

## THE CAROLINA TURTLE-DOVE.

†ECTOPISTES CAROLINENSIS, Linn.

PLATE CCLXXXVI.—MALES AND FEMALES.

I have tried, kind reader, to give you a faithful representation of two as gentle pairs of Turtles as ever cooed their loves in the green woods. I have placed them on a branch of *Stuartia*, which you see ornamented with a profusion of white blossoms, emblematic of purity and chastity.

Look at the female, as she assiduously sits on her eggs, embosomed among the thick foliage, receiving food from the bill of her mate, and listening with delight to his assurances of devoted affection. Nothing is wanting to render the moment as happy as could be desired by any couple on a similar occasion.

On the branch above, a love scene is just commencing. The female, still coy and undetermined, seems doubtful of the truth of her lover, and virgin-like resolves to put his sincerity to the test, by delaying the gratification of his wishes. She has reached the extremity of the branch, her wings and tail are already opening, and she will fly off to some more sequestered spot, where, if her lover should follow her with the same assiduous devotion, they will doubtless become as blessed as the pair beneath them.

The Dove announces the approach of spring. Nay, she does more:—she forces us to forget the chilling blasts of winter, by the soft and melancholy sound of her cooing. Her heart is already so warmed and so swelled by the ardour of her passion, that it feels as ready to expand as the buds on the trees are, under the genial influence of returning heat.

The flight of this bird is extremely rapid, and of long duration. Whenever it starts from a tree or the ground, on being unexpectedly approached, its wings produce a whistling noise, heard at a considerable distance. On such occasions, it frequently makes several curious windings through the air, as if to prove its capability of efficient flight. It seldom rises far above the trees, and as seldom passes through dense woods or forests, but prefers following their margins, or flying about the fences and fields. Yet, during spring, and particularly whilst the female is sitting on her eggs, the male rises as if about to ascend to a great height in the air, flapping his wings, but all of a sudden comes downwards again, describing a large circle, and sailing smoothly with wings and tail expanded, until in this manner he alights on





*Carolina Turtle Dove.*

1. Males. 2. Females.

*White flowered Quercus. Quercus Malacodendron.*

*Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon. F.R.S. E.L.S.*

*Litho Printed & Col'd by J. T. Bowen. Philad.*







the tree where his mate is, or on one very near it. These manœuvres are frequently repeated during the days of incubation, and occasionally when the male bird is courting the female. No sooner do they alight than they jerk out their tail in a very graceful manner, and balance their neck and head. Their migrations are not so extensive as those of the Wild Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratoria*); nor are they performed in such numbers, two hundred and fifty or three hundred Doves together being considered a large flock.

On the ground, along the fences, or on the branches of trees, the Carolina Turtle walks with great ease and grace, frequently jerking its tail. It is able to run with some swiftness when searching for food in places where it is scarce. It seldom bathes, but drinks by swallowing the water in long draughts, with the bill deeply immersed, frequently up to the eyes.

They breed in every portion of the United States that I have visited, and according to the temperature of different localities, rear either one or two broods in the season. In Louisiana, they lay eggs early in April, and sometimes in the month of March, and have there two broods. In the State of Connecticut, they seldom begin to lay before the middle of May, and as seldom have more than one brood. On the borders of Lake Superior, they are still later. They lay two eggs of a pure white colour, and having some degree of translucency. They make their nest in any kind of tree, on horizontal branches or twigs. It is formed of a few dry sticks, so loosely put together as to appear hardly sufficient to keep the eggs or young from falling.

The roosting places which the Carolina Turtles prefer are among the long grasses found growing in abandoned fields, at the foot of dry stalks of maize, or on the edges of meadows, although they occasionally resort to the dead foliage of trees, as well as that of different species of evergreens. But in all these places they rise and fly at the approach of man, however dark the night may be, which proves that the power of sight which they then possess is very great. They seldom place themselves very near each other when roosting on the ground, but sometimes the individuals of a flock appear diffused pretty equally over a whole field. In this particular, they greatly differ from our Common Wild Pigeon, which settles in compact masses on the limbs of trees during the night. The Doves, however, like the Pigeons, are fond of returning to the same roosting grounds from considerable distances. A few individuals sometimes mix with the Wild Pigeons, as do the latter sometimes with the Doves.

The Turtle-Dove may with propriety be considered more as a gleaner than as a reaper of the husbandman's fields, scarcely ever committing any greater depredation than the picking up a few grains in seed-time, after



which it prefers resorting to those fields from which the grain has been cut and removed. It is a hardy bird, and stands the severest winters of our Middle States, where some remain the whole year.

The flesh of these birds is remarkably fine, when they are obtained young and in the proper season. Such birds become extremely fat, are tender and juicy, and in flavour equal in the estimation of some of my friends, as well as in my own, to that of the Snipe or even the Woodcock; but as taste in such matters depends much on circumstances, and perhaps on the whim of individuals, I would advise you, reader, to try for yourself. These birds require good shooting to bring them down, when on wing, for they fly with great swiftness, and not always in a direct manner. It is seldom that more than one can be killed at a shot when they are flying, and rarely more than two or three when on the ground, on account of their natural propensity to keep apart.

In winter, they approach the farm-houses, feed among the Poultry, Sparrows, Grakles, and many other birds, and appear very gentle; but no sooner are they frequently disturbed or shot at, than they become extremely shy. When raised from the nest, they are easily tamed. I have even known some instances of their breeding in confinement. When caught in traps and cooped, they feed freely, and soon become fat, when they are excellent for the table.

When shot, or taken alive in the hand, this and our other species of Pigeon, lose the feathers on the slightest touch, a circumstance peculiar to the genus, and to certain gallinaceous birds.

This species does not extend very far eastward or northward. It is exceedingly rare in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and none were seen by my party in Newfoundland or Labrador. Dr. RICHARDSON makes no mention of it as having been observed in the Fur Countries. Yet it was met with on the shores of the Columbia river by Mr. TOWNSEND, who informs me, that although *Ectopistes migratoria* is found on the Rocky Mountains, *E. carolinensis* and *Columba fasciata* are the only species which he observed on the Columbia. On the other hand, I found the present species abundant in the Texas, where it was breeding on the ground, as well as on low bushes, and feeding on blackberries late in the month of April.

The Carolina Dove breeds in aviaries, even although caught when old, raising several broods in the season, insomuch that my friends Dr. BACHMAN and Dr. SAMUEL WILSON of Charleston, have had to kill the young for the table. The former intimates to me that a male was put into a cage with a female European Turtle-Dove, on which they paired, formed a nest, and laid eggs, but the cage having accidentally fallen, the eggs, which now contained young, were broken, and the Carolina Dove escaped. The same



friend has found this species breeding on the ground in the States of New York and South Carolina, among tall wheat and rye. In the latter country it is very numerous during winter, and is shot in great numbers by sportsmen, who hide themselves under low huts at the foot of moderately tall trees, such as persimons, while their servants drive the Doves from the adjacent fields. In this manner more than a hundred have been shot by one man in the course of a morning. When snow is on the ground, wonderful havoc is committed among them, and he has heard of a party of sportsmen having shot about five hundred in one day.

The egg of the Carolina Dove measures one inch one-eighth in length, by five and a half eighths in breadth, is equally rounded at both ends, and is of a pure white colour, somewhat translucent.

The *Stuartia Malacodendron*, on which I have placed the two pairs alluded to at the commencement of this article, is a tree of small height, which grows in rich grounds at the foot of hills not far from water-courses. The wood is brittle and useless, the flower destitute of scent, but extremely agreeable to the eye. Little clusters of twenty or thirty of these trees are dispersed over the southernmost of the United States. I have never met with it in the Middle, Western or Northern Districts.

COLUMBA CAROLINENSIS, Linn. Syst. Nat., vol. i. p. 286.

CAROLINA PIGEON OR TURTLE-DOVE, *Columba carolinensis*, Wils. Amer. Orn., vol. v. p. 91.

COLUMBA CAROLINENSIS, Bonap. Syn., p. 119.

CAROLINA PIGEON OR TURTLE-DOVE, Nutt. Man., vol. i. p. 626.

CAROLINA TURTLE-DOVE, *Columba carolinensis*, Aud. Orn. Biog., vol. i. p. 91; vol. v. p. 555.

Male, 12, 17. Female, 11, 15½.

Breeds from Texas to Massachusetts, and throughout the interior to the eastern bases of the Rocky Mountains, and again on the Columbia river. Common. Resident in all the Southern Districts.

Adult Male.

Bill straight, of ordinary length, rather slender, broader than deep at the base, with a tumid fleshy covering, compressed towards the end, rather obtuse; upper mandible slightly declinate at the tip; edges involute. Head small. Neck slender. Body rather full. Legs short and strong; tarsus covered anteriorly with scutella, rather rounded; toes scutellate, slightly webbed at the base; claws short, depressed, obtuse.

Plumage compact on the back, blended and soft on the head, neck and under parts. Wings long, second quill longest. Tail wedge-shaped, long, of fourteen feathers, the middle ones tapering, the rest obtuse.

Bill blackish, at the base carmine-purple. Iris hazel; orbit greenish-blue.



Feet carmine-purple; claws dusky. Crown of the head, and upper part of the neck, bright greenish-blue; the rest of the upper parts, including the wing-coverts, light yellowish-brown, tinged with light blue, of which colour are the edges of the wings, and the outer webs of the quills towards the base. Some of the proximal wing-coverts spotted with black. Forehead and sides of the head brownish-yellow, which colour predominates on the under parts, the breast and neck tinged with blue, and the abdomen and under tail-coverts paler. Quills dusky, margined externally with whitish, the last secondaries light brown and spotted with black. The two middle tail-feathers, and the outer webs of the next five on each side like the back; all the feathers, excepting the middle ones, have a spot of black about an inch from their extremity, the space between which and the base is bright greenish-blue, that beyond it being paler and tinged with brown, excepting in the three outer feathers, where it is white, as is the outer web of the outermost.

Length 12 inches, extent of wings 17; bill along the ridge  $\frac{7}{12}$ , along the gap  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

#### Adult Female.

The female is somewhat duller in the tints of the plumage; the bright blue of the head is wanting, that part being coloured like the back; the neck and breast have less blue, and the white of the tail is less pure.

Length 11 inches, extent of wings  $15\frac{1}{2}$ ; bill as in the male.

### THE WHITE-FLOWERED STUARTIA.

STUARTIA MALACODENDRON, *Willd. Sp. Pl.*, vol. iii. p. 840.—STUARTIA VIRGINICA, *Pursh*, *Fl. Amer.*, vol. ii. p. 451.—MONADELPHIA POLYANDRIA, *Linn.*

A small tree, with smooth spreading branches; ovate-acute leaves, generally entire at the margins; axillar flowers, which are solitary, or two together; large white corollas, of five rounded petals, and reddish-purple stamina. The leaves vary in being sometimes serrated, and more or less downy. It flowers from June to September.





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1. Males. 2. Females.

*White flowered Quarta. Quarta Malacodendron.*

*Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon. F.R.S. E.L.S.*

*Litho Printed & Col'd by J. T. Bowen. Philad.*





Audubon, John James. 1842. "The Carolina Turtle-Dove, *Ectopostes carolinensis*, Linn. [Pl. 286]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 5, 36–40. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319401>.

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