

The Way Of The Dove... Loyalty & Commitment

WRITTEN BY JOY FREEMAN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY GAIL KAISER
VENICE GULF COAST LIVING MAGAZINE

As we anticipate celebrating Valentine's Day this month, many symbols of the holiday come to mind. It's a pretty sure bet that most people won't be thinking about doves. Though, just about everywhere you go, a walk in the park, a hike in the woods or relaxing in your backyard, there is a good chance that you will hear the familiar coo-cooing of doves. There are approximately 310 species of doves and pigeons around the world, the only family of birds belonging to the order of Columbidae. The most common dove, the one you are most likely seeing, is the Mourning Dove. These prolific breeders, native to the Nearctic realm — encompassing most of North America including Greenland, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, number somewhere between 350 and 400 million in the United States.



So, what does this have to do with Valentine's Day, you may be wondering? Well, for starters, if you take notice, you will quickly observe that doves are almost always found in pairs. These charming, gentle birds are all about loyalty, commitment to their mates, and nurturing their offspring. They mate for life and appear to do everything together. Both males and females build nests, take turns sitting on their eggs, feed their young and are never far from each other. You will often see a pair sitting next to one another on a branch grooming each other, nuzzling and holding each other's beaks, almost like a kiss.

It all starts with that incessant cooing of a male searching for a mate. Once he attracts a lady dove and they establish themselves as a couple, it isn't long before they start nesting in anticipation of raising their first brood. These doves, found in all 50 States, build the flimsiest nests you will ever see. However, here in Florida, Mourning Doves will often build nests in palm trees, roof gutters, air conditioning units, window sills and ledges. It's a wonder that their usual two white eggs (a clutch) don't just roll out before they can hatch. The incubation period lasts around 14 days with the parents taking turns keeping the eggs warm and safe at all times. Once hatched, the helpless youngsters are never left alone for the first two weeks. Mom and Dad feed them crop milk, a fluid from the cells lining the crop, which is part of the alimentary tract that stores food prior to digestion. The little squabs (unfledged baby doves) soon become fledglings (able to fly). Somewhere between 15 to 30 days the fledglings, called squeakers, leave the nest, but stay close by. They continue to be fed by Mom and Pop until they can fly proficiently. Then they take off on their own and start the cycle all over again. Unlike most birds, who produce just one brood each year, doves are known to raise as many as five to six broods per year...especially in warmer southern locales.

Doves have been around for a very long time. Fossilized dove remains were discovered in Pleistocene deposits in both North and South America dating back 1.8 million years and a 23-million-year-old fossil believed to be a member of the pigeon family was found in France. Throughout written history doves have represented among other things, peace, love, faith, purity, devotion, valor, everlasting life and new beginnings.



above: Two squabs about one week old; below at about two weeks





We know from historical records that doves were domesticated around 4500 BCE. Today, each of the more than 300 various species of doves and pigeons number from the hundreds of millions to just an estimated 16 endangered Blue Eyed Ground Doves living in the tropical savanna of eastern Brazil.

*W*hite doves are rarely found in the wild. Their lack of camouflage would and probably did attract predators, leading to their demise in the general population. However, white doves were carefully bred for thousands of years in the ancient world...a practice that continues to this day. Their

appearance and release, first referred to about 5,000 years ago in Egypt, has had positive connotations wherever mentioned throughout history across all cultures. Today, they make their appearances at weddings, funerals, milestone celebrations, graduations, opening ceremonies, the Olympics and many major sporting events. An entire business exists of breeders all around our globe providing these lovely creatures to grace our most important moments.

So, maybe doves should have been the bird that came to be known as, "The Love Bird." Because, it seems they are the perfect symbol for lovers and Valentine's Day.



(941) 867-6077
HONESTLANDSCAPES.COM

Elevate Your Outdoor Living Experience!

- Design
- Patios & Driveways
- Irrigation
- Water Features
- Lighting
- Outdoor Kitchens



Visit Our Plant Nursery

973 1st Dirt Road
Venice, FL 34292

