



Eurasian collared doves feeding in groups on the ground.

Critters articles are inspired by the photographs I've taken, or photos I will take when prompted by the editor, as is with this story about the Mourning Dove.

The editor sent me a Facebook post illustrated with a beautiful Mourning Dove... and the caption had "Keys" written all over it... "this bird thrives with basic amenities such as gravel driveways and shallow water." That crunchy coral rock driveway is actually health food, as the doves need to swallow small stones to help them grind up the seeds in their gizzard.

I looked in my library, and I didn't have pictures, probably because these doves were so common, I overlooked them. No problem, they are always in my yard.



This challenge from my editor turned into a search for an elusive dove.

After more research I learned that aside from their coloration and markings, they had different, but similar calls. I was incorrect in thinking the koo-KOO-koo call was of the Mourning Dove. But no! The koo-KOO-koo is of the ECD, and is shorter and more frequent than the Mourning Dove's call of coo-AHH, coo-coo-coo which comes from the male sitting on his "cooing perch" letting females know he is available.

The ECD species name "decaocto" comes from Greek mythology. Decaecto was a servant girl transformed by the Gods into a dove, to escape her dreadful treatment; the dove's mournful cry references her former life.

Obtaining photos of the Mourning Dove (*Zenaidura macroura*) was becoming a greater challenge. Each time I'd venture out, I'd return with more ECD photos. I was beginning to think the Mourning Dove did not exist. A birder told me that ECD definitely outnumber

In just a few minutes I had obtained photos for the article. I uploaded them to the website iNaturalist, a site where I load my nature photos for positive identification. The online community responded within a day, identifying my dove as "Eurasian-Collared Dove." (*Streptopelia decaecto*) or ECD.



The Mourning Dove has a long tail, and a head that looks small in comparison to its plump body.



The Eurasian Collared Dove is slightly larger, has a shorter, squared off tail, and a distinct black half-ring on the back of its neck.

A learning moment... I thought the ECD were Mourning Doves.

ECD have plump bodies, small heads, long tails and pale, chalky, grayish-tan feathers. The ECD gets its name from the half round black collar on the back of its neck. Mourning Doves have a long pointed tail with white outer feathers; they have a fleck of black markings on their wings and are a warmer, pinkish-brown.

the Mourning Doves, but to look at the power lines or maybe construction sites to find them foraging on the ground.

After several days of hunting I finally spotted a few Mourning Doves in my yard. The Mourning Doves were under the bird feeder, cleaning up the seeds dropped there. Doves are the perfect clean-up crew. While the Cardinals and Blue Jays are careless feeders, allowing seeds to drop, the doves are

Mourning Dove... CONTINUED - Photos by Carol Ellis.



Eurasian collared doves blend in with dead branches, and find safety in an old avocado tree.

content to forage on the ground below.

A few more Mourning Doves were spotted on the loose brown mulch; their coloration made them blend in very well. They were very skittish, kept their distance and took flight when I got too close, but luckily I got some photos.

The ECD are invasive and becoming more common. The ECD have come a long way from their origin in India around 1600; from there they migrated to Turkey, and by 1945 had made it to Germany. By 1955 they had spread to England and most of Europe. The ECD population here stems from a 1970 Bahamian pet shop escape of about 50 doves. They made their way to Florida around 1980, and with up to six broods a year, they rapidly colonized North



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You will often see Mourning Doves grazing on the ground for seed. Above, on the loose brown mulch their coloration made them blend in very well.



The Eurasian collared dove are a pale, grayish tan.

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Eurasian collared dove.

America. They have adapted very well to living among people, and are easy to spot if you take the time to look.

This story is important to tell because it points to the level of awareness and appreciation we have as humans for the natural world. Think of what happens when you go outside with awareness: Step number one, you hear something or see movement in the brush. Step two, you try to identify it... it is something small, what color is it? ... a lizard? or is it a bird? Step three... you ask what is it doing? Is it feeding? It is eating a worm? What kind of worm... And so forth. We all lie on some part of the "curiosity spectrum." Now when I hear a dove, I am trying to decide if it is koo-KOO-koo (ECD) or coo-AHH, coo-coo-coo (Mourning Dove). And to make life interesting we also have White-winged Doves, the Common Ground Dove, and White Crowned Pigeons in our area.

In time, as we get to explore more in nature, we become more knowledgeable. It all starts with appreciation, active observing, or even a challenge.