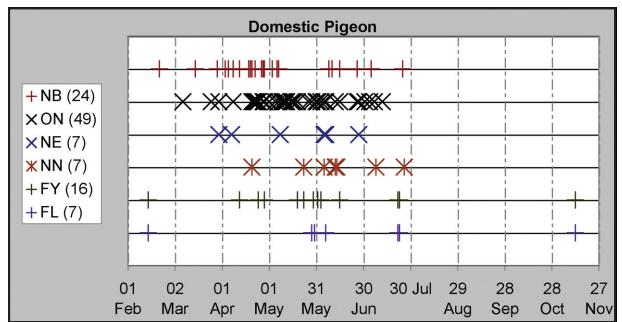
Breeding distribution: The Domestic Pigeon is common in heavily urbanized areas. Our counts for this atlas do not represent its true abundance, as even in cities observers focused their time far more on parks and remnant native habitats than around the buildings where pigeons congregate. In the breeding season our highest count was at Encinitas (K6), where the birds use supports for the railroad bridge (154 on 22 April 2001, J. Ciarletta). In San Diego's back country Domestic Pigeons are common around farm buildings in some places (up to 55 in Ballena Valley, K17, O. Carter), absent in others. In the higher mountains they are rare but nest possibly at Julian (J20; up to three on 26 June 2001, O. Carter) and definitely near Mount Laguna (P23; pair building a nest 5 July 2000, E. C. Hall). In the Anza-Borrego Desert, Domestic Pigeons are resident in small numbers in the communities of Borrego Springs (up to 20 in square F25 on 31 March 1998 and 28 April 1999, P. D. Ache) and Ocotillo Wells (up to three, plus a nest with eggs, in square I29 on 8 May 2001, J. R.



Photo by Anthony Mercieca

Barth). A single bird was in the community of Canebrake (N27) 29 April 2000 (R. and S. L. Breisch).

Nesting: In San Diego County the Domestic Pigeon nests on buildings and bridges almost exclusively. The only other nest site atlas observers described was inside a railroad tunnel, where R. Breisch and J. Determan found an abandoned egg 2 December 2001. Most nesting in San Diego County appears to take place from March to July, though this season may represent more the season when



atlas observers were looking for it. Some nesting takes place almost if not completely year round, as attested by adults feeding fledglings in Santee (P12) 14 February 1998 (C. G. Edwards) and in an underground parking garage in the Hillcrest area of San Diego (R9) 12 November 2001 (P. Unitt), meaning egg laying in late December and late September, respectively. Even as far north as Alberta some pigeons nest in midwinter (McGillivray 1988).

Migration: The Domestic Pigeon is nonmigratory but seen occasionally in transit, flying over native habitats, as in El Capitan Open Space Preserve (N15) 8 April 2001 (P. Unitt). A few such records could represent birds

using nearby natural cliffs (four near Garnet Mountain, N22, 24 May 1997, G. L. Rogers; one near the summit of Otay Mountain, U15, 1 April 2001, P. Unitt).

Winter: In winter Domestic Pigeons gather into larger flocks than in spring and summer, up to 620 in Escondido (J10) 22 December 2000 (W. E. Haas). The Domestic Pigeon has a slightly wider distribution in winter: we recorded it in 42 atlas squares in winter but not the breeding season versus 24 for the converse. We noted the species only a few times flying over more or less wilderness areas, for example, six near Margarita Peak (B5) 31 January 1998 (W. E. Haas), one at 4200 feet elevation in Henderson Canyon (E23) 26 February 2002

(R. Thériault), and ten near Garnet Mountain (N22) 10 December 1997 (G. L. Rogers).

Conservation: Urban development, of course, creates new habitat for Domestic Pigeons, but newer buildings are designed to discourage them, and some older ones have been retrofitted with porcupine wire to the same end. Even though the birds feed heavily on waste food left by people, farmland may on the whole offer better foraging than cities, so urbanization of former farmland may not benefit the birds. Except possibly at Borrego Springs, Christmas bird counts show no clear trend in Domestic Pigeon numbers in San Diego County since the species was included in the counts beginning in 1973.