

# Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

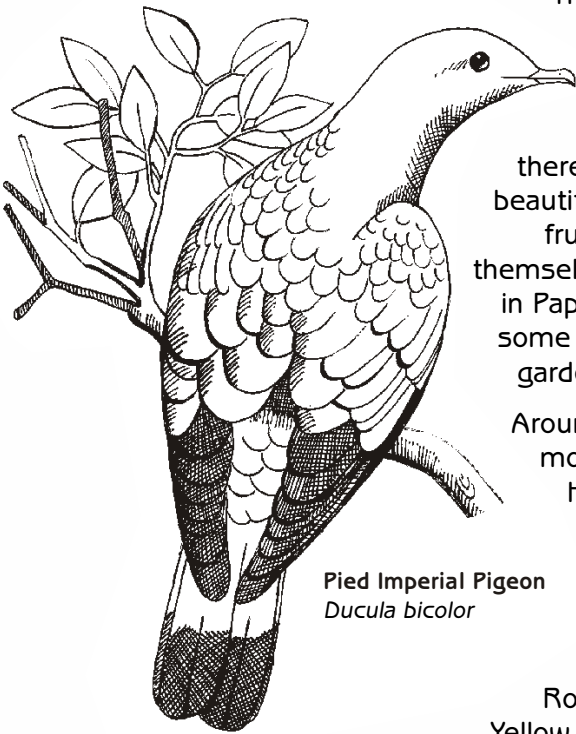
## THE PIED IMPERIAL PIGEON

For most Top End residents the Pied Imperial Pigeon is no stranger, but the name certainly may be. For most of us know this bird as the Torres Strait Pigeon, it's former common name.

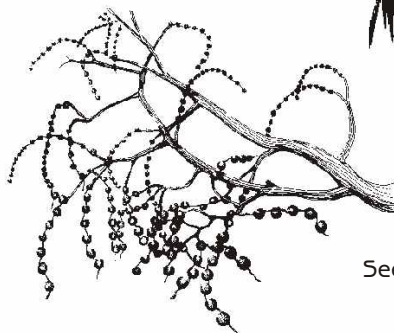
The **Pied Imperial Pigeon** is a large, plump, mainly white pigeon with black tail-tip and flight feathers. If you observe closely when they are flying, there are black bars under the tail. They call with a deep "coo-woo" and are *migratory* coastal birds. This means that they live in the Top End in large numbers during the wet season when there is a steady supply of monsoon forest fruits. So you may see this beautiful fruit-eater in your backyard happily swallowing the bright orange fruits of a native favourite, the Carpentaria Palm. They also gorge themselves on the ripe fruits of figs. But during the dry season they holiday in Papua New Guinea and most are gone from April to August. However some birds remain all year long, for in Darwin the beautiful tropical palm gardens, that are watered throughout the year, provide a good home.

Around Darwin you may see them in small monsoon forest patches like those in Holmes Jungle, Howard Springs and Berry Springs Nature Parks and Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve. These little areas are really important for a whole lot of fruit eating birds such as **Pied Imperial Pigeons**, Rose-crowned Fruit-doves, Figbirds, Yellow Orioles, Common Koels and Great Bowerbirds as well as Flying Foxes.

Carpentaria Palm  
*Carpentaria acuminata*



Pied Imperial Pigeon  
*Ducula bicolor*



Seeds

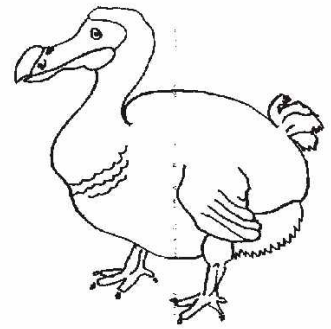
### DID YOU KNOW...

Scientists have found that in an average sized monsoon forest patch an estimated 190 seeds a day may be deposited from visiting birds. That's a lot of banking!

Around late August many flocks of these birds return to Australia to breed. Offshore mangrove covered islands or onshore Eucalypt woodlands make perfect spots. They build a flimsy platform nest of twigs and leaves on leafy tree branches. On this they lay one or two white eggs. Both parents then take turns to incubate the eggs and continue sharing the housework and feeding of their young when they are born (after about 27 days). The parents collect their food from the mainland on their day off.

## PERILOUS PLIGHT OF THE PIGEON

Pigeons are mostly threatened by people hunting them for food and through the destruction of the places they like to live (habitats). In the Top End some causes of destruction of monsoon forest patches include: frequent hot fires late in the dry season, invasion by weeds like Mimosa or Gamba Grass or feral animals like pigs, as well as clearing for farming activities. Yet our pigeons largely survive. We must be careful if we want to keep it that way. On the bonus side in the Northern Territory the proportion of such patches within parks (conservation reserves) is relatively high, and includes some of Australia's most significant National Parks.



Some American cousins were not so lucky. During the nineteenth century the Passenger Pigeon lived in flocks of about 2000 million birds. Unfortunately the last one died in 1914 at Cincinnati Zoo.

## WHAT'S ON THE MENU!

Ever wondered what a baby pigeon is called? Interested in what these young eat? Find out by using the grid to decode our pigeon paragraph.

	1	2	3	4	5
A	A	B	C	D	E
B	F	G	H	I	J
C	K	L	M	N	O
D	P	Q	R	S	T
E	U	V	W	X	Y

Baby pigeons are called       . They    '

eat      right away but are fed on a special

diet that their parents make in their

It looks a bit like



Want to learn more about the Pied Imperial Pigeon?

Check out the affordable field guides *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by either *Simpson & Day* or the one by *Pizzey & Knight*.