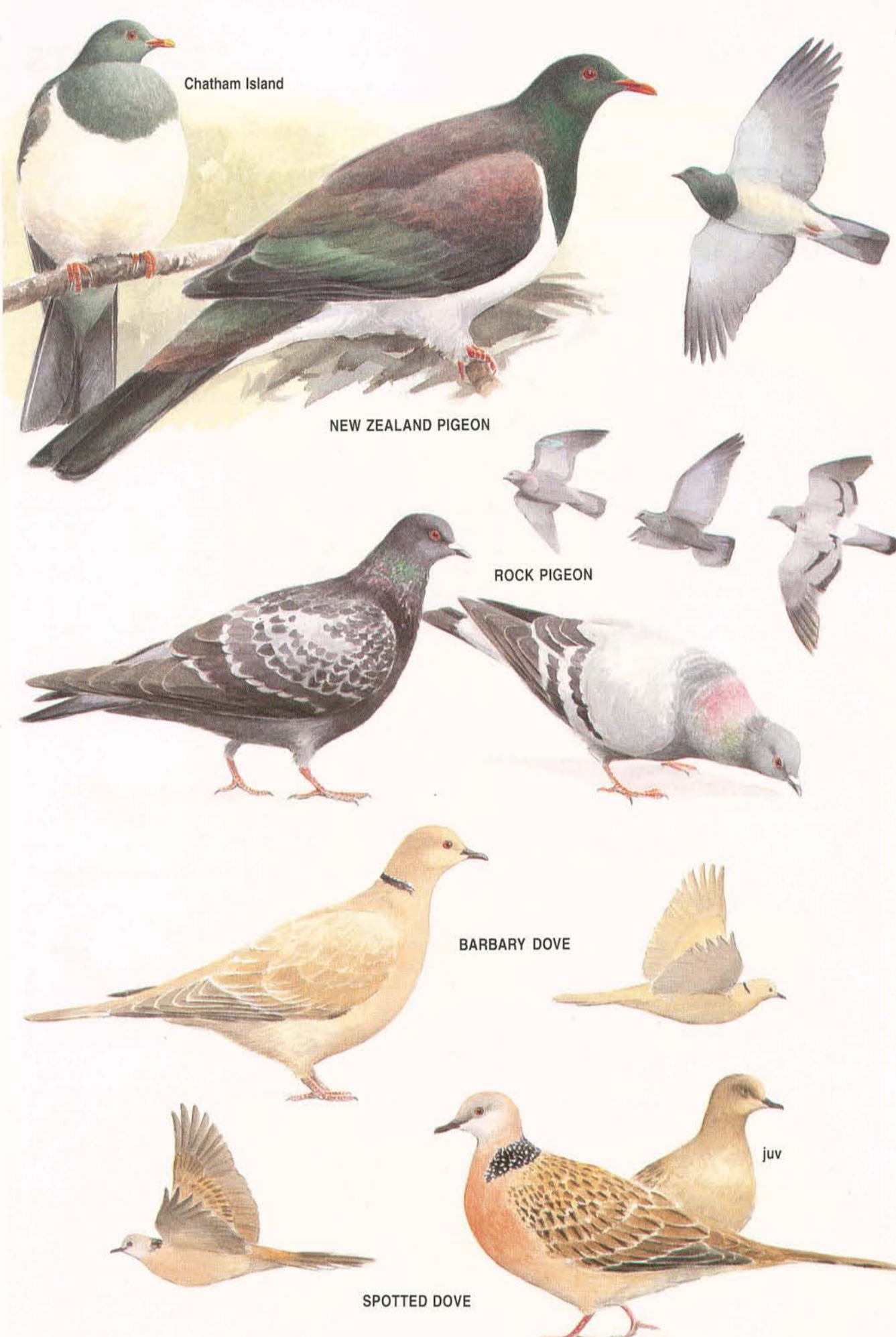
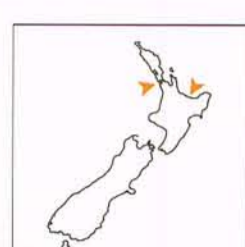


Medium to large landbirds with short bill, small head, rounded wings and short feathered legs. Sexes alike. Calls simple and often repetitive variations of 'coo'. Flight strong, direct and often noisy. Aerial displays of stall dives are part of breeding displays. Can breed at any time of year if food supplies are suitable. Lay 1–2 white eggs on a flimsy platform of sticks. Short incubation and nestling periods; young fed 'crop milk' and, later, other regurgitated food. They often fledge well below adult weight, with short wings and tail, and dull bill and feet. All are herbivorous; the New Zealand Pigeon feeds on fruit and foliage, the three introduced species feed on seeds, especially grain.

**SPOTTED DOVE** *Streptopelia chinensis*

Uncommon Asian introduction

30 cm, 130 g. Head grey, tinged pink; nape and back of neck black, finely spotted with white; back, wings and rump mottled brown; tail long, with darker outer feathers, broadly tipped with white. Eye red; bill black; feet pink. Juvenile similar but lacks patterning on nape. Calls mellow, varying from 1 to 4 notes: 'coo', 'croo-croo', 'coo-coo-croo', 'coo-coo-croo-coo'. **Habitat:** Suburban parks, gardens, farmland and orchards of Auckland, South Auckland, and near Te Puke and Opotiki. **Breeding:** Oct–Feb.



**PIGEONS and DOVES**

Columbidae

About 290 species worldwide; 1 is endemic to New Zealand and 3 have been introduced.

the ledge of a cliff or an artificial structure. All species lay only one or two small eggs; most granivorous species lay two eggs, and most fruit pigeons lay only one. The total clutch weight, at on average 9% of female body weight, is the lightest of all bird groups. The breeding season is usually determined by suitable food being available, and normally several broods are reared each year. This is helped by having very short incubation and fledging periods, and the young usually fledge well below adult weight. Clutches are sometimes overlapped, eggs being incubated in one nest while chicks are still being fed in another.

Usually the larger members of the family are called pigeons, and the smaller ones, doves.

Pigeons and doves have plump bodies with short legs and necks, small heads and short, straight bills. The plumage is soft, dense and loose, and some have brilliant or iridescent colouring. They feed mainly on vegetable matter and can be split into two groups: grain-eaters and fruit-eaters. Both groups supplement their diet with foliage, buds and flowers. Pigeons and doves have a large crop for storing grain or fruit. The fruit-eating pigeons play an important ecological role in forest regeneration, transporting intact seeds of trees and shrubs and depositing them at a new site.

Apart from Emperor Penguins and flamingoes, pigeons and doves are the only birds to produce food for their chicks. They feed their chicks (sometimes called squabs) crop-milk, a protein-rich, cottage-cheese-like secretion from the crop wall. At first, crop-milk is the only food, but as the chicks grow, regurgitated foods form an increasingly large part of the diet.

Unlike most birds, pigeons can drink without raising their heads to swallow. They are strong fliers and have aerial displays in which the bird stalls and dives with wings and tail held stiffly, and they also clap their wings together above their backs during display flight.

**Reading:** Goodwin, D. 1970. *Pigeons and Doves of the World*. London: British Museum. Robertson, H.A. 1988. *J Zool (Lond)* 215: 217–229.

The nest is rudimentary, usually a flat basket of interwoven twigs in a tree or on

**257. SPOTTED DOVE** *Streptopelia chinensis*

Plate 59

**Other names:** Spotted Turtle-Dove, Malay Spotted Dove

**Size:** 30 cm, 130 g

**Geographical variation:** Five subspecies, of which *tigrina*, from Burma through south-eastern Asia to Indonesia, has been introduced to New Zealand.

**Distribution:** Natural range is Asia, from India and Sri Lanka to southern China, Taiwan and Timor. Introduced to Hawai'i, Australia and New Zealand as a cage bird. The Spotted Doves in the Auckland area, from Albany to Pukekohe, probably originated from escaped cage birds and from a substantial liberation at Mt Eden in the 1920s. They are mainly found in well-treed suburbs and city parks, and in rural areas around Howick, Whitford, Clevedon and Karaka; a few birds have been recorded as far south as Miranda on the Firth of Thames. Small populations have established recently in rural Bay of Plenty near Te Puke and Opotiki.

**Population:** Locally common in the Auckland area.

**Breeding:** Spotted Doves breed solitarily. The nest is a flimsy platform of twigs, well concealed in a large shrub, hedge or tree, up to 12 m above the ground. They can breed at any time of year if food is available, but the peak is in spring and summer, and the low is in late autumn. Spotted Doves re-nest several times each season. They lay 2 white eggs (27 x 21 mm, 7 g). Both sexes incubate for c. 16 days and brood the chicks for the first week. Chicks are at first fed just crop-milk, a protein-rich secretion from the crop wall of both adults, but as the chicks grow, regurgitated seeds form an increasingly large part of the diet. They fledge at c. 15 days old and quickly become independent.

**Behaviour:** Spotted Doves are secretive and more often heard than seen. When seen, they are normally alone or in pairs as they search for food on the ground; however, they

sometimes form flocks where grain has been spilt or where weeds are seeding prolifically. A spectacular display is a steep upward flight and downward glide with wings and tail stiffly spread. Their calling reaches a peak in autumn and spring, 2–4 coo notes varying in rhythm and emphasis, e.g. 'croo-croo' or 'cu-cu-croo-croo'.

**Feeding:** In towns, they feed on grass and weed seeds in lawns and along paths, but in rural areas they feed on spilt grain, especially where horses and other livestock have been fed, around poultry yards and on grass, clover and weed seeds in short cover. Their diet is supplemented with occasional invertebrates such as snails.