

Band-tailed Pigeon

Patagioenas fasciata

A backwoods relative of the ubiquitous Rock Pigeon, the Band-tailed Pigeon is common in forests of the Pacific Coast and the Southwest. A sociable bird with a mellow coo, it forms large flocks in mountain forests where it feeds on seeds and fruits. As flocks pass overhead, these large, swift-flying pigeons can resemble Rock Pigeons, so look for the long tail with a wide, pale band at the tip. Up close, a distinctive white neck crescent adorns its pastel gray plumage.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Band-tailed Pigeons are large, stocky pigeons with small heads, long, rounded tails, and thick-based, pointed wings.

Color Pattern

They are soft blue-gray above and purplish-gray below, with a white crescent on the back of the neck. The upper half of the tail is gray, fading to a pale gray band at the tip. The wings are unmarked pale gray with dark wing-tips noticeable in flight. The bill and feet are yellow.

Behavior

These forest pigeons spend much of their time traveling in groups to search for nuts, fruits, and seeds on the ground and in trees. They typically travel and feed in flocks of dozens to hundreds of individuals. Their call is a slow one- or two-syllable coo, sounding somewhat owl-like.

Habitat

Band-tailed Pigeons live in mature coniferous forests in Western mountains, damp forests of the West Coast, and conifer-oak woodlands. They also visit forested suburban parks, fields, orchards, and backyard birdfeeders to forage.

Cool Facts

- Band-tailed Pigeons have two distinct breeding populations in the United States, one along the West Coast and one in the Southwest. Individuals do move from one region to the other, and sometimes they wander even farther afield. One pigeon banded in Oregon was shot a year later in Florida, well outside the normal range.
- Palomar Mountain in northern San Diego County is named after the Band-tailed Pigeon. The Spanish name for pigeon is “paloma”.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 13.0 - 15.7 inches
- Weight - 12.1 - 12.8 ounces

