

Common Name/Scientific name: White-headed Pigeon / *Columba leucomela*

The white-headed pigeon is a pigeon native to the east coast of Australia, belonging to the same genus as the domestic pigeon *Columba livia*. The population of White-headed Pigeons has declined greatly as many of the rainforests of eastern Australia have been cleared, and, in addition, they were also shot in great numbers, both for food and sport. Since the 1950s, however, their numbers have increased again after they were protected from hunters, and this also coincided with the widespread planting/spreading of exotic Camphor Laurel trees in agricultural lands. These trees produce berries which the pigeons readily eat, and they quickly became a staple part of the birds' diet in many areas. These pigeons are very welcome in the Maroochy gardens on their occasional visits, but not so the camphor laurels, which are banished & roused on sight!



Description: The White-headed Pigeon is a large pigeon with a distinctive white head, neck and breast, which sometimes have an orange or greyish wash. The back, wings and tail are dark grey to black and the underparts are grey. The male has a metallic green or purple sheen, and the female often has a darker cap and is usually greyer. Young White-headed Pigeons resemble darker females. The eye ring is pink to dark red and the legs and feet are also pink-red.

Feeding & Behaviour in the gardens: The White-headed Pigeon feeds on rainforest fruits and seeds, but strongly prefers laurels, such as the introduced Camphor Laurel. They feed in trees, sometimes in flocks, and will travel several kilometres to feed in open country. They (and other pigeons) are probably responsible for the occasional CL seedling in the gardens and nearby bushland, by dispersing the seeds in their droppings.

Breeding and Nesting: The White-headed Pigeon builds a platform of sticks in dense tree foliage or in tangled vines. Both members of breeding pairs incubate and care for the single young.

Similar species seen in the gardens: There are a number of native and exotic/domestic pigeons and doves (family: *Columbidae*) including the Wompoo Pigeon that are seen occasionally at the Maroochy gardens. It is the general size and white head, neck and breast that distinguishes this species.