

# WHITE-THROATED PIGEON

## *Columba vitiensis* Quoy and Gaimard

*Columba vitiensis* Quoy and Gaimard, *Voy. 'Astrolabe', Zool.*, 1, 1830, p. 246; *Atlas, Oiseaux*, pl. 28. (Fiji Islands.)

### OTHER NAMES

Metallic Pigeon, Lord Howe Island Pigeon (*C. v. godmanae*).

### DESCRIPTION

Length 37 cm.

#### ADULT MALE (ANWC B8348)

Forehead to neck brownish-grey with strongly iridescent purple gloss; mantle and upper back black, feathers with broadly iridescent purple edge and on sides of neck glossy oil-green; lower back to upper tail-coverts brownish-black, feathers with glossy oil-green edges; upper wing-coverts, scapulars, tertials and inner secondaries black with narrow glossy oil-green margins; chin and throat to ear-coverts cream-white, slightly duller and less extensive in females; foreneck to abdomen brownish-grey, feathers with broad iridescent purple margins, more strongly on breast where also glossy oil-green; under tail-coverts dark grey with narrow iridescent purple margins; primaries and outer secondaries blackish-brown; underwing-coverts dark grey; tail black; bill red with broad cream-yellow tip; iris orange; eyering carmine to dark red; legs and feet dull purplish-red; weight 410–550 g.

#### ADULT FEMALE (ANWC B26451)

Like male, but underparts more brownish and feathers with narrower iridescent purple margins giving overall duller appearance; less extensive, slightly duller cream-white on chin and throat; weight 395–510 g.

#### JUVENILES (Coates 1985)

Duller than adults with little or no iridescent purple on underparts.

### DISTRIBUTION

Widely distributed from the Philippine Islands and islands off Borneo and in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago to New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia to Fiji and Samoa; formerly on Lord Howe Island.

### SUBSPECIES

#### 1. *C. v. halmabeira* (Bonaparte)

*Ianthoenas halmabeira* Bonaparte, *Consp. Av.*, 2, 1855, p. 44. (Halmahera and Seram.)

This subspecies, as described above, is the most widely distributed form, ranging from islands off Sulawesi, the Kai Islands and the Moluccas, Indonesia, east through New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago to the Solomon Islands as far as Makira.

#### 2. *C. v. hypoenochroa* (Gould)

*Ianthoenas hypoenochroa* Gould, *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*, 1856, p. 136. (Isle of Pines.)

### ADULTS

Like *halmabeira*, but less strong iridescent purple gloss on lower underparts.

No specimens examined.

Occurs on New Caledonia and on Lifu and Uvea in the Loyalty Islands.

#### 3. *C. v. godmanae* (Mathews)

*Raperia godmanae* Mathews, *Austr. Av. Rec.*, 3, 1915, p. 24. (Lord Howe Island).

There are no known specimens from Lord Howe Island, this subspecies being described from a drawing painted in 1790 by George Raper, a midshipman on HMS *Sirius*, the flagship of the First Fleet, and this drawing is held in the Natural History Museum, London. Amadon (1943) points out that the bird depicted by Raper obviously represents some form of *Columba vitiensis* and, because Lord Howe Island is so isolated, a population occurring there was probably racially distinct, so tentatively may be listed as *godmanae*. Peters (1937) suggested that the locality attributed to the bird portrayed by Raper probably was erroneous, and he synonymised *godmanae* with *halmabeira*. Hindwood (1940) points out that Raper visited Norfolk Island several times, being marooned there for 11 months when the *Sirius* was wrecked, and he probably stopped over at Lord Howe Island or obtained birds from there. Frith (1982) concedes that it is a fair assumption that the bird portrayed in this painting and in another two paintings came from Lord Howe Island, but errs in claiming that identity of the Lord Howe Island Pigeon 'must remain clouded' because the paintings bear no locality reference. All three paintings are inscribed 'Pigeon of Lord Howe Island', and there is no reason to doubt the locality.

Without a specimen, it is not possible to determine how *godmanae* differed from other subspecies, but it has been likened to *C. v. halmabeira* and to the similar male of *C. v. leopoldi* from Vanuatu (see Amadon 1943; Gibbs *et al.* 2001). I agree with Hindwood, who points out that, like some other species from Lord Howe Island, especially the Lord Howe Island Woodhen *Gallirallus sylvestris* and the extinct subspecies of the Island Thrush

