

Common Ground-Dove *Columbina passerine*



Folk Name: Ground Dove, Mourning Dove

Status: Vagrant

Abundance: Very Rare

Habitat: Fields, open land, and bare ground with few, scattered small trees

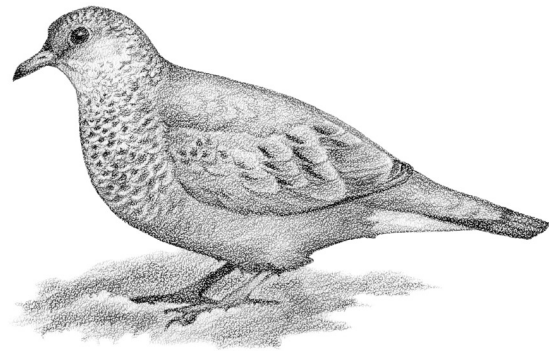
The Common Ground-Dove is a small, plump “bluebird-sized” dove that, at 5 ½ inches, is only about half the size of the Mourning Dove. This dove has a pinkish-orange bill with a black tip and cinnamon-colored primaries. It has a short tail and a scaled plumage pattern on its neck, breast, and nape. It has been described as an “exceedingly gentle” and “confiding” bird.

In the Carolinas, the breeding range of this dove appears to have expanded and contracted over the past 150 years. Ornithologists speculate that it was a widespread, but uncommon, breeding bird in North Carolina in the nineteenth century, and the state was the northern limit of its breeding range. One nest collected in Davidson County around 1897, was considered “the most northern record of this species breeding.” In South Carolina at that time, this dove was a permanent resident considered “exceedingly abundant” on the coast.

By the early twentieth century, “breeding ground-doves were unknown in North Carolina,” but several specimens of wandering birds were collected from the coast and the Piedmont of the state. One bird collected in Rutherford County was received by the State Museum in Raleigh on November 18, 1924, and one bird from Guilford County was received on November 18, 1933. A second so-called “invasion” along the coast of North Carolina began in the 1930s, and sporadic breeding was documented or suspected between Brunswick and Carteret County over the next 50 years.



Common Ground-Dove at McDowell Nature Preserve.
(Kevin Metcalf)



By the 1980s, there were none breeding in North Carolina, and in South Carolina, the breeding population was continuing a “precipitous” decline that had begun in the 1970s. By the end of the twentieth century, the Common Ground-Dove was “practically gone from North Carolina” and was designated state “threatened” in South Carolina. It is now the only dove species in South Carolina that is protected from harvest. Forty years of USGS Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a long-term population decline of this species across the Southeast. Biologists attribute the decline to several factors including: development, cat and raccoon predation, incidental hunting, and impacts from fire ants.

Common Ground-Doves occasionally wander into this region, usually during the fall. Robin Carter observed a pair in Kershaw County, SC, on June 29, 1987. John Cely reported one at Cheraw State Park in Chesterfield County on September 13, 1999. Ronny Roberts found one at the McDowell Nature Preserve in Mecklenburg County on October 16, 2002. This bird was relocated and seen by several observers, and a dropped feather was collected. It disappeared later the same day. Steven Glynn reported four present at the Carolina Sandhills NWR on September 1, 2007. This is the highest number found in the region.

Amazingly, a second Common Ground-Dove was found at McDowell Nature Preserve in the same spot as the first bird, 11 years after it was seen. This was an immature bird found by Marcia Howden on October 24, 2013. It was photographed the next day and was last seen flying over the open prairie restoration fields on 31 October. Amy Lykins photographed a Common Ground-Dove under her feeder near the town of Richfield in Stanly County on February 12, 2014, providing our only winter record. This bird appeared with a group of Mourning Doves and lingered 4 days. Charles Kahle described a Common Ground-Dove stopping at a “gravel/grassy driveway area” in Chesterfield County on June 2, 2014, providing a second summer season record.