

DIAMOND DOVES: *Geopelia cuneata*

Most of the birds kept as pets belong to the parrot family but the diamond dove is different. The beak is not hooked like a parrot's. This means that a dove cannot use its beak to break open hard nuts and seeds, chew into large pieces of fruit or dig into wood. Instead, doves swallow their food whole and then eat small pieces of gravel called "grit". The grit is passed into an internal organ called a "gizzard" which grinds the food into little pieces so it can be digested.

Birds are often named after a pattern or colored feature that stands out on the body. The diamond dove with its gray back and light colored chest gets its name from the little white diamond-like spots on the wings.

Male diamond doves look a lot like hen doves but they have wider more deeply colored reddish eye rings. Cock birds are also slightly larger. They will coo and show off in front of the hen. Young doves are a darker muddier shade of gray than the parents are. Juveniles also have paler grayish eye rings. These small 8-inch long doves come from northern and inland Australia. This makes diamond doves one of the smallest species belonging to the worldwide family of doves and pigeons called Columbiformes.

The diamond is certainly a good choice for someone getting started with doves. The diet needs to be little more than a good seed mix, sprouted seed and a little whole grain bread. The additional eggshell and, of course, grit is about all there is to it. Diamonds are essentially ground foragers so some dirt on the cage bottom is happily utilized. These quiet mellow birds are not likely to bully other kinds of birds in a mixed collection. The main challenge may be finding other compatible species that will not bully them! They will get along nicely with most finches, canaries, cockatiels and *Neophema* grasskeets.

Diamonds will molt into adult plumage at about four months of age and are ready to breed as early as six months old. If allowed to do so these prolific birds will nest non-stop all year around. Most breeders do not allow nesting before one year of age, as the continual demands of reproduction are quite a strain. A determined pair of diamond doves will attempt to nest in most any sized cage however, they do much better in quarters at least six feet long where sufficient flight will keep them fit. They like the equivalent of an open canary nest where they will lay a clutch of two white eggs. Incubation takes fifteen days. In another two weeks the young will be fledging with another clutch on the way!