

Record of a melanistic form of the Scaled Dove, *Columbina squammata*, from northeastern Brazil



Figure 1. Melanistic *Columbina squammata* from Sergipe, northeastern Brazil: (a) lateral view; (b) dorsal view. Photo: Rafael Breno.

Juan Ruiz-Esparza^{1,3}, Daniela Pinheiro Bitencurti Ruiz-Esparza² & Stephen F. Ferrari¹

The Scaled Dove, *Columbina squammata* (Lesson, 1831), has a body length of approximately 19 cm and is distinguished by its typical “scaled” plumage which acts as camouflage, and has a brown base, with white stripe at the base of the wing and side of the tail. The species is endemic to South America, occurring principally eastern and southern Brazil, with a distinct distribution that excludes most of the Amazon and Orinoco basins.

Scaled Doves are found in open habitats, such as savannas and savanna woodlands, secondary forests, and anthropogenic habitats, including pastures, plantations, and gardens^{1,2,3,4}. *Columbina squammata* forages in small bands, which may contribute to the effectiveness of antipredator vigilance⁵. The species is popular as a pet, especially in northeastern Brazil, where it is often trafficked illegally^{6,7}.

We recorded a case of melanism in *Columbina squammata* in January 31, 2014, in the village of Pontal

(11°28'51”S, 37°24'07”W), in the municipality of Indiaroba, Sergipe, northeastern Brazil (Figure 1). The bird was being kept in captivity in a private residence and was found to be in good condition, except for the loss of some feathers, especially those of the tail (Figure 1b). The owner reported that the animal had been in captivity for more than one year, which was captured in the wildlife. This is only the second record of melanism in this species, although the first record, from the Brazilian city of Brasília, referred to a case of partial melanism⁸, in contrast with the almost complete effect observed in the present case (Figure 1).

Melanism may often be adaptive by improving camouflage⁹, in contrast with albinism, which may increase vulnerability to predation¹⁰ or affect social behavior¹¹. The condition has been recorded in a wide range of vertebrates, ranging from manta rays, *Manta birostris*¹² to jaguar, *Panthera onca*¹³. In birds, however, this condition is most often found in raptors¹⁴, and it is unclear what the exact implications of this condition would be for *Columbina squammata*.

References

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¹Department of Ecology, Universidade Federal de Sergipe. 49100-000. São Cristóvão, SE, Brazil.

²Graduate Program in Development and Environment – PRODEMA, Universidade Federal de Sergipe. São Cristóvão, Brazil.

³E-mail: juancolorado21@hotmail.com