BIRDS OF AMERICA.

THE ZENAIDA DOVE.

+COLUMBA ZENAIDA, *Bonap.*

PLATE CCLXXXI.—MALE AND FEMALE.

THE impressions made on the mind in youth, are frequently stronger than those at a more advanced period of life, and are generally retained. My father often told me, that when yet a child, my first attempt at drawing was from a preserved specimen of a Dove, and many times repeated to me that birds of this kind are usually remarkable for the gentleness of their disposition, and that the manner in which they prove their mutual affection, and feed their offspring, was undoubtedly intended in part to teach other beings a lesson of connubial and parental attachment. Be this as it may, hypothesis or not, I have always been especially fond of Doves. The timidity and anxiety which they all manifest, on being disturbed during incubation, and the continuance of their mutual attachment for years, are distinguishing traits in their character. Who can approach a sitting Dove, hear its notes of remonstrance, or feel the feeble strokes of its wings, without being sensible that he is committing a wrong act?

The cooing of the Zenaida Dove is so peculiar, that one who hears it for the first time naturally stops to ask, "What bird is that?" A man who was once a pirate assured me that several times, while at certain wells dug in the burning shelly sands of a well known Key, which must here be nameless, the soft and melancholy cry of the Doves awoke in his breast feelings which had long slumbered, melted his heart to repentance, and caused him to linger

at the spot in a state of mind which he only who compares the wretchedness of guilt within him with the happiness of former innocence, can truly feel. He said he never left the place without increased fears of futurity, associated as he was, although I believe by force, with a band of the most desperate villains that ever annoyed the navigation of the Florida coasts. So deeply moved was he by the notes of any bird, and especially by those of a Dove, the only soothing sounds he ever heard during his life of horrors, that through these plaintive notes, and them alone, he was induced to escape from his vessel, abandon his turbulent companions, and return to a family deploring his absence. After paying a parting visit to those wells, and listening once more to the cooings of the Zenaida Dove, he poured out his soul in supplications for mercy, and once more became what one has said to be "the noblest work of God," an honest man. His escape was effected amidst difficulties and dangers, but no danger seemed to him to be compared with the danger of one living in the violation of human and divine laws, and now he lives in peace in the midst of his friends.

The Zenaida Dove is a transient visiter of the Keys of East Florida. Some of the fishermen think that it may be met with there at all seasons, but my observations induce me to assert the contrary. It appears in the islands near Indian Key about the 15th of April, continues to increase in numbers until the month of October, and then returns to the West India Islands, whence it originally came. They begin to lay their eggs about the first of May. The males reach the Keys on which they breed before the females, and are heard cooing as they ramble about in search of mates, more than a week before the latter make their appearance. In autumn, however, when they take their departure, males, females, and young set out in small parties together.

The flight of this bird resembles that of the little Ground Dove more than any other. It very seldom flies higher than the tops of the mangroves, or to any considerable distance at a time, after it has made choice of an island to breed on. Indeed, this species may be called a Ground Dove too; for, although it alights on trees with ease, and walks well on branches, it spends the greater portion of its time on the ground, walking and running in search of food with lightness and celerity, carrying its tail higher than even the Ground Dove, and invariably roosting there. The motions of its wings, although firm, produce none of the whistling sound, so distinctly heard in the flight of the Carolina Dove; nor does the male sail over the female while she is sitting on her eggs, as is the habit of that species. When crossing the sea, or going from one Key to another, they fly near the surface of the water; and, when unexpectedly startled from the ground, they remove to a short distance, and alight amongst the thickest grasses or in the heart of the

low bushes. So gentle are they in general, that I have approached some so near that I could have touched them with my gun, while they stood intently gazing on me, as if I were an object not at all to be dreaded.

Those Keys which have their interior covered with grass and low shrubs, and are girt by a hedge of mangroves, or other trees of inferior height, are selected by them for breeding; and as there are but few of this description, their places of resort are well known, and are called Pigeon or "*Dove Keys*." It would be useless to search for them elsewhere. They are by no means so abundant as the White-headed Pigeons, which place their nest on any kind of tree, even on those whose roots are constantly submersed. Groups of such trees occur of considerable extent, and are called "*Wet Keys*."

The Zenaida Dove always places her nest on the ground, sometimes artlessly at the foot of a low bush, and so exposed that it is easily discovered by any one searching for it. Sometimes, however, it uses great discrimination, placing it between two or more tufts of grass, the tops of which it manages to bend over, so as completely to conceal it. The sand is slightly scooped out, and the nest is composed of slender dried blades of grass, matted in a circular form, and imbedded amid dry leaves and twigs. The fabric is more compact than the nest of any other Pigeon with which I am acquainted, it being sufficiently solid to enable a person to carry the eggs or young in it with security. The eggs are two, pure white, and translucent. When sitting on them, or when her young are still small, this bird rarely removes from them, unless an attempt be made to catch her, which she, however, evades with great dexterity. On several occasions of this kind, I have thought that the next moment would render me the possessor of one of these Doves alive. Her beautiful eye was steadily bent on mine, in which she must have discovered my intention, her body was gently made to retire sidewise to the farther edge of her nest, as my hand drew nearer to her, and just as I thought I had hold of her, off she glided with the quickness of thought, taking to wing at once. She would then alight within a few yards of me, and watch my motions with so much sorrow, that her wings drooped, and her whole frame trembled as if suffering from intense cold. Who could stand such a scene of despair? I left the mother to her eggs or offspring.

On one occasion, however, I found two young birds of this species about half grown, which I carried off, and afterwards took to Charleston, in South Carolina, and presented to my worthy friend the Rev. JOHN BACHMAN. When I robbed this nest, no parent bird was near. The little ones uttered the usual lisping notes of the tribe at this age, and as I put their bills in my mouth, I discovered that they might be easily raised. They were afterwards fed from the mouth with Indian corn meal, which they received with avidity,

until placed under the care of a pair of common tame Pigeons, which at once fostered them.

The cooing of this species so much resembles that of the Carolina Dove, that, were it not rather soft, and heard in a part of the world where the latter is never seen, you might easily take it for the notes of that bird. Morning is the time chosen by the Zenaida Dove to repeat her tender tales of love, which she does while perched on the low large branch of some tree, but never from the ground. Heard in the wildest solitudes of the Keys, these notes never fail to remind one that he is in the presence and under the protection of the Almighty Creator.

During mid-day, when the heat is almost insufferable in the central parts of the Keys resorted to by these birds, they are concealed and mute. The silence of such a place at noon is extremely awful. Not a breath of air is felt, nor an insect seen, and the scorching rays of the sun force every animated being to seek for shelter and repose.

From what I have said of the habits of the Zenaida Dove, you may easily conceive how difficult a task it is to procure one. I have had full experience of the difficulty, and entire satisfaction in surmounting it, for in less than an hour, with the assistance of Captain DAY, I shot nineteen individuals, the internal and external examination of which enabled me to understand something of their structure.

The flesh is excellent, and they are generally very fat. They feed on grass seeds, the leaves of aromatic plants, and various kinds of berries, not excepting those of a tree which is extremely poisonous,—so much so, that if the juice of it touch the skin of a man, it destroys it like aquafortis. Yet these berries do not injure the health of the birds, although they render their flesh bitter and unpalatable for a time. For this reason, the fishermen and wreckers are in the habit of examining the crops of the Doves previous to cooking them. This, however, only takes place about the time of their departure from the Keys, in the beginning of October. They add particles of shell or gravel to their food.

From my own observations, and the report of others, I am inclined to believe that they raise only two broods each season. The young, when yet unfledged, are of a deep leaden or purplish-grey colour, the bill and legs black, nor is it until the return of spring that they attain their full plumage. The male is larger than the female, and richer in the colouring of its plumage. Their feathers fall off at the slightest touch, and like all other Pigeons, when about to die, they quiver their wings with great force.

The eggs of this species measure one inch and a quarter in length, by nearly seven-eighths in breadth; and are abruptly pointed at the smaller end. I am informed by the Earl of DERBY that this Pigeon is raised with ease in

aviaries, so much so as to have induced him to let some loose. Should it thrive in a wild state in England, it will form a valuable accession, as its flesh is excellent.

The branch on which I have represented these birds, belonged to a low shrub abundant in the Keys where they are found. The flower has a musty scent, and is of short duration.

This species resorts to certain wells, which are said to have been dug by pirates, at a remote period. There the Zenaida Doves and other birds are sure to be seen morning and evening. The loose sand thrown up about these wells suits them well to dust in, and clean their apparel.

COLUMBA ZENAIDA, Bonap. Syn., p. 119.

ZENAIDA DOVE, *Columba Zenaida*, Bonap. Amer. Orn., vol. ii. p.

ZENAIDA DOVE, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 625.

ZENAIDA DOVE, *Columba Zenaida*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. ii. p. 354; vol. v. p. 553.

Male, $11\frac{1}{2}$, $18\frac{1}{8}$. Female, $10\frac{1}{2}$.

Florida Keys during summer only. Common.

Adult Male.

Bill short, straight, rather slender, compressed; upper mandible with a tumid fleshy covering at the base, a convex, declinate, obtuse tip, of which the margins are acute and overlapping; lower mandible, with the angle near the extremity, which is compressed and rounded. Nostrils medial, oblique, linear. Head small and compressed; the general form rather full. Legs short and of moderate strength; tarsus short, covered anteriorly with four broad scutella at the upper part, and a double series below, rounded and hexagonally reticulated behind; toes scutellate above, free, margined; two lateral toes nearly equal, middle one not much longer, hind toe much smaller.

Plumage rather compact. Wings of moderate length, second and third quills longest, first and fourth equal. Tail rather short, much rounded.

Bill deep carmine-purple. Iris brown; bare space surrounding the eye light blue. Feet deep carmine-purple. The general colour of the plumage above is light yellowish-brown tinged with grey. Quills brownish-black, narrowly margined with white, seven of the secondaries broadly tipped with the same; the inner ones of the same colour as the back, but having a broad black spot on the inner web towards the end, which is also the case with the tertiaries; several of the coverts also have a black spot on the outer web. The four lateral tail-feathers on each side are greyish-blue, with a broad black bar towards the end, the extremity greyish-white, the four middle feathers of the colour of the back, with a faint dusky bar. The sides of the head and under parts are of a light brownish-red, paler on the throat, and passing into greyish-blue on the sides; under wing-coverts pale bluish-grey.

There is a small spot of deep blue immediately behind the eye, and a larger one a little below on the side of the neck; and a band of splendid feathers extends over the back and sides of the neck, having bright purple and greenish reflections.

Length $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches; extent of wings $18\frac{1}{8}$; bill along the back $\frac{7}{12}$, along the edges $\frac{11}{12}$; tarsus $\frac{11}{12}$.

Adult Female.

The female can scarcely be distinguished from the male, the colouring being but slightly fainter.

Length $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

PURPLE-FLOWERED ANONA.

PORCELIA PARVIFLORA, *Pursh*, Fl. Amer. Sept., vol. ii. p. 383.

This plant is very abundant on many of the outer Keys of the Floridas. It grows among other shrubs, seldom exceeding seven or eight feet in height, and more frequently not more than four or five. The leaves are obovate, rounded at the base, thick, glossy above, downy beneath. The outer petals are larger, and not unlike the divided shell of a hickory or pig nut; the inner ovate, deep purple, with a white band at the base. I did not see the fruit, which I was told is not unpalatable when ripe, it being then about the size of a common walnut, and of a black colour.

THE KEY WEST PIGEON, OR DOVE.

†COLUMBA MONTANA, *Linn.*

PLATE CCLXXXII.—MALE AND FEMALE.

It was at Key West that I first saw this beautiful Pigeon. The Marion was brought to anchor close to, and nearly opposite, the little town of the same name, some time after the setting of the sun. The few flickering lights I saw nearly fixed the size of the place in my imagination. In a trice, the kind captain and I were seated in his gig, and I felt the onward movement of the light bark as if actually on wing, so well timed was the pulling of the

W. H.

Zenaida Dove.

1. Male. 2. Female

Anona.

Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Zenaida Dove, *Columba zenaida*, Bonap. [Pl. 281]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 5, 9–14. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319396>.

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