

An unusual mating behavior of Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Anika Tere, Kartik Upadhyay & Pranav Pathak

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Anika Tere, Dept. of Zoology, Faculty of Science, M.S. University of Baroda, Vadodara 390002, Gujarat, India. Email: anikatere@rediffmail.com

Kartik Upadhyay, B/104, Premsagar apartment, Near Rameshwar Temple, Subhanpura, Vadodara 390239, Gujarat, India.

Pranav Pathak, Shailesh Park Society, Near Kashiram Hall, Old Sachivalaya Vistar, Ahmedabad 380015, Gujarat, India.

Email: pranavpathak2000@yahoo.co.in

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The Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* is a widespread resident of the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1983; Grimmett *et al.* 1998). It breeds throughout the year (Dharmakumarsinhji 1955; Ali & Ripley 1983; Patel 1986). It builds its nest at various places, such as, in houses, wells, temples, buildings, etc., and is not affected by the presence of human beings. We report here an unusual observation on the mating behaviour of the species.

On 12.ii.2006, a dead Blue Rock Pigeon was seen on its back, on the Viramgam-Nal Sarovar road, about 8km from Viramgam. It was perhaps dead for at least 4–5 days as its body was stinking and covered with red ants (Formicidae). Several other Blue Rock Pigeons were also present around it, on the roofs of houses, electric poles, etc. Suddenly a pigeon landed near the dead bird, moved in circles around it, making whooping sounds and started mating with it, as though it was alive. This behavior lasted for about two to three minutes and then the pigeon flew away. In its mating dance, and also as a

preliminary to mating, a cock Blue Rock Pigeon puffs its neck feathers, makes a whooping sound and circles around a hen.

In several species the drive to mate is urgent and almost overpowering during the breeding season. Some birds will even copulate with stuffed dummies of conspecifics or even with a human hand (Welty 1901). A White-tailed Tropic Bird *Phaethon lepturus*, for example, has been recorded attempting to copulate with miniature gliders flown by hobbyists along the California coast (Hetrick & McCaskie 1965). Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) has shown a photograph in which a male Lesser Frigatebird *Sypheotides indica* is attempting to mount a stuffed Stone-Curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus*.

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