

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WYOMING

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

Biology No. 216

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Subject: MOURNING DOVE*

General

The mourning dove (Zenaida macroura) is found in a wide variety of habitats including suburbs, farmlands, croplands, grasslands, open forest environments, and desert areas close to water.

Food Requirements

The mourning dove's diet is almost entirely seeds. Weed seeds, tree seeds, and grain from cultivated crops are consumed. The seeds from grasses, sparges, legumes, and composites were eaten in Missouri. The bulk of their diet consists of those seeds that happen to be in plentiful supply in a particular habitat at a specific time of year. One study found that mourning doves in Alabama preferred to feed in large open areas that were relatively free of vegetation which could limit their view.

Water Requirements

One study stated that doves require water daily. Water sources may be a limiting factor in arid areas. Another study found doves to be within 3 to 4 mi (4.8 to 8 km) of water in Iowa. Doves can go several days without drinking. One study identified preferred watering areas in California as having sandy, gently sloping edges devoid of vegetation.



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*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

Cover Requirements

Nests are commonly found in a mixture of isolated, woody patches near the edges of fields, pastures, or other clearings. Nests are seldom located in dense forests. Ground nests are used by doves in western Colorado. One study found parklike areas to be preferred dove nesting habitat in Texas. Another study found dove nests in Georgia most frequently located along forest edges, primarily in peninsulas of forest or hedgerows that extended out into fields or other open country. In continuous forested areas, the majority of nests were located either on stream borders or at junctions between forest types. Dove population density appeared to be roughly correlated with the linear amount of forest edge. Nests in Alabama were usually in areas free of any nearby concealing vegetation. In Texas, nesting sites are found to be clear of concealing vegetation for a height of 8 to 12 ft (2.4 to 3.6 m) under the tree canopy, providing an open view on all sides.

A preferred nest site is usually the horizontal limb of a tree. The availability of openly growing trees in, hedgerows, orchards, windbreaks, or fields is important for suitable nest sites. The number and distribution of these trees determine the breeding density of doves in that habitat.

Large trees are most often used for nesting. The average dbh of nest trees in the midwest was found to be approximately 19 in. (62.5 cm). In central Nebraska, the average dbh of trees used was 10.2 in. (25.5 cm). In various studies around the U.S., the height of mourning dove nests above the ground has been found to range from 9 ft (2.7 m) to 30 ft (9.1 m). Perching sites near the nest are desirable.

Special Habitat Requirements

Roosting sites in trees are desirable. Roosting may occur along sheltered southern exposures during stormy weather.

Interspersion Requirements

Desirable habitat for mourning doves occurs in farmland with scattered trees or shrubs or in open country with scattered woody plants. Woody plants are more vital in the form of individual plants than as extensive cover.

Doves in Colorado are found from the plains into the foothills up to 7,000 ft (2,100 m).

Special Considerations

Farming and the presence of cropland increases habitat suitability for mourning doves. Irrigation systems supply water throughout its habitat. "The clearing of forests for farming extended the area of dove habitat and continued farming maintains it."