



### Description

There are two species of Turtle-Dove present in the south-west of Western Australia. They were introduced to the state in the late 1800s from Africa and Asia. They are not known to cause significant problems for agricultural production or to compete with native species.

The Laughing Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, is also known as the Senegal Dove or Laughing Dove. It is a small brown dove 24-27 cm in length and 85-124 g in weight. The head and neck are dull brownish purple, the upper back and upper wings are mottled reddish brown and grey and the wings and lower back are bluish grey (Figure 1). The tail is dark grey, tipped with white, and the breast is purplish brown becoming white on the belly and under the tail. The area just below the throat is reddish brown, speckled with black. The iris is dark brown and the legs are purplish pink. Immature birds are more reddish brown in colour and do not have a blue-grey wing patch, or a neck patch. The bird has a musical, laughing or bubbling call of 'coo-oo coocoo'.



Figure 1 Laughing Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* (Photo Babs & Bert Wells / DEC).

The Spotted Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*, is also known as the Spotted Dove or the Indian Turtle-Dove. It is larger than the Laughing Turtle-Dove. It is 28-32 cm in length and 135-179 g in weight. Its upper parts are generally grey-brown and its wings, back and tail are brown. It has a black patch on its nape that is spotted with white. Its chin is whitish and its throat and breast are purplish pink. The tail is long and the outer feathers are tipped with white. The iris is yellow, orange-yellow or pinkish white and the legs are pinkish red.

Immature birds are duller in colour and do not have the nape patch. This dove has a mellow, musical 'coo' or 'coocoo, croo' call.

The typical display flight of both species involves birds flying steeply upwards for 30-40 m with clapping wings, before gliding downwards with spread wings and tail. Immediately after landing, particularly on a wire, the spotted turtle-dove raises and lowers its tail.



Figure 2 Head of a Spotted Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* (Photo R Major © Australian Museum).

### Distribution and Habitat

The Laughing Turtle-Dove inhabits woodlands, towns, villages, parks, gardens and cultivated areas. Its natural distribution is Africa and southern Asia including Israel, Jordan and Asia Minor, Arabia, Turkestan, Iran and Afghanistan.

This species was introduced into Western Australia from the Perth Zoological Gardens in 1898 and the population spread rapidly after the 1930s. It has been recorded on Rottnest and Garden Islands and is found in many country centres from the Hutt River, east to Morawa, Merredin and Kulin, and south to Bunbury, Donnybrook, Kojonup and Ongerup. It is also found in isolated colonies at Southern Cross, Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie and is a casual visitor to other locations. This bird is very common in the suburbs of Perth and in larger wheatbelt towns.

Elsewhere in Australia, the Laughing Turtle-Dove has been recorded in New South Wales and Queensland, but it has not permanently established outside Western Australia.

The Spotted Turtle-Dove occurs in open forest, woodlands and cultivated habitat, parks, rivers and residential and urban areas. The bird's natural distribution is southern Asia, from north-eastern China, Taiwan, Hainan, west to Pakistan and India, and south to Sri Lanka, Burma, Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, Lesser Sunda Islands, Borneo and Palawan.

The Spotted Turtle-Dove was also introduced into Western Australia from the Perth Zoological Gardens in 1898. Although it became established in the Perth Metropolitan area prior to 1912, birds were still being released in country centres in the 1920s. From the 1930s, it steadily increased in range, reaching Rottnest Island in 1937. The Spotted Turtle-Dove is now established around Perth, including Rottnest and Garden Island. This dove is moderately common in Perth and a casual visitor to other locations on the Swan Coastal Plain.

Elsewhere in Australia the Spotted Turtle-Dove is well established in mainly coastal areas from northern Queensland to South Australia and it occurs in Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

### Diet

Turtle-Doves are largely dependant on humans for food. Around Perth the most important foods are grains used to feed domestic and zoo animals. These include Wheat *Triticum aestivum*, Oats *Avena sativa*, Sorghum *Sorghum bicolor* and Maize *Zea mays*. Other foods include scraps of bread and the seeds of garden and road-side plants, such as Winter Grass *Poa annua*.

### Breeding

These dove species build a frail platform nest of twigs and rootlets concealed in trees or shrubs. The Laughing Turtle-Dove lays two eggs from July to March, incubation lasts for 13-15 days and the young remain in the nest for 21-23 days. The Spotted turtle-Dove lays two eggs from June to January.

### Behaviour

Turtle-Doves are found singly or in small groups or flocks at food sources and watering points. They are sedentary.

### Damage

In Africa, the Laughing Turtle-Dove eats small seeds, corn and other crops when they are available. In the Fijian Islands, the Spotted Turtle-Dove is reported to damage rice crops.

In Adelaide, the Spotted Turtle-Dove reportedly eats olives. Turtle-Doves have been accused of spreading the Stick Fast Flea *Echidnophaga gallinaceae* to domestic poultry and they also carry a beak and feather disease which is related to (but distinct from) psittacine circoviral disease.

In Western Australia, both species of Turtle-Dove frequent backyards, eating food provided for chickens and aviary birds. The doves are also attracted to residential areas by food provided to them by residents. They can cause a nuisance by eating garden seeds and by fouling outdoor living areas with their droppings and nests.

Turtle-Doves do not appear to compete with native bird species for nest sites or food. They are a common food item of native birds of prey in Western Australia, including the Square-tailed Kite *Hamirostra isura*, Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*, Collared Sparrowhawk *A. cirrocephalus*, Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*, and the Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis*. However, the presence of the doves near aviaries can attract birds of prey which, in turn, may scare the aviary birds.

### Status

Laughing and Spotted Turtle-Doves are 'unprotected fauna' under provisions of the *Wildlife Conservation Act 1950*, administered by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). They may be controlled humanely without the need to seek approval from the Department of Environment and Conservation.

### Further Reading

- [Spotted Turtle-Dove](#), Birds in Backyards, Australian Museum.

### References

Morecombe, M. (2000) Field Guide to Australian Birds. Steve Parish Publishing, Archerfield.

Johnstone, R.E. and Storr, G.M. (1998) Handbook of Western Australian Birds. Volume 1. Non-passerines. WA Museum.

Long, J.L. (1981) Introduced Birds of the World. Reed Books, Sydney.

### Further Information

Contact your local office of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

See the Department's website for the latest information:  
[www.naturebase.net](http://www.naturebase.net).

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