

Band-tailed Pigeon *Patagioenas fasciata*



Folk Name: (none)

Status: Vagrant

Abundance: Accidental

Habitat: Backyard feeders, parks, ledges, trees

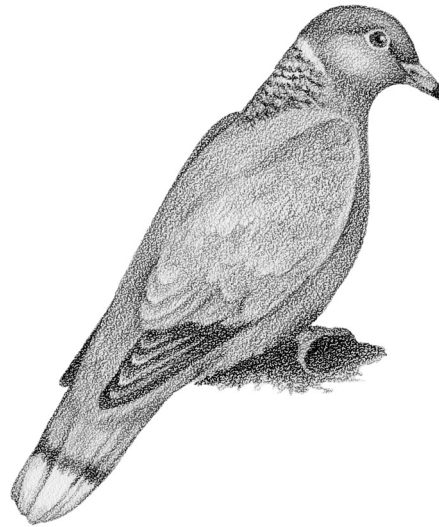
The Band-tailed Pigeon is a bird native to the western United States, and it rarely strays eastward. It is 2 inches larger than its close relative, our ubiquitous Rock Pigeon. This pigeon gets its common name from the wide gray band across its tail, just below its gray rump.

The first record of a Band-tailed Pigeon in North Carolina was a single bird found in a remote section of the Blue Ridge Parkway. A group of four birders discovered it after stopping at the Fetterbush Overlook on June 10, 1980. This pigeon was observed feeding on the ripe berries of a Mountain Elderberry shrub. A field note published in the Fall 1980 issue of *The Chat* described this sighting.

Dogged persistence led to confirmation of the second record of a Band-tailed Pigeon in North Carolina and the first with physical documentation. Around February 1, 1994, Carol Tracy found an unusual looking pigeon visiting her backyard bird bath at her home in Charlotte. Tracy's home was situated in a heavily developed residential neighborhood just a few miles from the center of downtown. She was a novice bird watcher, but she knew this bird looked different. So, she spent a great deal of time carefully looking through her field guides to figure out its identity. After much study, she decided her strange bird was a Band-tailed Pigeon, and she realized after consulting the book's range map, it was far out of its normal range.



Band-tailed Pigeon in Charlotte on March 13, 1994.
(Stephen J. Dinsmore)



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Tracy reported her find to the Mecklenburg Audubon Society and asked if someone could come out and confirm her identification. It took Ms. Tracy multiple phone calls before she was able to finally convince someone to come out and take a look. Audubon members were well aware of the extreme rarity of finding a second Band-tailed Pigeon in this state, and the fact that it was reported in a backyard in Charlotte made them even more skeptical. They also knew a novice birder could easily mistake one of the wide variety of color morphs of local Rock Pigeons with a picture in a book. After continued perseverance, however, Ms. Tracy was able to convince David Wright to stop by her home to take a quick look.

Wright wasn't expecting much when he arrived at the house. He was shown to the backyard and was completely stunned when, sure enough, a Band-tailed Pigeon appeared. He immediately knew that he had to get a photograph to document this rare find. Then, his heart sank when quick as a flash, a Cooper's Hawk swooped down, and the pigeon darted away, the hawk trailing close on its tail. Wright was sure the bird had been killed. Much to their surprise and delight, the Band-tailed Pigeon reappeared later without a scratch.

Birders from both Carolinas and beyond were soon streaming to Tracy's backyard to see this western vagrant. The bird was photographed, and videotaped by many and it was seen regularly into the month of April. Then, it disappeared, as suddenly as it had arrived. The North Carolina Bird Records Committee reviewed a written report of this bird along with both photographs and videotaped evidence, and they accepted the record as valid. The committee debated the possibility that the bird

was an escaped bird, but were unanimous in voting that all evidence indicated the pigeon was of wild origin.

On June 16, 2001, two more Band-tailed Pigeons were located on the Blue Ridge Parkway providing a third North Carolina report. Audio recordings were made of these birds calling. On January 7, 2014, an adult showed up at a backyard feeder in Manteo, NC, providing North Carolina's fourth record. This bird was visited by hundreds of birders and lingered until mid-April. Band-

tailed Pigeon has only been formally documented once in South Carolina. One was photographed in Georgetown on August 16, 1991. *Note: A sight report from a hunter in Sumter County, SC, in January 1980 was never confirmed.*

The Band-tailed Pigeon is listed on the Yellow Watch List of birds of the continental United States. It is a species with both “troubling” population declines and “high threats.” It is in need of conservation action.