

Grenada Dove

(*Leptotila wellsi*) **CRITICALLY ENDANGERED**



Greg Homel

DESCRIPTION

The Grenada Dove, Grenada's national bird, is one of the rarest doves in the world and found only on this island. It is medium-sized (26–31 cm, ~200 g) and somewhat plump, with solid cinnamon-brown upperparts, a pale pinkish-beige face and forehead, grayish crown, white throat, and cinnamon to pinkish-buff nape, neck, and breast. The belly is white with a distinctive strip of white feathers extending over the shoulder—a key field mark that distinguishes it from other doves. Its eyes are pale yellow, surrounded by a bright carmine ring, and the legs and feet are vivid reddish-pink.

Males and females look alike, though males are slightly larger. Juveniles are duller, with less vivid coloring. Shy and elusive, the Grenada Dove is most often seen walking quietly on the forest floor or perched low within dense vegetation.

ECOLOGY & BEHAVIOUR

The Grenada Dove is a solitary, ground-feeding bird, though pairs are sometimes seen and small family groups may forage together. Its preferred habitat is dry coastal and mixed deciduous forest, especially areas with thorny leguminous trees and shrubs. These forests provide a carpet of leaf litter and exposed soil where the dove searches for small seeds and possibly other food items such as insects. Foraging occurs within the forest, occasionally near clearings or edges. Access to freshwater is especially important during the long dry season.

Breeding takes place mainly during the rainy season (June–December). The dove's distinctive, descending *hooooo*, repeated every 7–8 seconds, is most often heard at this time as males establish territories and attract mates. Nests are fragile stick platforms placed 4–7 meters above the ground, sometimes higher. Both parents share incubation and care of the young, switching duties morning and evening.

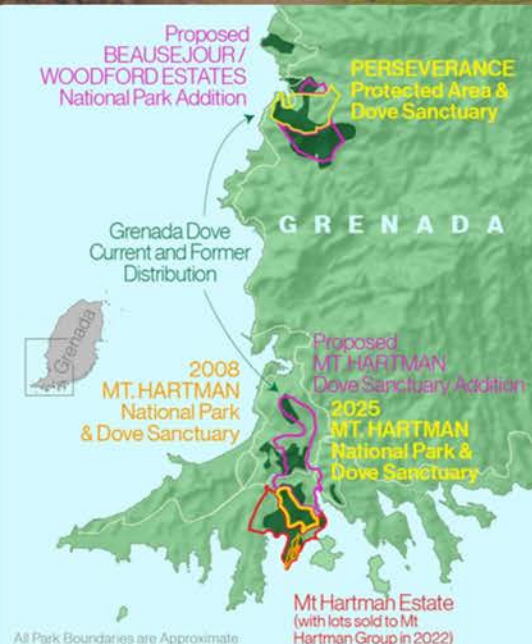


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STATUS & DISTRIBUTION

The Grenada Dove is classified as **Critically Endangered** on the IUCN Red List, with the most recent survey (2013) estimating a total population of **about 160 individuals (range 107–229)**. Endemic to Grenada, it now survives in just two small areas of dry forest: on the southwest coast (including Mt. Hartman Estate, Petit Bouc and Woodlands, Lower Woburn, and surrounding forests) and on the west coast (Perseverance, Woodford, Beausejour and Grenville Vale Estates, and Black Bay). These two populations were likely connected in the past but are now separated by nearly 9 km of urban development, including the island's capital, St. George's. Mt. Hartman National Park has long been considered the core of the species' population, supporting nearly half of the remaining birds.

Although legal protection exists at Mt. Hartman National Park and Perseverance Dove Sanctuary, these areas safeguard less than **10%** of the dove's habitat, leaving the species highly vulnerable to ongoing habitat loss and degradation.



THREATS

The Grenada Dove faces multiple severe threats that endanger its already tiny and fragmented population.

1 Habitat Loss and Degradation: The greatest threat is the destruction and fragmentation of dry forest habitat for housing, commercial development, small-scale farming, and fires. The proposed resort and golf course at Mt. Hartman would directly impact the dove's most important stronghold, bringing further habitat loss, pollution, disturbance, and more predators. Even low levels of human activity can disrupt feeding and breeding, as these shy birds flush easily and fly to the ground when disturbed.

2 Invasive Predators: Introduced mammals—including mongooses, rats, cats, and opossums—are abundant in the dove's habitat and pose a grave threat to the remaining population. Because the species forages mainly on the ground, adults, chicks, and eggs are highly vulnerable to predation.

3 Natural Disasters: Hurricanes have historically caused major declines. After Hurricane Ivan in 2004, the west coast population was reduced by nearly half.

4 Climate Change: Increasingly frequent and intense storms and hurricanes, along with prolonged droughts, further degrade habitat, alter forest structure, and reduce the food and water resources the dove needs to survive and reproduce.

The combined impact of these pressures continues to drive the population decline, leaving the future of the Grenada Dove uncertain without urgent conservation action.



CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT

The Grenada Dove is more than a rare species—it is **Grenada's national bird**, a symbol of pride featured on stamps and in education and ecotourism programs. Yet, despite its cultural importance, its survival remains precarious.

In 1996, the Government of Grenada legally established **Mt. Hartman National Park** and the **Perseverance Dove Sanctuary**, which together hold a small portion of the population. Management by the Forestry and National Parks Department has included patrols, boundary maintenance, rubbish clearing, signage, and predator control. These efforts have helped reduce local threats, but the protected areas cover less than **10%** of the dove's range, and most remaining habitat lies on private or unprotected land vulnerable to development.

Two **Grenada Dove Recovery and Action Plans** (1999, 2008) and a **Conservation and Management Plan for Perseverance-Beausejour** (2010) called for halting habitat loss, preventing further declines, and expanding suitable habitat. Yet progress has been limited, and ongoing development at Mt. Hartman continues to destroy dove habitat and infringe on park boundaries. Recovery will require protecting existing sites, restoring degraded dry forest, creating new safe areas, and controlling rampant mongoose populations.

Equally important are **research, long-term monitoring, and outreach and education** to close knowledge gaps, raise awareness, and build public and political support. Schools, community groups, and ecotourism programs can foster pride and stewardship—helping to secure the future of this critically endangered dove.

SIMILAR SPECIES

The Grenada Dove can be confused with the Zenaida Dove and the Eared Dove but is larger, stockier, and shows warm cinnamon-brown plumage with no spots or dark cheek patches. Its most distinctive feature is a strip of white feathers over the shoulder, unique among Grenada's doves. Zenaida Doves show a purple neck sheen and white wing edge in flight, while Eared Doves have black spots on the wings, neck, and face. Unlike these common open-country species, the Grenada Dove is confined to dry forest and is much rarer and more secretive.

GRENADA DOVE CAP WORKSHOP:



WITH GRATITUDE TO OUR FUNDING PARTNERS:

