

Shufeldt (R.W.)

Notes on the Classification
of the pigeons



Notes on the Classification of the Pigeons.—Quite recently the writer has very thoroughly compared the characters presented on the part of the skeletons of specimens of nearly all the genera of the United States Columbidae. There appears to be a difference of opinion as to how these birds should be classified. Coues, in his "Key" (second edition), states it as his opinion that "the order Columbæ may be separated into three groups or suborders: Didi, Pterocletes, and Peristeræ,—the first two certainly, the last probably, of a single family. The Peristeræ alone are American. These he divides in the following way:

Suborder.	Family.	Subfamilies.
PERISTERÆ.	Columbidæ.	{ 1. Columbinæ. { 2. Zenaidinæ. { 3. Starnœnadinæ.

In the Columbinæ he includes the genera *Columba* and *Ectopistes*; in the Zenaidinæ, the genera *Engyptila*, *Zenaidura*, *Zenaida*, *Melopelia*, *Columbigallina*, *Scardafella*, and *Geotrygon*; and finally, in the Starnœnadinæ, the genus *Starnœnas*.

The American Ornithologists' Union, in its official check-list, presents the order Columbæ to contain the family Columbidae, and creates no subfamilies for the genera just named above.

Mr. Ridgway, in his "Manual," adopts the same scheme of classification.

Coues primarily bases his division of the Columbidae into subfamilies upon the following characters:

- Tarsi scutellate, feathered Columbinæ.
- Tarsi scutellate, naked Zenaidinæ.
- Tarsi reticulate, naked Starnœnadinæ.

The remaining characters, in so far as we have any knowledge of them at present, except in the case of the Starnœnadinæ, do not go to



support this division, and it breaks down utterly when we come to take into consideration the osteology of the various species.

The skeleton of *Geotrygon* has not been examined by me; but I am of the opinion that it will not militate against the classification suggested below, judging as I do from its external anatomy.

My studies of the osteology of the group convince me that our United States pigeons naturally make a very good suborder, containing the family Columbidae. Now, if we take the characters presented on the part of the skeleton of such a species as *Ectopistes migratorius*, we find that they are essentially repeated by all the other genera save *Starnœnas*. When we come to osteologically compare *Starnœnas* we find that it differs very materially and in a number of points, as in the general pattern of its sternum, the number and arrangement of its vertebræ and ribs, some of its cranial characters, and in the characters of its pelvic limbs.

From osteological premises, then, our family Columbidae divides naturally into two subfamilies: the Columbinæ, containing the genera *Columba*, *Ectopistes*, *Engyptila*, *Zenaidura*, *Zenaida*, *Melopelia*, *Columbigallina*, *Scardafella*, and *Geotrygon*; and the subfamily *Starnœnadinæ*, containing the genus *Starnœnas*.

In another connection it is my intention to present these osteological characters of the Columbidae in detail.—R. W. SHUFELDT, *Smithsonian Institution, January 22d, 1891.*

