
INVASION FROM THE MONGOL EMPIRE

By Randall D. Babb ■ Photographs by George Andrejko



Another invader, the house sparrow, is now one of our most common birds.



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Recognized as one of the most formidable and successful military leaders in history, Genghis Khan left a legacy: a Mongol Empire that later encompassed millions of square miles and included much of what is now eastern Europe and Asia. However, even his conquests pale in comparison with those of a small bird that already occupies three continents and is rapidly spreading across another two, achieving success the Great Khan knew only in his most ambitious dreams.

In recent years, most of us (if we were paying attention) heard a new bird call in our neighborhood. That raspy “whirrrrrrr” belongs to the Eurasian collared-dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), which made its way to the United States in the early 1980s from introduced populations in the Bahamas. Quickly spreading across the nation, it has become one of our most common urban birds, perhaps even rivaling in some areas that other infamous foreign invader, the house sparrow.

Eurasian collared-doves are members of a diverse genus of Old World doves found in Asia, Europe and Africa. Most of us have witnessed their stiff-winged courtship flights, even if we didn’t realize what we were seeing. Interestingly, their rapid expansion is primarily attributable to their reproductive prowess. These birds have been known to lay another clutch of eggs while chicks are still in the nest. Given a potentially year-long nesting season in warmer climates, a single pair may produce more than 14 young a year.

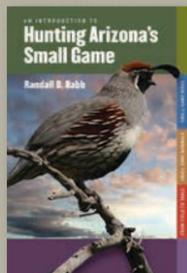
Their genus name, *Streptopelia*, means “dove with a necklace,” referring to the black band on the back of the neck. Their specific name, *decaocto*, derives from the Greek word for the number 18, “dekaokto.” It refers to a Greek legend about an underpaid servant girl who implores the gods to inform others she is being paid only 18 pieces (coins) annually. The gods answer her prayers by creating a dove whose call is “dekaokto, dekaokto” to let the world know of her plight — a solution that seems a lot more complicated than merely arranging for a raise.

Eurasian collared-doves are found statewide, usually associated with urban and urban-fringe settings and nearby agricultural areas. Recently, they have pushed into adjacent natural habitats, where they build nests in ironwood and paloverde trees. Collared-doves prefer places with tall trees that provide roosting and nesting cover.

“whirrrrrrr”



“An Introduction to Hunting Arizona’s Small Game,” by Randall D. Babb, gives expert tips for hunting Arizona’s small game birds and mammals, from doves and quails to squirrels and rabbits. This lavishly illustrated book includes detailed descriptions of small game animals and specialized information about their behavior and habits. It will help new and experienced hunters alike select the right firearm, gear up for the hunt, succeed in the field and care for the harvest. **The book is available for \$16.95 at all Arizona Game and Fish offices, or visit www.azgfd.gov/publications** to download and print an order form.



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As collared-dove numbers continue to increase, they may eventually compete with native doves for other resources, such as food or roosting sites. Eurasian collared-doves are managed in a manner that favors Arizona’s native dove species. A year-round hunting season without bag limits means that with the purchase of a hunting license, a hunter can pursue these birds all year long.

Though exceedingly abundant, collared-doves can be difficult for hunters to bag because they are seldom found far from urbanized areas, where hunting opportunities are limited. Hunters interested in doing their part to curb this current Mongol invasion (and securing a tasty meal in the process) should scout potential roosting, loafing, feeding and watering areas near urban settings. Look at abandoned farms or in urban-fringe locations where large trees are present. Much like other doves, Eurasian collared-doves visit agricultural areas adjacent to urban areas to feed on grains such as sorghum, safflower, sunflower, corn and millet, or congregate at feed lots where they consume prodigious amounts of grain intended for cattle feed.

Pay special attention to the status of the area you plan to hunt. While it is legal to hunt within portions of some city limits, other areas are closed to the discharge of firearms. Before scouting or hunting on private property, be sure to secure permission from the landowner.

The best time to scout for Eurasian collared-doves is when they are most active: mornings and afternoons. Care should be taken to properly identify collared-doves before shooting. They are easily confused with other dove species, which are protected or have strictly defined hunting seasons.

Hunters, it’s time to take up arms and protect the mother land before the Mongol hordes have us all on the run! 🦋

■ Randall D. Babb is a biologist and naturalist who grew up hunting and fishing in Arizona and especially loves to pursue small game.

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