

Feathered world domination?

By Larry Hyslop



An Eurasian collared dove showing the distinctive neck band

Before I sat down to write this column, I looked out my front door. Two Eurasian collared doves were flying over the street and three were perched on telephone wires. Then I looked out my back door, where I found four doves on my rail fence and two others flying over my neighbor's house. Not bad for a bird that only showed up in Elko's Christmas Bird Count in 2006. The 2012 count found close to 900 doves in Elko.

Collared doves are larger than the native mourning doves and carry distinguishing black rings around the back half of their necks. These birds do not migrate seasonally. The first time I saw them, I was shocked to see doves flying among snow-covered trees on a very cold morning.

Such sightings around my house are not unusual, since I can find these non-native doves any time I walk outside. Seeing Eurasian collared doves this summer was more distressing. Telegraph Cove is a picturesque spot in British Columbia, located near the northern end of Vancouver Island. Daily boat tours go out to watch orcas and black bears wander through the area. While sitting on the boardwalk, I watched seagulls walking about on the marina docks as bald eagles called in the trees. Such a tranquil scene was broken, however, when a group of Eurasian collared doves flew overhead.

But these introduced doves are seen all over Vancouver Island. The four western Canadian Provinces report populations of collared doves. Southeastern Alaska is starting to see them also.

They were first seen nesting in North America south of Miami, Florida, in 1982. Project Feederwatch is a group of people who report the birds seen at their backyard feeders. Their web site reports "No species of bird has colonized North America at the speed with which the Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) has marched across the continent." They report the fastest colonization is occurring to the northwest from Florida to Alaska but I also found a Maine Birds web site reporting their first sighting.

In the 1800s, the collared dove seemed to be only an Asian bird, living in dry, open habitat. During the 1900s, it invaded Europe, reaching Britain in 1953. It spread north into Norway, east into Russia and south into Africa. It is known to have reached the Bahamas in the 1970s and from there into Florida.

They are very strong dispersers, meaning individuals commonly investigate and move into new areas. Some of their rapid movement, such as into North America, was probably by people transporting them as pets.

Various nations and individuals have dreamed of world domination, but with no success. Maybe they just needed feathers.

Elko Daily Free Press, "Nature Notes", 10/12/2013

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