

Celebrating Ohio Wildlife: The Mourning Dove

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For those of you that have been following our Ohio Wildlife Series, you will notice that we have touched on quite a bit of animals that find their home right here in Ohio. Some may be thinking that we have hit many species, but in fact, we have not even scratched at the surface. For this week's feature, we will go to the birds and talk about the Mourning Dove. All the bird watchers out there will be sure to take interest in this article!

The Mourning Dove is found well throughout the United States in a year-round capacity while they will be found in the northern plains only during their breeding seasons. Primarily a ground forager, this species will primarily search for various seeds with their favorite being millet. Mourning Doves will swallow seeds and store them in an enlarged part of the esophagus called the crop which is known to handle 17,200 bluegrass seeds according to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Once the crop is filled, they will fly to a perch they feel is safe and digest their meal. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology notes that Mourning Doves primarily make their perch on telephone lines with their flight being rapid with utmost precision in flying a straight line as their wings will make a loud whistling sound as they prepare for their flight.

This species is an overall brown color with dark gray wings and a long, narrowing tail with bordering white spots. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), usually in the spring, with have patches of green and pink and bears resemblance of the extinct passenger pigeon. Cornell writes that during the breeding season, it is common to see a group of three doves flying in a close nit formation which is more of a social display as the lead bird is the male of a mated pair, the second is an unmated male shoos his rival away from an area he hopes to nest, and the third being the female of the mated pair.

Once the warm days of spring arrive, the Mourning Dove will begin their nesting activities with their nest generally being placed in various tree species, particularly conifers, or shrubs although they have been known to utilize buildings as a nesting site. According to ODNR, eggs are laid in clutches which consist of two eggs, laid in March or early April with an average incubation timeframe of about 13-14 days.

The Mourning Dove likes to take up a home near residences in both rural and suburban areas nesting in the shade trees generally found in those areas. They also like the bird feeders that many have in their landscaping and are very appreciative of food provided for them. ODNR writes that it is not all that uncommon to see members of this species foraging in farm fields taking up a nest in fencerows or the edge of wooded areas. After reading this article so far, are you left wondering how the Mourning Dove got its name? This species gets its name for its low pitched, sad song.

What can you do to aid the Mourning Dove? As mentioned above, this species likes coniferous trees or shrubs and millet seed. By planting dense shrubs or conifer trees in your landscaping, that will help provide nesting

sites. Cornell suggest scattering the seed either directly on the ground or in feeders with an additional suggestion of keeping your cats inside as birds that spend a majority of their time on the ground find themselves vulnerable to prowling cats.

Have you seen a Mourning Dove before? We would enjoy seeing your photos! This is a bird species that you can find everywhere you go in Ohio and beyond and one that will be sure to grace your shrubs if they also have plenty of seeds scattered as well! Hopefully you know just a little bit more about the Mourning Dove and one more animal that calls Ohio home. Stay tuned as we have many more amazing animals to cover!