

Status and Occurrence of Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) in British Columbia.

By Rick Toochin. Submitted: April 15, 2017.

Introduction and Distribution

The Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) is a large Dove species that is mostly sedentary in much of its range, but the northern subspecies are migratory (Brazil 2009). This species is found as a permanent resident in South and Central Asia from India, north to north-western Pakistan, north-western Afghanistan, north into Tajikistan, western Kyrgyzstan, northern Kazakhstan, across southern areas of Siberia, Mongolia, through most of China, Korea, and southern Japan, south to Vietnam, throughout South-east Asia to Malaysia, north to Burma and Bangladesh (Clements *et al.* 2015). The breeding range of the migratory subspecies of the Oriental Turtle-Dove is as far west as the Ural Mountains and includes northern Kazakhstan, across Siberia, throughout northern Mongolia, to Sakhalin Island and northern Japan (Brazil 2009). There are 6 recognized subspecies of the Oriental Turtle-Dove (Clements *et al.* 2015). Some are migratory and some have restricted ranges. The nominate subspecies of Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*) is highly migratory and is found breeding in central Siberia to China, Korea, Japan and Kuril Islands and accounts for all North American records from Alaska to California (Gibson and Kessel 1997, Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Brazil 2009, Clements *et al.* 2015). The second subspecies of Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis meena*) is also migratory and is found from the Ural Mountains of northern Kazakhstan, through south-western Siberia to Iran, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Nepal (Goodwin 1983, Gibbs *et al.* 2001, Clements *et al.* 2015). The winter ranges for the migratory subspecies of the Oriental Turtle-Dove is hard to know as they winter in the same range as non-migratory subspecies (Brazil 2009, Clements *et al.* 2015). The third subspecies of Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis stimpsoni*) is non-migratory and is found on the Ryukyu Islands off Southern Japan (Gibbs *et al.* 2001, Brazil 2009, Clements *et al.* 2015). The fourth subspecies of Oriental-Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis orii*) is also non-migratory and is restricted to Taiwan (Gibbs *et al.* 2001, Brazil 2009, Clements *et al.* 2015). The fifth subspecies of Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis erythrocephala*) is also non-migratory and is restricted to Peninsular India (Gibbs *et al.* 2001, Clements *et al.* 2015). The sixth subspecies of Oriental-Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis agricola*) is non-migratory and is found from north-eastern India to Myanmar and in south-central China (west Yunnan and Hainan Island) (Gibbs *et al.* 2001, Clements *et al.* 2015).

In Europe, the Oriental Turtle-Dove is a rare vagrant that has occurred mostly in the fall and winter from October to February (Lewington *et al.* 1992). This species has been recorded from Great Britain west to Greece with some records being questioned due to this species being kept in captivity in many places in Europe (Lewington *et al.* 1992).

The Oriental Turtle-Dove is an accidental species anywhere in North America. In Alaska, this species is accidental with a few summer records from areas such as at St. Paul Island on board a ship near Pribilof Islands, at Unalaska, Attu Island, on Chernabura Island, and at Dutch Harbour (Gibson and Kessel 1992, Gibson and Byrd 2007, West 2008).

This species is accidental in the Yukon where there is a recent photographed record from Whitehorse on June 30, 2008 (Anonymous 2009, Eckert 2009).

The Oriental Turtle-Dove is accidental in California with 2 accepted records by the California Bird Records Committee with records occurring at Furnace Creek Ranch, Inyo County on October 29, 1988 and at Bolinas, Marin County from December 9-31, 2002 (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Dunn and Hansen 2010)

In British Columbia, the Oriental-Turtle-Dove is an accidental vagrant with 3 provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014).

There are no confirmed records for Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2016) or from Oregon State (OFO 2016).

Identification and Similar Species

The Oriental Turtle-Dove is shown in most North American Field Guides. This is a large stocky Dove measuring 30-35 cm in length, and a wingspan of 54-62 cm (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009). It is a little smaller in size than a Band-tailed Pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*) which measures 37 cm in length, and has a wingspan of 66 cm (Sibley 2000). In plumage characteristics, the Band-tailed Pigeon looks nothing like an Oriental Turtle-Dove and poses no identification issues (Dunn and Alderfer 2011). The Oriental Turtle-Dove is larger, but similar-looking to the smaller European Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) which measures 45-48 cm in length, and has a wingspan of 45-50 cm which is an unlikely vagrant to British Columbia, but is kept as a cage bird and could be encountered as an escapee (Mullarney and Zetterstrom 2009).

The Oriental Turtle-Dove and the European Turtle-Dove are different looking to each other, but also similar enough that when describing either species it is important to compare the differences. The following comparison description of both species is taken from Lewington *et al.* (1992).

Adult Oriental Turtle-Doves of the subspecies (*Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*) look distinctly darker than the European Turtle-Dove. The forehead and usually the crown are gray, contrasting with a brown nape and hind-neck which is approximately the same colour as the

mantle on the Oriental Turtle-Dove, whereas the European Turtle-Dove has a grayish nape, hind-neck, and head that clearly contrast with the browner mantle. The dark bars on the side of the neck are typically 4-6 on Oriental Turtle-Dove, whereas the European Turtle-Dove has 3-4 wider bars, but note these can be hard to judge. Note that both species show a bluish tinge to the pale patch surrounding the dark bars. This is normal in Oriental Turtle-Dove, but seldom seen on European Turtle-Dove. The breast on Oriental Turtle-Dove is more brownish-pink, less lilac-tinged, and the colour of the breast extends further down than on European Turtle-Dove. The belly and under-tail coverts are pale grayish-pink on Oriental Turtle-Dove, not whitish as on the European Turtle-Dove. The dark centres to the lesser and median coverts of the Oriental Turtle-Dove are normally extensive and diffuse and rounded at the tips. This creates a characteristic scaly appearance that is enhanced by the usually pale feather tips. The coverts appear contrastingly paler than the scapulars, and frequently there seems to be two pale wing-bars. The European Turtle-Dove shows clear-cut, relatively small, triangular dark marks on the otherwise uniformly orange-brown coverts, there are no contrasting marks with the scapulars and no pale bars. Juvenile European Turtle-Doves moulting to 1st winter can have un-moulted juvenile coverts that may resemble those found on adult Oriental Turtle-Doves, and often contrast with newly moulted scapulars. There should be some newly moulted and characteristically patterned coverts upon closer inspection. The outer lesser, median and greater coverts are not contrastingly blue-gray to the carpal joint, as in most European Turtle-Doves, and is most obvious in flight. Unless the feathers are worn, the primaries on Oriental Turtle-Dove usually show more distinct pale tips than on European Turtle-Dove.

The back and rump is usually uniformly dark blue-gray on Oriental Turtle-Dove, whereas most, but not all, European Turtle-Doves show a lot of brown. The pale tips to the tail feathers, but not the central pair, are generally more grayish on Oriental Turtle-Dove than on European Turtle-Dove, but there is some overlap. The outermost tail feathers of the Oriental Turtle-Dove usually show some dark on the outer web, which is not the case on European Turtle-Dove. The central pair of tail feathers on the Oriental Turtle-Dove normally contrasts slightly less with the outer rectrices than on European Turtle-Dove.

The adults of the western subspecies of Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis meena*) are similar looking to European Turtle-Dove. Although most individuals are still quite distinctive, some require close scrutiny. The western subspecies (*Streptopelia orientalis meena*) is slightly smaller than the eastern subspecies (*Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*), and shows a more European Turtle-Dove-like pattern on the lesser and median coverts. The colour of the breast is rarely very similar to that of the European Turtle-Dove. The western subspecies (*Streptopelia orientalis meena*) shows blue-gray only on the back; the belly and under-tail coverts are whitish, similar to European Turtle-Dove, but slightly less extensive.

Juvenile birds are easily separated from the adults by their paler and browner plumage, with fainter dark centres on the scapulars, coverts and tertials, and they lack the distinct neck-patch (Jonsson 1992). The wing coverts are darker and have distinct pale gray tips forming pale bars across the wing; this impression of pale barring on wing-coverts remains on adult, but are less obvious (Jonsson 1992). Oriental Turtle-Dove has a gray terminal band on its tail without the blackish sub-terminal band found on European Turtle-Dove (Jonsson 1992).

The Oriental Turtle-Dove is distinctive enough to be distinguished from all common occurring pigeon or dove species in British Columbia. Any future records should be photographed in order to figure out which subspecies is involved.

Occurrence and Documentation

The Oriental Turtle-Dove is an accidental vagrant to British Columbia with 3 provincial records (Toochin *et al.* 2014). The first record for the province was found and photographed by the late Rory Paterson who found the bird coming to her feeder from August 15-25, 1992 (Paterson 1992). This bird was in the company of a small flock of Band-tailed Pigeons and was of the subspecies (*Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*) (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). The bird was very accommodating for everyone that chased for it (R. Toochin Pers. Obs.). The second record for British Columbia was of an immature bird found and photographed by Christopher Di Corrado at the Alaksen National Wildlife Area, near the Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary in Ladner on January 18, 2010 (Toochin *et al.* 2014). A typo of the date showing February 18, 2010 was published in North American Birds (Charlesworth 2010b). Despite extensive searches the following days this bird was never relocated after its initial discovery (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.). The bird appeared to be of the subspecies (*Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*) based on photographs taken by Christopher Di Corrado (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.). The third record for British Columbia was found and photographed by Adrian Dorst on Stubbs Island in the Tofino area and was present from September 26- October 2, 2013 (Toochin *et al.* 2014). The subspecies was assumed to be (*Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*), but the photographs taken were mostly in flight and this was hard to judge for certain (D. Cecile Pers. Comm.). It is presumed that all three records are of wild birds and not of birds in captivity. A query to the International Species Information System in January 2010 resulted in no captive Oriental Turtle-Doves at zoos or other participating institutions in North America (InSpIS 2010). A similar conclusion was reached by the California Bird Records Committee when they investigated the possibility of captive Oriental Turtle-Doves in North America (Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

The Oriental Turtle-Dove was accepted by the ABA on their official checklist in 1990 based on three prior records from Alaska that occurred from May – July and all were of the migratory subspecies (*Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*) (DeBenedictis *et al.* 1991). Since that time there

have been a few more records in Alaska and 2 records in California. The 2 records from Tofino were likely spring overshoots that spent the summer months in Alaska before heading south down the west coast of North America. The timing of these birds fits very well with when the Oriental Turtle-Dove migrates in Russia. At the northern end of the breeding range in the Urals and western Siberia, fall migration of the subspecies *meena* and *orientalis* begins during the last third of August and peaks in mid-September, and a few stragglers occur as late as early October (Wilson and Korovin 2003). Farther south in Hong Kong, where the species does not breed and where there are only a few summer records, fall arrival of *orientalis*, the only recorded subspecies, is not until the last week of October, with most birds arriving after the second week of November (Carey *et al.* 2001). The Oriental Turtle-Dove is classified as a common passage migrant and winter visitor in Hong Kong with maximum counts of over 700 birds (Carey *et al.* 2001). The winter record from Ladner is not unprecedented as there is a winter record from California. This seems possible as the Oriental Turtle-Dove is found in Asia at similar latitudes in the winter (Brazil 2009)

The Oriental Turtle-Dove is likely to turn up again along the west coast and keen observers should watch for this species anywhere along the west coast, including known vagrant traps, or where migratory passerines are found in good concentrations.



Figure 1: Record #1: Oriental Turtle-Dove in Tofino on August 17, 1992.

Photo © Aurora Paterson.



Figure 2: Record #1: Oriental Turtle-Dove in Tofino on August 18, 1992.
Photo © Adrian Dorst.



Figure 3 & 4: Record #2: Oriental Turtle-Dove in Ladner on January 18, 2010.
Photo © Peter Davidson.



Figure 5 & 6: Record #2: Oriental Turtle-Dove in Ladner on January 18, 2010.
Photo © Peter Davidson.



Figure 7: Record #3: Oriental Turtle-Dove in Tofino on Stubbs Island on October 2, 2013.
Photo © Adrian Dorst.



Figure 8: Record #3: Oriental Turtle-Dove in Tofino on Stubbs Island on October 2, 2013.
Photo © Adrian Dorst.

Table 1: Records of Oriental Turtle-Dove for British Columbia:

- 1.(1) adult August 15-25, 1992: Rory Paterson, mobs (BC Photo 1848) Tofino (Paterson 1992)
- 2.(1) immature January 18, 2010: Christopher Di Corrado, mobs (photo) Alaksen N.W.A. & Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Ladner (Toochin *et al.* 2014) [not February 18, 2010 which was published incorrectly in North American Birds by Charlesworth (2010b)]
- 3.(1) immature September 26- October 2, 2013: Adrian Dorst (photo) Stubbs Island, Tofino (Toochin *et al.* 2014)

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photographer and are fully protected by copyright law. Photographs are not to be reproduced, published or retransmitted on any website without the authorization of the photographer.

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