

First Band-tailed Pigeon and its Status in Eastern North America

By H. David Bohlen

While conducting the Springfield Christmas Bird Count on 22 December 1996, Dennis Oehmke and I stopped to view a flock of Cedar Waxwings. We were along the west side of Lake Springfield at East Hazel Dell Lane. I looked into a deciduous tree above the waxwings and saw a large dove or pigeon with a distinct white collar on the nape. Thinking it might be a Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) I mentally noted other field marks. The pigeon was fairly high in the tree and at first the underparts looked dove-colored. Then the bird turned its head, giving me a profile. It was immediately obvious that this was not a Eurasian Collared Dove for I could see a red orbital ring and a bright yellow bill with a black tip. There was no doubt in my mind that the bird was a Band-tailed Pigeon (*Columba fasciata*).

We carefully slunk out of the truck, I with my scope, and Oehmke with his camera. For the next hour we viewed the Band-tailed Pigeon. Oehmke took numerous photographs. The bird was high enough and the light was so poor that the real colors, especially the purples were not coming through. It was not until the following day that I definitely saw the purple color. The pigeon sat for long periods making it easy to scope.

The bird showed purplish on its head, throat, and breast, becoming lighter ventrally. Below the nape's white crescent was an interesting

ruff of feathers forming a patch, which was metallic green-gray. The wing coverts were darker gray and the primaries charcoal. The lower back and rump were bluish-gray and the undertail coverts were light buff. The tail was mauve with a dark smudge, then a broad terminal band of gray-buff. The tarsi were bright yellow with black nails. At first, we thought the iris was brown, but in better light, it was an orangish color. Also the "eyelids" were light blue above and below the eye. That first day, I made a sketch in the field and wrote a description which I later revised due to much better views.

It was soon established that the Band-tailed Pigeon was attending a feeder in the yard of house #124 on Hazel Dell at LaRue Scott's. Mr. Scott and his neighbors graciously allowed observers to view the bird. Oehmke sat in a blind near the feeder for three hours one cold morning and obtained good photographs.

Birders easily viewed the pigeon perching in the deciduous trees near the house. At times it hid high up in coniferous trees or oaks retaining leaves. Once, an observer saw it eat dark berries off privet (*Ligustrum* sp.) Occasionally it flew giving the characteristic loud wing clapping. I never heard it call.

At least two different Cooper's Hawks frequently visited the area. This species preys on pigeon-sized birds, but whether this particular pi-

geon became prey or just moved is unknown. I saw the Band-tailed Pigeon 11 different days, and for the last time on 23 January 1997. This bird constitutes the first record for Illinois.

Sibley and Monroe give the range of the Band-tailed Pigeon as western North and Middle America from southwest British Columbia south through the mountains of Washington, Oregon, California, and extreme western Nevada to Baja California and from southern Nevada, Arizona, central Utah, north central Colorado, New Mexico, and western Texas south through the mountains of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Honduras to north central Nicaragua. This is quite an extensive range, however, another very similar form continues even farther, from Costa Rica to northwestern Argentina (White-necked Pigeon - *C. albilinea*). The 6th edition of the A.O.U. Checklist (1983) adds that the Band-tailed Pigeon winters at lower elevations than where it spends time during the breeding season. Also, the species is casual in Alaska, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Idaho, Montana, and North Dakota south to Wyoming, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The many reports from eastern North America may pertain largely or entirely to individuals escaped from captivity.

Most football fans know the term "go long," and some birds ap