

Masked Dove

*Oena Capensis*

The natural habitat of Masked Doves is Central and Southern Africa. They occupy semi-arid areas with shrubs and grassland.

They are fairly common in Victorian aviculture with the availability varying from year to year.

The Cock Bird has a black face and breast area with a yellow tipped beak. The hen has a grey face and breast area with a purple/black beak. Young are grey all over with white dots until adult plumage is obtained

I house my Masked Doves in a large planted aviary with a mixed collection of Finches, Small Lorikeets, and other larger Doves and Pigeons. I have found them to be total compatible with all species with one exception. If housed with other small doves such as Diamond Doves, Peaceful Doves and Talpacoti Doves, aggression and competition for food and nesting sites will occur. This is due to the fact all these species occupy the same aviary space and have very similar habits and behaviour. I believe from my observations that each of these species perceives the other as a direct threat to their existence. So to prevent undue stress to either species, I recommend only one be kept in each flight or enclosure. I keep other larger Pigeons and Doves such as Wonga, Brush Bronzewinged, Bleeding Heart and Green Winged Pigeons in the same enclosures with the Masked Doves without issue any issue. My theory being that larger species don't perceive smaller species as a threat and vice versa. And this is working successfully with all my pigeons after two years of trial.

My planted aviaries have a mixture of grasses, bamboo, native shrubs and trees providing a fairly natural habitat. The floors are natural earth mix with leaf mulch that was placed in the aviary during construction. The whole area was designed to have good drainage due to the high rainfall in my area, but irrigated for dry conditions. I have the large threat of native and non-native rodents and snakes in my area so construction was critical. And I will mention the Tiger Snakes are very keen this year.

A single pair of Masked Doves will live and breed in a small aviary with other suitable species providing suitable feeding and nesting and housing are provided. I have housed single pairs with Neophema Parrots such as Bourkes, Scarlets and Turks without issue. Cockatiels, Princess and Suburb parrots have also been suitable companions in the same aviary. But as with any parrot, the individual must be assessed for compatibility with other species. If more than one pair are house in small aviary they will compete with each other for nesting sites causing undue stress. Young birds can be successfully house together for holding purposes or left with their parents.

I have personally experienced and have observed in the collections of other aviculturists that a family group or small colony of Masked Doves will live quite happily together in a large planted aviary and bred freely. And they will display their nature behaviours when given room to move and natural ground to move around on. Planted aviaries should include suitable roosting and nesting sites for the small doves. In a small aviary natural brush branches can be provided for roosting and nesting. Nesting materials need to be provide such as smaller sticks and twigs broken into short lengths. Short pieces of grass will also be used. The nest are small and tightly constructed.

I feed my Masked Doves on the same diet as my finches sharing the same aviary. Dry Seed consisting of two different custom finch mixes and standard Budgie Mix. Greens and Grains special seed mix. Finch Soft food mix. Soaked and sprouted seed. Seeding grasses. Broad leaf green food grown at home such as silver beet and coss lettuce is also used. Live food such as meal worms and maggots

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are also taken when feeding young but not a necessity. Grit mixes and cuttle fish are always available. They also have a liking for Lorikeet dry food provided in the aviary. All doves and pigeons are messy feeders so I provide the dry seed in large deep trays to prevent it being spilt everywhere. It might be fairly obvious to most but it is important to remember that Pigeons, Dove and Quail eat and swallow seed whole. They do not husk seed like Finches and Parrots. So it is important to monitor the seed supply! Water is provided in shallow dishes. These dishes are suitable for finches to bath in and to prevent any young drowning. Doves will fossick around on a natural earth floor for insects and bits and pieces.

Masked Doves will nest in many different locations. Mine will nest on the ground, in a low shrub, in a bush or on an artificial platform in a sheltered area. Nests are constructed from small sticks and twigs plus coarse grass. Some pairs will nest in the open flight and be successful even during bad weather such as 30mm of rain in 6 hours that can be experienced at my location. They are very good parents. Most breeding is conducted in spring into early summer. I wouldn't call them free breeders. One year there might be no nesting or young produced. The next they might be prolific for a period of time. Two eggs are laid and incubated by both parents. The cock bird usually incubates during the day with the hen late afternoon into the night. When the young are ready to leave the nest they are still quite small and feeble for a few weeks but are provided with constant care by both parents. They grow quickly and are at full size in about a month. The young can be left to become part of the family group or colony if housed in a large aviary. This will be dependent on individual birds and their housing situation.

Mask Doves are an attractive and peaceful species to keep. They become quite tame and are great to observe in a family group enjoying each other's company.

As they are a non-native species it is important that they are maintained in suitable numbers by different aviculturists to prevent them becoming scarce in the future.