

IDENTIFICATION : Pigeons

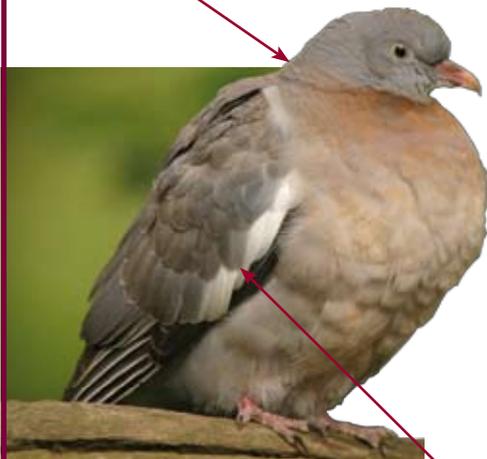
Although there are only three *Columba* pigeon species from which to choose, they can prove tricky – especially when you are dealing with young birds. There is also the question of Rock Doves and Feral Pigeons which, even though they are the same species, are often treated as being different.

When it comes to pigeons visiting your garden feeding station the chances are that you'll have Woodpigeon, Feral Pigeon, or both! Stock Dove is a farmland species so only really turns up in rural gardens and even then it can go unnoticed. The main identification pitfall is the Feral Pigeon/Rock Dove problem. While many Feral Pigeons look nothing like the wild Rock Dove from which they are descended, some look identical. However, unless you live on the rural northwest coast of Scotland or west coast of Ireland, then you will not be visited by a true Rock Dove.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

This, the largest of our pigeons, has shown a dramatic increase in both its breeding population and in its use of gardens. It can now be found in even the most urban of gardens, coming to bird tables, ground food and even hanging feeders. **Call** - a monotonous, often repeated 'Oooh oooh ooh oooh ooh' best remembered by the rhyme 'take-two-cows-taffy'.

Lacks white collar seen in adult



White wing bar

Juvenile (above): The overall appearance is of a plain, slightly dark-looking Woodpigeon. The upperparts are a more brownish-grey than seen in the adult and there can be extensive pale pinky/buff edges to the back and wing feathers. The iris is pale but can look all-dark at any distance. Lacks the white collar of the adult.

Adult (below): Essentially grey above, showing no contrast between the back and the rump. The breast is pinkish, with the rest of the underparts being pale and off-white in colour. Adults are easily identified by an obvious white patch on the side of the neck. This is absent in the other two species.

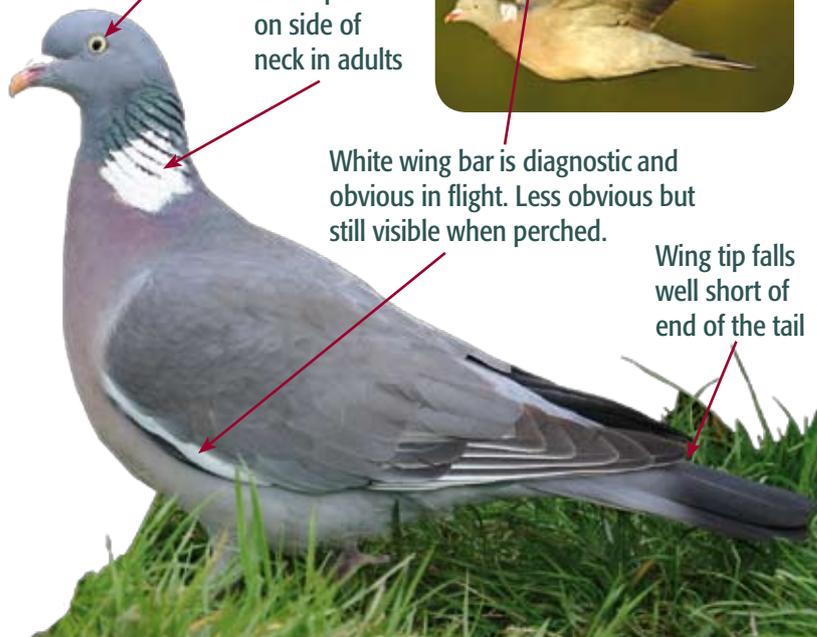
Bright yellow eye stands out from face

White patch on side of neck in adults



White wing bar is diagnostic and obvious in flight. Less obvious but still visible when perched.

Wing tip falls well short of end of the tail

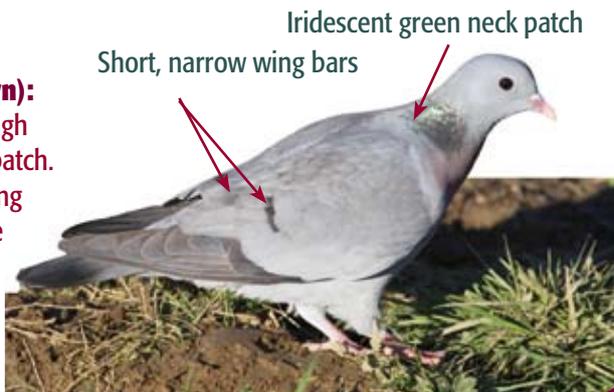


Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

The smallest of our three wild pigeons and a much daintier looking bird than the Woodpigeon - which it most closely resembles. Although this is a bird of farmland it can be found in larger parks and rural gardens. **Call:** A drawn out low 'Oooh', very like blowing over the top of a jam jar.

Adult (main photograph): Smaller, darker version of a Woodpigeon, with a large iridescent green and vinous (wine-coloured) neck patch. Dark grey upper back contrasts with paler lower back and rump. Eye is dark. The clinching features are the short, transverse black bars in the centre of the lower wing, which fall well short of the outer edge.

Juveniles (not shown): Similar to adult although lacks the green neck patch. Does have the two wing bars but these may be less well marked.



Woodpigeons have become increasingly common in urban areas and are as likely to be encountered in gardens as Feral Pigeons. Stock Doves, on the other hand, are rural birds, usually only turning up in rural gardens.

Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

The true Rock Dove is the rarest of our three pigeons and is only found on sea cliffs on the west coast of Scotland, Orkney, Shetland and the west coast of Ireland. Feral Pigeons originated from wild Rock Doves and are birds that, at one time or another, escaped from pigeon houses. **Call** - 'Crrooo'.

Feral Pigeons show lots of variation in colour, from almost pure white to wholly black. The one pictured is almost identical in appearance to the wild-type Rock Dove. If you see something that looks like a pure Rock Dove anywhere away from the areas above then it will be a Feral Pigeon. In this individual, note the dark



head and neck, the green neck patch (similar to Stock Dove), the pale grey wings and broad dark wing bars.

TEST YOUR SKILLS

Try to work out the age and/or species of these pigeons (answers on Page 22).



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