



DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME!!
 Jim Hiatt, our bird-man of Hungry Hollow, was trimming limbs and found several nests waaaaay up in his Eucalyptus trees and shared his sequence of shots.



Our Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*, is part of what makes the countryside the delight that it is. "Ohhhhh-OOOOHHH-whoooooo, whooo-whooo!" Likely one of the best known and loved phrases among our Avian family in Hungry Hollow and up the Capay Valley; it would be hard to imagine anyone who has been in this area--even for a few weeks--and listened to the bird calls hereabouts, not recognizing the preceding. It's one of the signature bird calls of our area, and is really country-wide in distribution. They are found in small towns as well, but really only the Pigeon (Rock Dove) is to be found in really urbanized areas.

Besides the ubiquitous call, another sound is made as they lift-off to fly, which is an almost explosive take-off, which is a peculiar, almost whistling sound with their wings sounding somewhat like, "WHE-he-he-he-hu-hu." They make this sound upon alighting, too. These birds are very streamlined for flight, and I have paced them at 60+ mph while driving parallel with them and knew in watching that they were capable of a little more speed, yet, if they had to have it. They have a very straight-lined, but also a darting and even zig-zag flight pattern, making them quite the challenge for dove hunters to hit and other prey to capture.

They are pretty much a grain and seed eater, and if you are a hunter, when cleaning them you can check into the crop [saclike enlargement of a bird's gullet where seed is stored before digestion]and see not just what they've been eating, but what foods tend to be their favorites. You see them along roadsides eating seeds of Turkey Mullein (gray-green, almost fuzzy weeds that grow in patches) as much as anything else, with their tiny, black seeds even smaller than alfalfa seeds. Mullein, Safflower--smaller seeds in general--and even Sunflowers are in their primary diet. They tend to roost in orchards at night, but are aloft before sunrise for the nearest feeding areas.

Birders and hunters are all familiar with this bird's habits: safflower fields, roadsides with abundant weed seeds, and even sunflower fields are among their favorite areas to feed, and preferably near a waterway or watering hole of some kind, especially in our hills we find these birds in profusion. In the summer and fall, Cache Creek is alive with these. I've seen these alight on sunflower heads

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and pick the seeds out. They have a habit in flying of following a fence-line, pole-line, tree-line---pretty much anything that runs in a straight line. After the morning feed, they fly back to the orchards to "loaf for the mid-day," as in the earlier generations we used to put it, and then back out to the feeding/watering area in the evening for the final feed for the day. Perhaps the favorite game bird hereabouts, the meat is delicious, with a wild-sweet flavor to it. When I was much younger, the season was the month of September, but in the last couple decades, since there are so many here in the winter as well that they "split" the season to the first half of September, and a couple weeks in December. It was the last FUN thing to do before school began again.

These are a very crude nester, with the chosen spot usually a branch crotch in a tree as we have on the ranch here, but even rain gutters will suffice. Anywhere from sticks alone to sticks lined with finer stuffs for the "Deluxe versions" are made, and nearly always there are two pure white eggs laid. If you see a dove on the ground, they're either feeding or looking for nesting materials. Weaker in the legs than most birds, they walk in short, quick steps on the ground--almost a crawl, and are not a hopper or walker like most of our other local birds.

One to six broods are had each year. The young are fun to watch grow up---this year I was able to get some really nice "progression" shots here from eggs to the ready-to-leave stages. The young feed from the mother's gullet of partially digested food-stuffs from the fields: "dove's milk."



From two eggs to two chicks, closer and closer--oops! They flew the coop, as it were!

Incubation takes two weeks. The hatched young, called squabs, are altricial, being helpless at hatching and covered with down.

Mourning Doves have a familiar brownish-gray-tan coloration, some black spotting on the wings, and the upper breast feathers have an iridescent pinkish-salmon tinge to the feathers themselves, but this can be seen only very close-up--see page 14. It's one of the first things that an observant first-time dove hunter or birder learns about these lovelies. Males and females are colored alike. Young have a darker gray-black down that's white-tipped and then goes more to the brownish color as the feathers come in. Country-life would be somehow just incomplete without these special friends that just help to make our mutual home what it is, and are another facet to our appreciation of things here. Jim Hiatt

parents feed the squabs "dove's milk" for the first 3-4 days. After that, the crop milk is gradually augmented by seeds. Fledging takes place in about 11-15 days, before the squabs are fully grown but after they are capable of digesting adult food.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/>



Left: Tarweed flower.

One problem with moving away from "home" for decades and trusting your memories when you come back--what do they say, "You can't go home again"? Well, you can--but it will surprise you!

Case in point: in Volume 12, I wrote about my love of that pungent smell of Tarweed on the Monroe Ranch--problem was, the pungent plant I was calling Tarweed was actually **Croton setiger**, or *Turkey Mullein* or *Doveweed*. When I found this out I went into research over-drive and the first thing botanist Tim Lowrey said to me--again--is: "That is the problem with using the common names, Betsy, you can easily make mistakes with similar plants." Thing is, we do have both plants on the old ranch and they are hairy and pungent and not so great for livestock-- BUT I STILL LOVE THE SMELL! *That part has not changed!* Oh, and I have gone back and re-written that feature in Volume 12! My motto: Never stop learning!!

Below: Dove-loving Croton setiger -- that's Turkey Mullein or Doveweed to us!

Below: Croton stellate hairs 4.JPG -- greatly magnified from:
<http://malpighiales.myspecies.info/file/1504>

Thanks to my photo-buddy Jim Hiatt, descended from the Capay Valley and Hungry Hollow Goodnow pioneers, and my old EHS buddy Tim Lowrey, descended from the pioneer Rumsey Lowreys, now a botany professor at UNM, I know

Below:<http://corelectronics.com/DERUFF/Croton%20setiger.htm>

Doveweed from Tarweed!! Thanks, guys! And I have now seen the stellate hairs up close and personal! Doveweed: "The foliage is toxic to animals, and the crushed plants were used by Native Americans to stupefy fish and make them easy to catch. Turkey mullein was smoked to cure sore throats and cough. It can replace a fraction of tobacco. The seeds are very palatable to birds"--especially Mourning Doves!!

Bottom 2 photos: Betsy Monroe and Jim Hiatt took in Hungry Hollow, 2013.

