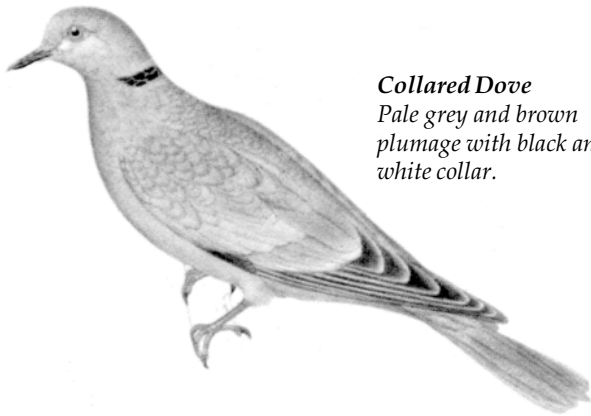


Collared Doves

The day after Boxing Day I looked out of my window and spotted what looked like a small mushroom on the lawn. A closer inspection revealed that it was a white shell from the egg of a collared dove.

Collared Doves are relative newcomers to the UK they first nested here in 1955 spreading westwards from their native home in south-eastern Europe. Since then their numbers have increase dramatically. In the 2001 RSBP Garden Bird Survey they were the 9th most common bird seen in British gardens. Perhaps because its new home is colder, the collared dove prefers to



Collared Dove
Pale grey and brown
plumage with black and
white collar.

live near towns and villages, or near farms, where it can find plenty of food.

They normally nest from March to November producing about 5-6 broods a year, so my egg shell must have been from a very late brood. The nests are usually located in tall trees with dense foliage, like leyland conifers, and contain 2 white eggs which are incubated for 14-18 days. The young dove nestlings are called squabs and are fed on pigeon's milk a cheesy secretion from the crop, rich in protein and fat. They are fledged in 17 days and fully independent one week later.

Their main food is seeds and they will visit bird tables eating grain and scraps. I have 3-4 regular visitors to my bird table. They are very aggressive and will "see off" starlings and much larger wood pigeons, this may be one reason for their success.

The adults are about 32 cm long with pale grey and brown plumage with a black and white collar at the back of the neck, which is lacking in the juvenile. The voice is a repeated monotonous *coo-coo-coo* which to some people can become quite infuriating. The dove also gives a nasal *whurr-whurr* when excited, particularly when courting.

Bees will emerge soon

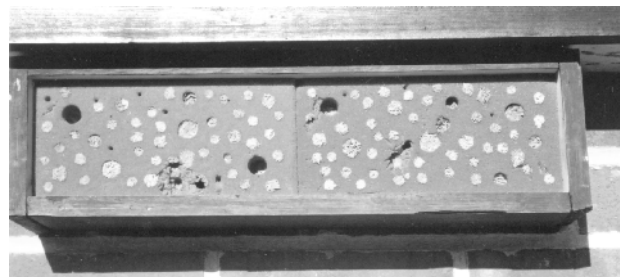
Last year I described how to make a box that could be used as a nest site for solitary bees and wasps. Horsell Common is one of the best sites in the south of England for these special insects. Many use the sandy banks of the sandpit to dig tunnels in which they lay their eggs. Over 180 different kinds of bee and wasp have been identified on the Common so far, some of them quite rare.

In the spring the larvae which have overwintered in my box will emerge as young bees and wasps ready to repeat the life cycle all over again.

If you want to create your own beehive now is a good time to start. You will need some flower arrangers oasis, the type used for dried flowers (usually buff coloured) not the green that is used for flowers that need water. Place this in a box

on a south facing wall. Make some holes by pushing a pencil halfway into the foam this will encourage the bees to start creating tunnels for their nests.

Last year I put my bee box up in May and within two hours the bees were using it. After they had laid their eggs they sealed the holes with mud.



Photograph of the beehive taken in February. If you look carefully you will see the damage done by a Woodpecker during the winter as it attempted to get at the overwintering larvae which will be emerging in the spring.

