**YVCipedia AVIAN**

Pigeon & Dove Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

**Pigeons and doves** are gentle, intelligent birds that adapt well to human care and form strong bonds with their flockmates or caretakers. While most people associate them with city life or wild birds, domestic pigeons and doves—such as the Ringneck Dove, Diamond Dove, or Racing/Homing Pigeon—can make excellent companions.

At YVC, we find these birds to be calm, easy to handle, and surprisingly social. Their soft coos, curious nature, and routine-driven behavior make them well-suited to both new and experienced bird owners. Many pigeons and doves live 10–15 years, with some exceeding 20 in captivity when properly cared for.

## **Housing & Environment**

Despite their reputation for being low-maintenance, these birds need thoughtful housing that allows for exercise, hygiene, and social interaction.

Indoor birds should have spacious cages, ideally wide enough to allow short flights—something most standard vertical cages don’t offer. At YVC, we recommend cages at least 30" wide for a single pigeon or dove, with ample perching space and room to stretch their wings.

Softwood perches and padded ledges are ideal, as these birds spend more time perching or walking than climbing. Unlike parrots, pigeons and doves do not chew, but they do need enrichment and daily interaction.

If housed outdoors, aviaries must be predator-proof, well-ventilated, and provide protection from wind, cold, and wet weather. These birds are hardy in moderate climates but still benefit from temperature stability (ideally 65–80°F) and dry, draft-free conditions.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Pigeons and doves have a granivorous diet, meaning they primarily consume seeds and grains. However, commercial seed mixes alone are often unbalanced, and supplementation is key to preventing nutritional deficiencies.

At YVC, we recommend a combination of:

* **Commercial dove or pigeon mix**: Choose a high-quality blend with millet, safflower, cracked corn, and other clean grains. Avoid dusty or heavily dyed mixes.
* **Pellets**: Though not all individuals take to pellets easily, we encourage offering small parrot or softbill pellets for balanced nutrition. Some birds will eat these more readily when mixed with seed.
* **Fresh produce**: Finely chopped leafy greens, chopped vegetables (carrot, bell pepper, squash), and occasional fruit can be offered in moderation.
* **Calcium**: Cuttlebone or mineral blocks should be provided at all times—especially important for egg-laying females.
* **Grit**: While parrots don’t need grit, pigeons and doves benefit from small amounts to help grind food in the gizzard. Use clean, bird-safe grit (not oyster shell alone).

Fresh, clean water must always be available and changed daily. These birds also enjoy shallow dishes of water for bathing and benefit from misting during dry seasons.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Pigeons and doves are typically docile and easy to handle, especially when hand-raised or well-socialized. They don’t nip or chew like parrots and rarely exhibit aggression, though they may be shy at first.

With regular interaction, many become quite affectionate—cooing, perching calmly on shoulders, or flying short distances to greet their person. Unlike parrots, they don't talk or mimic, but they have rich vocal communication through coos, wing claps, and tail-fanning behaviors.

At YVC, we recommend daily out-of-cage time in a bird-safe space for exercise and engagement. For single birds, social interaction with humans is especially important to avoid loneliness.

## **Enrichment**

While their needs are simpler than parrots, pigeons and doves still require mental and physical stimulation. A bored bird may become listless or overweight.

Try incorporating:

* Flying time or flapping space in a safe room or aviary
* Natural branches or broad perches to encourage movement
* Mirrors or safe companion toys for solo birds
* Small cardboard boxes, shredded paper, or fabric strips for nesting and exploring

Many pigeons and doves enjoy soft background music or ambient sounds, and will often vocalize in response.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

At YVC, we recommend **annual avian wellness exams and fecal testing** for all birds, including pigeons and doves. These check-ups help identify common conditions before they become serious.

Though they’re generally robust birds, we commonly see:

* **Parasites**, both internal (coccidia, worms) and external (mites, lice)
* **Respiratory infections**, especially in poorly ventilated environments
* **Egg-binding** in reproductively active females without proper calcium support
* **Nutritional deficiencies**, often due to all-seed diets
* **Obesity** from lack of flight or exercise

Signs of illness can be subtle: fluffed feathers, decreased vocalization, labored breathing, reduced appetite, or diarrhea. Pigeons are especially good at hiding symptoms until late in the course of disease, so early evaluation is important.

Depending on findings, additional diagnostics like bloodwork or crop swabs may be recommended.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Pigeons have been domesticated for thousands of years and were used as messengers long before modern communication
* Both males and females produce crop milk to feed their chicks
* Many domestic pigeons are descendants of homing breeds and retain excellent navigational instincts
* Doves tend to be more skittish than pigeons, especially smaller species like Diamond Doves
* These birds bond strongly to partners—housing same-sex pairs or keeping a single bird with ample attention is often best in home settings

## **Supplies Checklist**

To keep pigeons or doves happy and healthy, you’ll need:

* A spacious, well-ventilated cage or aviary with wide horizontal space
* Soft perches, padded ledges, or low shelves
* High-quality dove or pigeon seed mix with occasional pellets and vegetables
* Grit and calcium sources like cuttlebone
* Bathing dish and clean water supply
* Food and water dishes that are easy to clean
* Nest box or platform if housing a pair
* Carrier for vet visits or emergencies
* Paper-based or easily cleaned cage lining

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*