

White-winged Dove

SCIENTIFIC NAME: The white-winged dove, *Zenaida asiatica*, is a member of the pigeon and dove family Columbidae. It was first named in 1758 by Carl Linnaeus, the father of the modern taxonomy system. The genus *Zenaida* (of Latin origin), meaning “born of Zeus,” was given in tribute to Linnaeus’ wife with the same first name. The species *asiatica*, meaning “from Asia,” was given to the first specimen in error. At the time, North America was still referred to as the “West Indies” and Linnaeus mistakenly thought of the “East Indies” (Asia) while naming the specimen. Linnaeus tried to correct the error in 1766 by renaming the species *Columba leucoptera*, meaning “white-winged dove,” but the rules governing scientific nomenclature prohibited the change; thus, the false scientific name remains.

DESCRIPTION: Medium-sized birds, white-winged doves are considered one of the larger dove species. While not as large as pigeons, they are larger than mourning doves. White-winged doves are 11–12 inches long and

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13.75–15 inches tall, with a wingspan of 17–18 inches. They have a grayish-brown body with a black beak and dark pink legs. Their unique features include a black streak along the cheeks, bright blue skin



around the eyes, white patches on the top side of the wings (which appear as epaulettes along the front of the wings when stationary) and a tail that has a squared-off shape when a dove is in flight. Juveniles are similar in appearance to adults, except they are duller in color, have purplish-brown legs and lack the black streak along the cheek.

DISTRIBUTION: White-winged doves are a mostly tropical bird that winters in Central America and southern Mexico and summers in the Southwest from the Gulf Coast to California. They occur in small numbers as far north as Alaska and Newfoundland. Here in Arizona, they reside mostly in the lower elevations below the Mogollon Rim; however, these doves occasionally are sighted at bird feeders in Flagstaff and other locations above the Rim.

HABITAT: The vast mesquite thickets that used to exist in the drainages of Arizona probably supported millions of nesting white-winged doves, which prefer open woodland habitat. Today, the invasive tamarisk is used more than mesquite for nesting. Currently, these doves rely on four vegetation types in this order of importance: chaparral, oak woodland, desert grassland and desert scrub. Agriculture also provides significant food and cover.

BIOLOGY: White-winged doves migrate into Arizona from the south from late March through mid- to late September to breed. Shortly after the birds arrive, the breeding season begins and doves pair up, build a nest and lay eggs (usually two). The task of sitting on the eggs is shared equally between the sexes on a regimented daily schedule. The incubation period lasts an average of 14 days. Rapid growth of the nestlings allows them to leave the nest 13 to 16 days after hatching.

White-winged doves are seed-eaters that commonly forage on the ground, except when they perch on and eat the seeds from a flowering saguaro cactus.

STATUS: Currently, this is a hunted species with a limited harvest. Harvest peaked in 1968 and declined precipitously in 1980. Since then, their numbers and harvest have been increasing gradually. They adapt and return to areas that have been developed into urban centers.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: There is concern that market-driven forces could change agricultural crops grown in Arizona that support white-winged dove populations. Even with the extended drought, desert areas continue to provide good forage and nesting sites for the baseline population. 🦋

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