
The Green Umbrella

by: Janet Law¹

MOURNING DOVES TAKE UP RESIDENCE

When we moved to the West from Florida, I was happy to hear the familiar “coo ah, coo, coo” of the Mourning Dove [*Zenaida macroura*], so named because of its low, mournful voice, BUT little was I prepared for the many that homesteaded on my little parcel of land!

We pulled the Audubon Society Field Guide from the shelf and read that the Mourning Dove’s habitats are “open fields, parks and lawns with many trees and shrubs.” How strange, as we live in a large subdivision of houses tightly situated next to one another, some postage stamp lawns and much gravel for an environment. However, our garden is among the more lush, filled with desert trees and plants, and into this garden our Mourning Doves moved, creating unexpected nesting places.



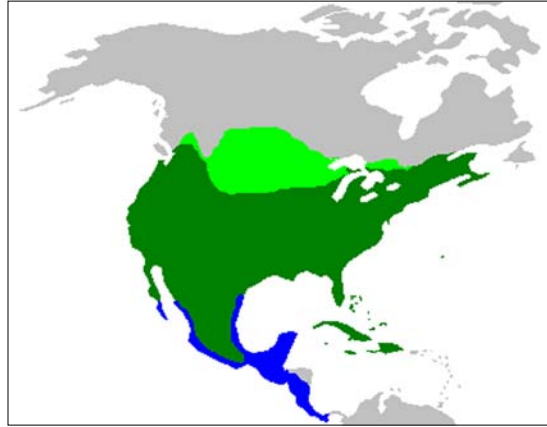
photos: Wikipedia

Last spring they resided in the two pots on either side of the front gate even though the entrance was frequently used. They raised their families in nests comprised of a few sparsely placed twigs and have continued to return again and again. The lighting fixture next to the front door also attracted them and a family built on top of it, but sadly the flimsy nest collapsed and the eggs crashed to the walk through the hollow fixture.

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This spring they tried a different approach. Atop our market umbrella, directly outside the family room, another pair took up residence, again using a few twigs for a nest but this time with a soft umbrella underlining. The female incubated her two eggs for fifteen days, swaying back and forth as the umbrella moved with the wind. Suddenly, activity occurred and we noticed the busy feeding of chicks with regurgitated “crop milk” or “pigeon’s milk” which is rich in protein and is provided by BOTH parents.



Winter only (blue), summer only (light green), and year-round (dark green) range

We read that adult birds feed on the ground as they walk with their characteristic gait, and that their diet consists entirely of seeds, along with a few insects and snails. To digest the seeds, mourning doves swallow grit or sand.

We watched the two babies grow on top of our green umbrella, flutter their wings and eventually depart, first to the garden wall, back to the umbrella top for another day and then they were gone.



Parent and two chicks

Our next project was a lengthy umbrella and patio clean-up job. **THREE DAYS** later we noticed twigs on the ground, looked up and there perched on the green umbrella was a Mourning Dove! Could it be our former homesteader, expecting again? Or another observer, awaiting her turn? Will they return next spring? I hope so! We just saw a pair of White Winged Doves on the wall. Do you suppose they are “casing the place?”

