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## Jail-Bird Watching, Part 2 of 2

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When it comes to pigeon-watching, I'm a mere dilettante. But I need an occasional break from my studies, writing and other cerebrations. So, I was bummed when I discovered that, while I wasn't watching, a raptor of some kind smoked the lighter colored female pigeon (yes, I realize I spelled pigeon wrong, with a "d" in Part 1, post #142), leaving her mostly-devoured carcass on the back of the prison's chapel, which apparently discouraged other pigeons from visiting that love shack, ~~was abandoned~~.

The gray male pigeon was out of sight. I thought he too might be dead.

Weeks passed.

The carcass of the female pigeon, still fully plumed but headless, was blown or pushed by some other bird from the top of the chapel to the lower roof of its annex, where it appeared to me to have been cleaned dry by maggots and scavenged of gristle, bone or maggots by puny sparrows, until its final, frail remains were blown to the concrete walkway and disposed of by some sucker getting paid 20¢ an hour to keep the area clean.

"It's the circle of life," one part of my brain pointed out to me.

After her carcass was gone, two new pigeons took up part-time residence at the love shack: a nearly jet-black male and a light-blue/gray female with slate patches on her wings. Each bird had a pure-white patch that ran down their backs, larger than the lighter back-patches on the previous pair, that ran right down to the base of their tailfeathers.

"They must be young," I thought, because: their plumage was so fresh looking, they weren't as large as the prior pair and they seemed inexperienced (the male, when he went out to gather nest-building materials, dropped almost everything he picked up, as if disapproving of it for some reason; he rarely brought back anything and sometimes picked up the same twig or whatever & rejected it again when reencountering it). This apparently younger pair did seemingly weird things too: the dark male would stick his head into a crevice under the eaves of the

main building's roof and keep it there for, sometimes, more than 30 minutes, while the female stood by, often with her rear high in the air, towards the male, who's head was buried in a crevice....

"Was the male rooting for food of some kind, trying to dig into the brick wall (futilely), or hiding from the world?" I wondered. It was obvious what the female wanted - sex. When the male's head wasn't in the wrong crevice, she persistently tried to kiss at him, practically rubbing her rear in his face. The male usually seemed more interested in staring off into the distance or burying his head under a brick.

After a day or two, a plumper, darker gray pigeon dropped in on the annex roof, missing 3 or 4 feathers from the left side of his tail. After some scrutiny of it, I realized it was the male who's mate got ate.

"Why the missing feathers?" I wondered.

I'd seen a show about birds that revealed that parrots in captivity would pluck their own feathers from severe anxiety if denied the ability to socialize with other birds (or their keepers), like how some anxious people bite their nails or even compulsively pulled their hair out.

"Maybe it pulled its own feathers out of frustration at the loss of his mate, maybe at anger at himself for not being able to protect her?"

He did seem more passionately in love with his mate than the dark male seemed to be with his.

Although the gray male was alone, he drove off, easily, the darker male and that male's partner. The times I was watching, the darker male flew off as soon as the gray male loomed close, and once had a piece of his down plucked off by the gray male for not leaving quick enough. The new pair rarely went farther than to another eave on the chapel building, where the dark male promptly dug his head into the wrong crevice while the female tried to entice him with her raised rear.

"Being run off probably drained the male's libido," I thought, based on my recent reading of Anthony Storr's Human Aggression. Despite the fact that birds and humans split evolutionary paths a long time ago, we do have some qualities, surprisingly, in common, which, I think, likely includes how we deal with aggression and being vanquished.

Soon the gray male had a mate, a long-legged female, who was as

black as the dark male, with hardly any white on her back. She too ran off the black male, though she more frequently ran off his female partner. The gray male didn't tolerate the dark male being too near his favorite stoop, and absolutely didn't tolerate the dark male being near his female. Once, when the dark male's mate was away, that male performed some kind of dance where he puffed out the feathers around his neck, squatted down, made tight circles with his body, and, from the vibrations I could see in its throat, made some vocalizations too; but the dark female ran him off, obviously not impressed.

Unlike the dark male, the gray male kept most pieces of desiccated vegetation he picked up, brought them back up under the eave his new mate was waiting under, dropping it by her.

The dark female stood very erect. She reminded me of Dr. Baird, the head shrink here, <sup>who</sup> stands about 6'3" and has long, black hair, with, like the pigeon, super-long legs, along with an assertive personality. She initiated a lot of kissing and mating with the gray male. She'd get him all excited with necking, he'd then try to get behind her, she'd turn a few tight circles, make him chase her, then stop and let him mount her. By making him chase her, I think she satisfied her need to feel wanted, like people also do, which is a basic psychological need of all animals, I believe, as I get into in post #156.

Boy, he mounted her with style too! Call it the pigeon position when ya get up on & behind your woman, flap your arms, outstretched, to help ya balance, while thrusting! 😊

Without a T.V. or radio, I had little other live action to entertain/distract myself with. Pigeon porn was it, and I yelled to my neighbors whenever the pigeons initiated a romp.

It was & is curious to me how like humans those pigeons were, or how like pigeons we humans are.

Maybe Native Americans saw this & that's why they wear feathers & do dances not too different than the one I saw that dark pigeon do?


For several days, "Dr. Baird" was nowhere to be seen. Yet the gray male kept that younger pair the hell away from his stoop. During one of these days, the dark male's female flew up onto one of the towers in this prison, where the gray male did the same circular, crouching dance that the black had done in front of the black female, in front of the gray female.

The gray female flew off and the gray male followed her, out of sight. When Dr. Baird returned, she promptly kissed at and demanded sex from the gray male. While I watched them, they boldly mated, and less than 30 minutes later did so again. Right after the second mating, the gray male, with no preamble, crouched down and let Dr. Baird mount & dry-hump him!

No, Dr. Baird was not a male. It was posturing only, but unexpected.

If those birds lacked complex personalities, minds, souls, or whatever you want to call "it," I don't think their behavior can make sense, nor would my description of my observations be believable. But I'm sure anyone who spends some time watching pigeons would see the same, maybe more, because I only part-timed this.

Isn't it curious how complex pigeon's social & mating activities are, that the females (at least of these two pairs) initiate sex with their mates, that they're not strictly monogamous and that they engage in sexual role reversal? All this with brains about as big as the tip of my index finger if that!

I suspect that, in their  minds, they perceive themselves to be quite conscious and competent, not the dummies they sometimes seem to me. We are being, I think, foolishly arrogant about our own species if we deem pigeons, or any animals, to be dumb, lack personalities, or not feel. Some humans seem to have no personality, be absolutely despicable, but maybe we are being foolishly arrogant with our take on them too....

<http://betweenthebars.org/blogs/540/>

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