

PIED IMPERIAL PIGEON

Ducula bicolor (Scopoli)

Columba bicolor Scopoli, *Del. Flor. et Faun. Insubr.*, fasc. 2, 1786, p. 94. ('Nova Guiana' i.e. New Guinea.)

OTHER NAMES

Torres Strait Pigeon, Nutmeg Pigeon, Torresian Imperial Pigeon, White Nutmeg Pigeon, Spice Pigeon, Australian Pied Imperial Pigeon.

DESCRIPTION

Length 38 cm.

ADULTS

General plumage white to cream-white; variable pale grey suffusion on forecrown and face, almost lacking in some birds and in others extending over entire head and neck; primary-coverts, primaries and outer secondaries black with silver-grey reflection; black spots on lower flanks; black subterminal band on feathers of lateral under tail-coverts; under tail-coverts often suffused yellow; outermost tail-feathers white with broad black tips and broad black margins on outer webs, remaining tail-feathers white at bases and black distally; bill greenish-yellow; iris dark brown; eyering pale blue; legs and feet greenish-grey; weight males 378–540 g, females 380–525 g.
34 males: wing 222–250 (234.8) mm, tail 115–135 (126.8) mm, bill 24–30 (27.1) mm, tarsus 27–39 (31.9) mm.
24 females: wing 221–235 (229.4) mm, tail 112–130 (121.4) mm, bill 25–29 (27.0) mm, tarsus 28–34 (31.4) mm.

JUVENILES

Like adults, but general plumage variably suffused pale grey; very fine buff-yellow margins to feathers of head, lower back, abdomen and upper wing-coverts; primary-coverts, primaries and outer secondaries very dark grey; outer under tail-coverts buff-brown with diffuse dark spotting on basal coverts and longest coverts with broad brownish-grey tips; outer greater underwing-coverts variably suffused grey; outermost tail-feathers not tipped black; bill pale yellow with purple-grey at base; eyering paler bluish-grey; legs and feet pale blue-grey with purplish tinge.

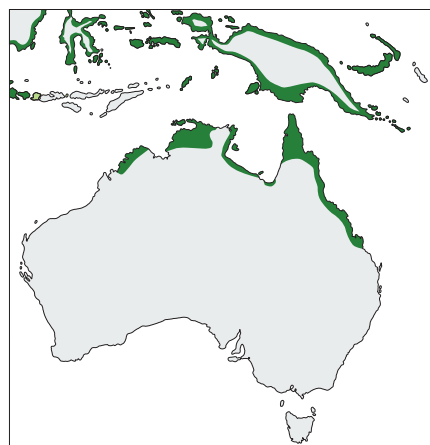
DISTRIBUTION

Andaman and Nicobar Islands in Bay of Bengal, south-western Myanmar, and Philippine Islands east and south through South-East Asia to Indonesian Archipelago, New Guinea, east to the Bismarck Archipelago, and northern Australia.

SUBSPECIES

Taxonomic treatments of the *D. bicolor* complex have varied from recognition of four species to the inclusion of all forms in a single species. Plumage features used in taxonomically differentiating populations have been the extent of grey on the head and patterns of black in the tail and on the under tail-coverts, both of which are variable, and a yellow suffusion over the entire body in the distinctive population on the Bismarck Archipelago and Admiralty Islands. Referring to the then recognition of four species – *D. bicolor*, *D. luctuosa*, *D. melanura* and *D. spilorrhoea* – subsequently adopted by Peters (1937), Goodwin (1960) reported that he had been unable to find any evidence in the literature or in data from specimen labels to contradict the claim made by Siebers (1930) that no two of these supposed species are known to breed in the same locality as any other, and only *D. bicolor*, a form which inhabits small islands and wanders much in search of food, has been collected at times within the range of other forms. Goodwin concluded that slight, though fairly constant, differences in plumage colouration could justify recognition of three species, but *melanura* should be treated as a race of *bicolor*. After re-examining plumage differences and measurements, Johnstone (1981b) concluded that this group of pigeons is best treated as one widespread species, but acknowledged that more work is required to elucidate the distribution, local movements and ecological requirements of subspecies in Sulawesi and the Moluccas. Noting that in Sulawesi *bicolor* and *luctuosa* seem to overlap on the Minahassa Peninsula and northern islets, White and Bruce (1986) treated these forms as separate species, though acknowledging that *luctuosa* could be a casual visitor, and *melanura* was considered to be a morph of *bicolor*. Subsequently, Bruce (1989) afforded specific status also to *subflavescens* from the Bismarck Archipelago and Admiralty Islands, and separated the population from the Kimberley Division of Western Australia in a new species, *D. constans*, because of a consistently grey head and black spotting on the under tail-coverts. Johnstone points out that, on morphological grounds, the Kimberley population scarcely warrants subspecific differentiation (in Johnstone and Storr 1998). I examined specimens from the Kimberley Division and found that, although they do tend to have more grey on the head than in specimens from the Northern Territory, especially in males, subspecific differentiation is not warranted because of individual variation in both populations.

While acknowledging that further work on these pigeons is required, Christidis and Boles (2008) noted that the examination undertaken by Johnstone is still the most comprehensive revision, so his treatment of all forms in a single species was adopted. They noted also that most recent authors, including Schodde (1997), do not even recognise *constans* as a valid subspecies. In this work, I am concerned primarily with Australian populations, and am following



OPPOSITE:

Pied Imperial Pigeon

Ducula bicolor spilorrhoea

with red condoo *Mimusops elengi*.

Left: ANWC B05871 adult ♂

Centre Island,

Sir Edward Pellew Islands, NT,

14 February 1967.

Right: ANWC 15883 adult ♀

Centre Island,

Sir Edward Pellew Islands, NT,

27 October 1967.