

IMPACT OF EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVES ON MOURNING DOVES

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The Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) was first discovered in northwest Florida in 1987 near Destin in Walton County (Smith 1987, Duncan 2000). At that time it was at the northernmost limit of its range in the United States and has since undergone an explosive range expansion (AOU 1998). A native of India, it spread to western Europe by the late 19th century (Smith 1987, Hengeveld 1993). They were first observed in southern Florida in the late 1970s. The suspected source of the Florida birds was no more than 50 individuals that escaped from a Bahama pet store in 1974 (Smith 1987, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992). Locally well-entrenched, it is now a common breeder found throughout the year along the coast and in suburbs of Alabama and northwest Florida (Haggerty et al. 2004).

Because invasive species can have deleterious effects on native species (Temple 1992), studies are needed that investigate the impact of increasing populations of Eurasian Collared-Doves on native species (Hengeveld 1993). In this research I examine the possible effects of an increasing Eurasian Collared-Dove population on another columbid, the Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) in northwest Florida.

To study population trends for the two species, Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) data from four coastal CBC circles (Gulf Shores, Perdido Bay, Pensacola, and Choctawhatchee) were analyzed both prior to and after the arrival of the Eurasian Collard-Dove.

Mourning Dove numbers for the five-year period prior to the invasion (i.e., 1983 – 1987) showed an average of 7.59 birds/party hr compared to 12.50 birds/party hr for the five-year period after the invasion (i.e., 1998 – 2002), a surprising increase of 61%. A comparison of Mourning Dove numbers with Eurasian Collared-Dove numbers for a five-year period (i.e., 1998 – 2002) showed that the populations of both species appear to be relatively stable (Figure 1).

In summary, this study found no evidence that increasing Eurasian Collared-Doves populations are impacting Mourning Dove populations in the coastal counties of Alabama and extreme northwest Florida in spite of the former's presence in the area for the past 15 years. Only time will tell whether this trend will continue.

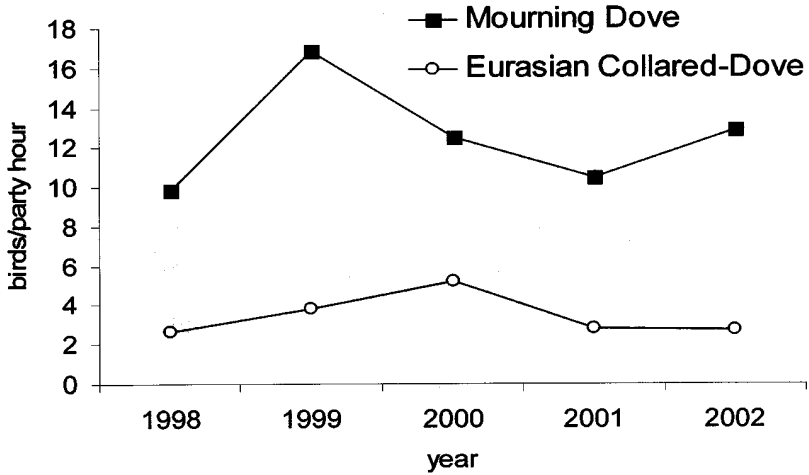


FIGURE 1. Average number of Mourning Doves and Eurasian Collared-Doves observed per party hour for four Christmas Bird Counts along the Gulf Coast over a five-year period.

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