

Pigeons and Doves in Australia

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Source: The Auk, 133(3) : 565-567

Published By: American Ornithological Society

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1642/AUK-16-40.1>

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BOOK REVIEW

Pigeons and Doves in Australia

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Published July 6, 2016

Pigeons and Doves in Australia by Joseph M. Forshaw and William T. Cooper. 2015. CSIRO Publishing, Clayton, South Victoria, Australia. 360 pp. + 31 color plates, numerous maps and text figures. \$170.88 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-6430-9633-2.

The Columbiformes are an ancient, easily recognized, and very successful group of birds, found almost worldwide, and are strongly represented in Australia from the islands of Torres Strait to the forests and heaths of Tasmania. A total of 35 species are recorded in Australia, 14 species are endemic, 4 are introduced, 5 are vagrants, and 2 are non-breeding visitors.

The original *Pigeons and Doves of Australia* by H. J. Frith (1982) was a wonderful compendium of what was known about Australian pigeons. It certainly stimulated my interest in this group many years ago, especially in their distribution, ecology, status, and taxonomy. It was a book that met the needs of ornithologists, institutions, aviculturists, and naturalists and was also good value for the money.

This new book by Joseph Forshaw and the late William Cooper is dedicated to Harry Frith who certainly laid a strong foundation for them to add a mass of new knowledge that has been accumulated over the intervening 33 years. Joseph M. Forshaw has had a lifelong interest in pigeons and a long association with museums and aviculturists that has certainly aided him in summarizing knowledge about the family in Australia. With few exceptions, the text shows the results of careful attention to all the recent literature as well

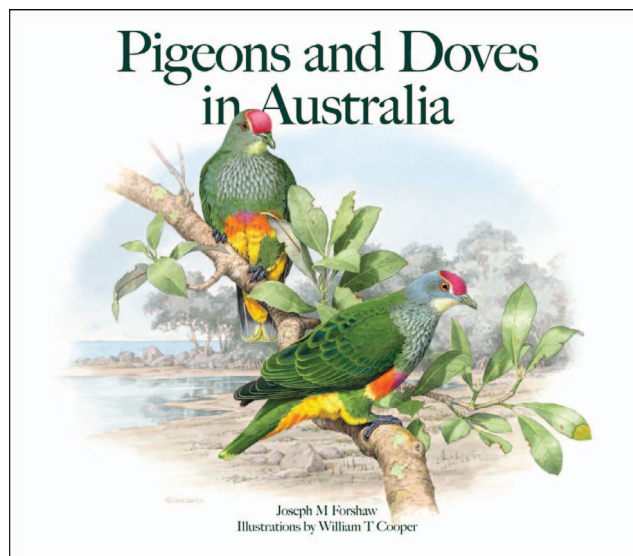
as the personal experience that both authors have of these birds in the field and the aviary.

The first thing that strikes you about this book is its shape, oblong quarto, a rather peculiar shape for bird books, but common for sixteenth century music books. While I don't like the shape of the book, William Cooper's illustration of two Rose-crowned Fruit Doves (*Ptilinopus regina*) on the dust cover is absolutely stunning and I soon forgot about the oblong quarto. My copy even smells good.

Cooper's wonderful color plates are placed within the text for each species, and the reproduction by CSIRO Publishing is excellent. The colors are intense and accurate, the brush work superb, and the birds look as if they could just walk off the page. Particularly noteworthy are the backgrounds that, for all the species I know well, faithfully depict the habitats of the various species. Cooper researched all aspects of the birds including their habitat, diet, and behavior.

The Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula whartoni*) in Japanese Cherry and the Pied Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula bicolor*) in Red Condoo are great examples with accurate flowers and fruits. This was to be his last book and it is a fitting tribute to this exceptional artist.

Species-by-species accounts comprise the major part of the book. For each species the common and scientific names are given followed by a description for every species and subspecies along with its distribution, general notes, habits and status, movements, social behavior, field notes,



diet and feeding, vocalizations, courtship and mating, nesting, eggs, and aviary notes. The total provides a comprehensive account of all species.

I have a minor quibble with the captions for the text figures particularly where two wings are given, e.g., White-quilled Rock Pigeon. As printed, the upper means purely the upper figure, so why not say upper figure. In some cases (admittedly these are stated), this upper is actually the underwing, but in some cases (and these are not stated) it really is the upperwing that is presented. Focusing on the distribution maps presented in the book, some errors are apparent. For example, the Emerald Dove currently ranges much farther east in Western Australia, to the Carson Escarpment and the lower Ord River; the Pilbara, Gascoyne, and Murchison populations of the Peaceful Dove all are isolated, not continuous as shown; the population of the Spinifex Pigeon in the Carnarvon Range, Western Australia, is also isolated, but shown on the map as continuous and in paler green (apparently the supplementary range); and the former range of the Partridge Pigeon in Western Australia and the Northern Territory is not given and should have been depicted in red. All of these are accurately mapped in Johnstone and Storr (1998) and Johnstone (1981).

The taxonomic treatment is conservative, and I recognize just about the same genera and species as Forshaw does, but we often differ in recognition of subspecies, as he retains many that I would merge. In many cases the taxonomic treatment could have been improved. With the Emerald Dove, for example, he quotes Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) who treat the Asian and Australian forms as separate species based on plumage and vocalizations and gives a personal communication from me expressing a contrary view. Material collected in the 1990s and held in the Western Australian Museum from the eastern Lesser Sundas clearly indicating a broad intergrade zone between *C. i. indica* and *C. i. longirostris* was not consulted, and from this there is no doubt that the two forms are conspecific. While his treatment is correct, he could well have borrowed these specimens and checked these for himself or possibly included recent publications, such as Johnstone et al. (2014).

Rejecting weak subspecies where the zone of intergradation covers half a continent, e.g., in the Crested Pigeon (see below), or where the subspecific characters are part of a cline involving the whole species (e.g., Peaceful Dove), should have been one of the aims of the book, as researchers rely on texts such as this for detailed measurements and analyses.

With the Crested Pigeon, for example, this would have been a good opportunity to rebuff the subspecies *O. l. whitlocki* from south Western Australia. This widespread species of the arid and semi-arid regions of Australia does undergo some geographic variation (cf. Mayr 1951), but it

is far too mobile and continuously distributed for the recognition of subspecies. To highlight how difficult it was to place specimens into definable subspecies, we need go no further than Mayr (1951) who placed an Oodnadatta (South Australia) specimen in the western race *O. l. whitlocki* and a specimen from west of Oodnadatta in the eastern race *O. l. lophotes*. This jarred my confidence in Mayr's analysis and should have done others. Forshaw does at least note that it is a poorly differentiated subspecies.

Most of my taxonomic treatments including those of Pied Imperial Pigeon, Red-crowned Pigeon, Partridge Pigeon, and much of the Spinifex Pigeon have been followed, but not those of the Peaceful Dove or Bar-shouldered Dove. With the latter, I recognize no subspecies in Australia or New Guinea. Forshaw recognizes 4 subspecies but noted that retaining all Australian populations in the nominate subspecies, as adopted by me, may be warranted, and that differences in birds from southern New Guinea are slight and their subspecific differentiation is doubtful. The book does not alter my view on the taxonomy of both Peaceful and Bar-shouldered Doves.

With the White-quilled Rock Pigeon *P. albipennis*, they perhaps should have drawn several other wings to show the clinal nature in the loss of white in the wing patch from the nominate form to the dark-winged *P. a. boothi*, another poorly differentiated subspecies, while on the White-quilled Rock Pigeon the author discusses the debate about the type locality of this species. Crome and Johnstone (1979) argue that because the type specimen closely resembles specimens from the Victoria River district in the Northern Territory, the type locality should be Victoria River, where specimens were collected during the second voyage of the *Beagle*. Mees (1961) and Ford and Mees (1987) rejected this and retained the type locality as Sunday Island in Western Australia. In Crome and Johnstone (1979) we gave three reasons for believing that the type came from the Victoria River namely: the cotypes of *albipennis* best match specimens from this area rather than those from west Kimberley; Gould did not describe this taxon until two years after he described several new taxa from King Sound, i.e. after he obtained material from the *Beagle's* 1839 survey of the Northern Territory; and finally the species does not occur on Sunday Island or adjacent islands as no rocky habitat exists there. A more detailed explanation of this debate would have been useful here and the issue could have been resolved.

As a general comment, I think under General Notes it would have been useful if some boldface headings had been used to locate habitat and status, etc., for the various regions, making the information easier to find. The section on diet and feeding is thorough and well compiled.

In Frith's original (Frith 1982), the sections on voice included sonograms of several calls. These were basically simplified diagrams taken from sonograms but in some cases were quite useful in looking at variations in intensity and pitch or relative loudness of calls. Although the call descriptions are good, the inclusion of more up-to-date sonograms and additional data from recent publications could have been included.

The section on nesting is often a bit rambling and anecdotal for many species, and the given egg measurements depend on only one or a few clutches. From the point of completeness, many more measurements could have been taken or extracted from the literature, especially in species that have considerable geographic variation, to highlight differences between populations.

Where known, the history of each species in aviculture is summarized as are the requirements with respect to housing, feeding, and breeding, and this section contains a wealth of data and experience evident in the many species accounts. Some of my criticisms here are minor and a little nit-picking, and for every omission or error I noted there are many pages of excellence, and overall this is a fine book. It will certainly enhance the memory of both Harry Frith and Bill Cooper, and I complement Joe Forshaw on a job well done. For those interested in the pigeons and doves of Australia, as I have been for many years, this book should be compulsory reading.

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