

Book Review

Pigeons and Doves in Australia

JOSEPH FORSHAW, ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM COOPER, 2015

*CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne. \$185
Hardback, 360 pages*

Before reading this monograph I am ashamed to admit that I had a limited interest in or knowledge of Australian pigeons and doves. Similarly, I have rarely consulted its predecessor compiled by one of Australia's most eminent ornithologists, Dr Harry Frith (Frith 1982).

My ignorance can be partly excused by my South Australian bias, reflected by our relative lack of diversity in the group and dominance of introduced species. Being born and raised in Adelaide, my experience has been prejudiced by the homeless Feral Pigeons, *Columba livia*, of the city squares and the incessant 'coo' of Spotted Doves, *Streptopelia chinensis*, or the puff of feathers trailing a suburban express train. We lack the brightly coloured species that characterise the eastern Australian forests. This has also led to few publications on pigeons and doves appearing in this journal, with the notable exceptions of Andrew Black's recent review of the expansion of the Crested Pigeon, *Ocyphaps lophotes* (Black 2015) and papers on periodic southward irruptions of the Flock Bronzewing, *Phaps histrionica* (Read 1996, Pedler 2010).

I now realise that I had under-rated them. Pigeons and doves deserve better attention in this State. Of particular note is the ability of many of our native species to adapt to severely



modified environments. As seed-eaters with few ground-nesters, the group has fared relatively well in South Australia, with most species occurring throughout previous known distributions or having expanded into the grasslands created by extensive agriculture. After recently witnessing massed Flock Bronzewings at a waterhole near the Birdsville Track I believe that our arid pigeons also deserve better attention.

Forshaw and Cooper's revision is my kind of bird book. It extensively updates Frith's earlier work, packed with new details on every aspect of pigeon distribution, habitat and ecology, again written by a person with both field and aviary experience with most species. There is much interesting historical information on early records or introductions. Even more importantly to me, it includes interesting personal anecdotes by the author or colleagues, contained primarily within the Field Notes section for each species. At the end of each species account there are notes on keeping birds in captivity and associated common colour variants. The text is extensively referenced.

Forshaw has mostly adopted the common names of HANZAB (Higgins and Davies 1996) but several of the author's preferred names are used instead, mainly based on Goodwin's (1983) 'Pigeons and Doves of the World'. These include Crested Bronzewing, Feral Pigeon, Spotted Turtledove and Barbary Turtledove.

The book also highlights what is not known. For example while recently birding in the stringy-bark forest in the hills at Springmount, I saw a Common Bronzewing, *Phaps chalcoptera*, fly very slowly by, giving an occasional loud clap of its wings. Evidently this was a courtship display flight, about which surprisingly little is known or reported. The discussion of Barbary (Turtle)dove, *Streptopelia risoria*, is brief and based on limited published accounts, with the species more widely distributed in SA than indicated. Forshaw rightly points out that nothing is published on its habits here.

A minor omission is the lack of reference to Spotted Doves and Crested Pigeons commonly eating the flesh of olives near Adelaide in autumn-winter, and its significant effect on darkening plumage (Paton and Paton 1987).

The paintings by Cooper are excellent, showing birds in their natural habitat, often with an associated food plant, and include specific plumage details (e.g. tails). Various behaviours are illustrated in black and white. I would like to have seen photos of habitat and a few species included, as I found the annotated plates in Frith's monograph to be very instructive. Habitats are rarely described well in fauna books, and good photos provide much information better than words.

It is rare in Australian ornithology that there have been two separate authorities that have produced monographs on the same group of birds. Forshaw and Cooper are commended on the quality of this revision and it is hoped that other groups of birds will be treated similarly in future.

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