

ROCK DOVE

By John Lampkin

Pigeons get a bad rap. In common parlance, pigeon means “easy scam target” and a stool pigeon is a “singing rat” in the mob. They became forever vilified in 1966 when NYC Parks Commissioner Thomas P.F. Hoving called them “rats with wings.” The catchy term caught on and persists today as part of our lexicon.

In Sun City Center we don't have statues for them to “whitewash” and no public park with benches full of popcorn tossers so for the most part, our pigeons, aka rock doves aka rock pigeons are remarkably well-behaved on our Nature Trails and they can easily be admired perched on power lines

throughout our community. Yes, admired, for they are not only beautiful but highly intelligent and have been subjects of many experiments in animal cognition. Many messenger pigeons have received Medals of Honor for their heroic service in wartime, saving many American lives. Originally, they crossed the Atlantic with early settlers, but unlike some other introduced species such as House Sparrows, they don't have much of an impact on our native species, according to Audubon's website.

The Rock Pigeon is the world's oldest domesticated bird (see Wikipedia) and because of more than 5000 years of selective breeding, a wide variety of plumages fly among us. Domesticated birds and pets usually have a way of showing up in the wild one way or another. Shown on the wire, a slate blue-gray sits beside a dark companion. We also see many pied (blotchy) individuals. If one takes the time to look without prejudice, the plumage in sunlight can be stunning and together with the eye and red feet, it's a handsome package indeed. Rats with wings? Nope.

The Nature Trails is an ongoing project of the SCC Audubon Club in cooperation with the SCC CA. The trailhead is located opposite North Lake on Del Webb West between Vincennes and Seton Hall. Join us for interpretive walks on the first Tuesday of the month at 9 am.



Rock Pigeons come in a wide variety of iridescent plumages ranging from dark to light.