



## **Birds of Peace & Love or Rats with Wings**

**By Paul Gibbs**

How often have these terms been used along with the name “dove” to describe our wonderful birds? Depending on what side of the fence you sit determines your feelings and description of the bird scientifically named as “Columba livia” (Rock Pigeon) with the family to which both pigeons and doves belong being known as “Columbidae” that includes around 310 species.

It’s amazing how people’s perception of the two birds (pigeons and doves) are viewed. Doves and pigeons are from the same family as mentioned above, yet elicit quite different reactions from the general population, “Stool Pigeon” and “Pigeon Toed” are phrases with negative connotations, where as “Dovetail” is a term that gauges a more positive response.

How would it be if the United Nations changed its symbol of a dove to a pigeon? Would the manufactures of Dove Soap increase its sales by renaming its product Pigeon Soap? What about Dove Chocolate? Would we accord the same respect to the Bank of America and Visa credit cards both of which have doves as part of their logo if they were to change them to pigeons? The same could be asked of Christmas cards and releases at weddings and funerals of just plain grey pigeons. It’s marvellous how companies, authorities and the general public perceive both these birds. One as being

negative, the other positive. The difference between the emotional reactions caused by these two birds is quite remarkable.

To quote part of what Robert Wright Campbell suggested was that people and pigeons are curiously much alike, that is to say qualities of fidelity, affection, love courage, determination and pride when they are at their best. In some things they shame us, once mated, they wed for life unless forcibly separated. When set to the task, such as a long race, they will persevere and endure through measures of hell that only the best of men will willingly undertake.

He suggests that there are other more allusive facets to our fascinations with both pigeons and doves that are more to do with denial and dreams that probably influences our prospective of these two birds. The pigeon symbolizes who we are, whereas the dove represents the "other" who we would like to be. As the pigeon and the dove belong to the same family, so too do these two birds represent aspects of the one, or same personality. The pigeon is the "ordinary", the "every person" who we are in our daily lives. The dove, on the other hand, speaks to our hearts, opens the envelope of our dreams. The dove is what we aspire to, what we fantasize about becoming, she is our deepest desire coming into being. She is magnificent, beautiful, and exquisite: often out of reach, never to be realized.

Pigeon or dove? Is there any interest in the ordinary pigeon? Charles Darwin, himself a pigeon fancier, wrote about the pigeon in "Origin of the Species" and that when we examine the biological facts, starting at what should be the least controversial, defining the differences between "dove" and "pigeon", we are confronted by the disturbing news that there is no zoological distinction between them. "Pigeon" is the term that is usually applied to the larger species and "dove" to the smaller ones, but they are of the same family, the family "Columbidae". This may come as a surprise, as many regard pigeons as pests yet see doves as symbols of higher virtues, such as peace and love. Prejudice can be levelled at firmly held views concerning the humble pigeon. Substitute "dove" and note if opinions change.

All pigeons and doves are direct descendants of the blue rock dove/pigeon. Charles Darwin, whose interest in pigeons sparked his theory of heredity, stood by his theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics. Darwin wrote: "Great are the differences between the breeds of the pigeon, I am fully convinced that all are descended from the rock dove "Columba livia". In 2004 British and American ornithologists officially renamed the Rock Dove to that of Rock Pigeon.

Pigeons and doves are found in every continent except Antarctica with a preference for the tropics, and have the remarkable ability to adapt to a variety of different environments.

All fancy pigeons and doves; rollers, tumblers, fantails, pouters and the many others all descend from their common ancestor, the rock pigeon due to the genetic plasticity along with genetic mutations have revealed amazing variations in shape and size.

Pigeons have had, and to some extent to this very day still play a role in both religion and mythology in nearly every culture. Here in Australia, in Aboriginal Dreamtime pigeons have key roles in several legends (so much for the pigeon being an introduced specie, especially if Charles Darwin's theory of "Origin of the Species" is correct).

In the religious world, doves and pigeons have been mentioned in the Bible more than any other bird. One writer holds that the dove is indisputably the most important bird in the Bible. So much then for our local and state politicians (apart from those that are atheists) that when sworn in to office, do so with their hand on the Bible. They would have us believe that they hold all that is written and referred to in the Bible as true, and hold holy the teachings and scriptures. Keep in mind though that when it comes to our pigeons, that not too many of them regard them as a sacred bird in any way, but "Rats with Wings".

The well-known story of Noah's Ark includes a dove/pigeon being sent out to see if it can find land. Perhaps the dove was actually a homing pigeon as it returned to the ark twice. (Keep in mind that true doves don't actually home as do pigeons). The role of the dove in the story of Noah has bestowed upon it the characteristics of loyalty and trustworthiness.

In many ancient societies the pigeon was revered and was part of many ceremonies. The Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Aztecs and Hebrews along with many other cultures held the pigeon in high regard.

In Christianity the dove/pigeon is the most common symbol of the Holy Spirit, one of the Three Persons of the Trinity. At the Annunciation the angel Gabriel tells Mary that during her conception the Holy Spirit will overshadow her. In religious artwork of the Annunciation the Holy Spirit is usually depicted as a dove/pigeon.

At the Baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is portrayed as a dove/pigeon, and it remained on him (according to John 1:32).

In Islam doves/pigeons are held to be sacred. This is unusual in that neither pigeons/doves are mentioned in the Koran, yet reverence is shown to them by Muslims. In around 1915 there was a pigeon shrine known as Kaptar-Mazzar near Hotan in Xinjiang, where Muslims would dismount and approach the area with reverence. In Istanbul there is a Mosque of doves/pigeons. Around the holy building the nests are kept safe, for they are not allowed to be disturbed.

Look in literature, there is no bird so persecuted as the dove/pigeon (even up until the present day) nevertheless it was she that God chose to be sacrificed on his alter. God said; "Offer me in holocaust not those who persecute but those who are persecuted".

**Most of what has been written above are extracts/quotes from a wonderful book just called "Pigeon" by Barbara Allen (see attached cover photo).** This book is indispensable as a reference book for all those not only interested in the history of the pigeon down through the ages, but as a resource to refer to when questioned as to

the worth of our pigeons when dealing with neighbours and/or local authorities. There are also many interesting facts that will not only make you more informed as to the history of our birds, but it would make a good reference for school projects for either your children/grandchildren.

It's interesting to note that Australia has several species of pigeons that are all deemed to be "native" to this country, yet the homing pigeon is seen to be an "introduced" specie. If Darwin is correct and all doves and pigeons descend from the grey Rock Pigeon then does it matter if the homing pigeon is only the latest specie to arrive here? After all we are also an "introduced specie" who's DNA can be traced back to Asia, Africa and Europe, so too for the Peregrine Falcon, found on all continents of world apart from the Antarctica (just like the homing pigeon).

In the overall scheme of things in this the "new age" of Global thinking and theories, then maybe the humble Rock Pigeon should now be classified as native specie. After all, many of us that were born here along with our parents and grandparents would not think of them selves as introduced specie but as Australians, albeit that their ancestry could be linked back to some other global country.

**Foot note:**

I would like to thank the publisher Reaktion Books Ltd for their kind permission to reproduce much of the above content. Anyone wishing to obtain a copy can contact [www.bookdepository.com](http://www.bookdepository.com) and search for the book "Pigeon" by Barbara Allen.

In closing, the following quote by P K Shaw may well apply to people in this modern day with regards to pigeons: ***"People do not change with the times; they change the times"***.