**Assignment 5: Species Portrait**

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**iNaturalist Observations (May 29th)**

* Mourning Dove: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/164919688>
* House Finch: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/164919787>
* Green-tailed Grackle: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/164920592>
* Mallard: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/164920395>
* Little Blue Heron: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/164920090>
* *Acanthocephala terminalis*: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/164920168>
* Shiny Acrobat Ant: <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/164919978>

**Mourning Dove (*Z. macroura*)**

The Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*, also known as the turtledove, is a member of the Dove family *Columbidae*, found extensively in North America. Although the Mourning Dove is one of the most pervasive avian species in the United States, its cultural significance in Native American history makes it a dove worth remembering.

The Mourning Dove is found almost exclusively in North America, with most of its year-round sightings in the United States and Mexico and breeding grounds identified as southern Canada (Otis et al. 1)[[1]](#ailr9og0ymly). The dove has an average length of 22-34 cm, 96-170 g weight, and a wingspan of 45 cm and is identified by its characteristic round head, light gray to brown plumage, and long tail (Powell 1)[[2]](#1q4og0eugmng). In fact, the *Z. macroura* species classification “macroura” is derived from the Greek word for “large tail” (Otis et al. 3). In regards to feeding, *Z. macroura* is known to be a ground forager with seeds making upwards of 99% of its diet, and gravel, and sand consumed supplementally to aid with digestion (Otis et al. 2). With a top speed of 55 mph (Bastin 47)[[3]](#t6ldq9r0gvz4), a robin-sized classification, and geographical ubiquity, the Mourning Dove is a hugely popular game bird in the United States. These selected evolutionary adaptations allow the Mourning Dove to thrive in nearly every ecosystem in the US, allowing for an equitable distribution across the 48 mainland states. Thus, its significance is usually tied to the symbol of peace. Hence, the Mourning Dove has been chosen as Wisconsin’s official symbol of peace (Wisconsin Historical Society 1)[[4]](#7kn9j3hcb4p) and Michigan’s bird of peace (Audi 1)[[5]](#t3plsnovcqon). However, the Mourning Dove is perhaps better known as a symbol of grief due to the historical lore originating from a Native American folk tale.

The Wyandot people, indigenous to the Northeastern Woodlands of North America, tell an Iroquoian story of the Mourning Dove, which has permeated through American culture, developing the reason for the colloquial naming of *Z. macroura*. The legend describes a maiden who tended to the many birds around her home, including the Mourning Dove. The doves would flock to her daily, developing a tight relationship with the maiden. One day, the maiden died of a sickness, and as her spirit traveled to the beyond, the doves followed her across the land to the gates of the Underworld. The gatekeeper deity (and, more generally, the primary deity in Native American cultures), Skywoman, denied the doves entry alongside the maiden’s spirit. The doves, however, were persistent and forced Skywoman to deceive the flock by throwing smoke and ash as she stole away the maiden’s spirit. In doing so, the doves’ feathers became tainted with the smoke, and the Mourning Doves have since been mourning the loss of their beloved maiden (Connelly 45)[[6]](#fnbwdafrwo0a). The folk tale itself is thought to have originated from the similarity of the Mourning Dove’s vocalization and the Iroquoian chant for the dead at funerary rituals (Connelly 45). Although this legend is unique to the Wyandot people, the characterization of the Mourning Dove as the bird of grief and peace extends beyond and into classical and modern American pop culture.

In the past century, the Mourning Dove has inevitably invaded American culture and has become a core part of daily life. In the past century, ornithologists began to colloquially refer to *Z. macroura* as the “mourning” dove due to its coos which have been noted to resemble a person mourning a loss (*Encarta* 1)[[7]](#la9id7euk2qp). This characteristic has since been adopted by Hollywood, which tends to feature Mourning Doves alongside white doves in scenes depicting a funeral to juxtapose the stages of grief the characters go through. On a more positive note, the omnipresence of the Mourning Dove caught the attention of infamous rapper Kanye West, who collaborated with Adidas to create a shoe line for the everyday person. In doing so, he designed the “turtledove” colorway, which took over the fashion industry and pop culture due to the widespread fanaticism over the shoe line (Stonebrook 1)[[8]](#l4s700eqmc2k). The Mourning Dove also appeared extensively in Native American literature and was even the penname of Christine Quintasket, one of the first published Native American female authors (Musgrave 1)[[9]](#ioemi3oxjgcc). Finally, the Mourning Dove was perhaps more pervasive among households due to its appearance on plate *CCLXXXVVI* of Audobon’s *Birds of America* (Audobon 286)[[10]](#m3s6pc8lijf9), a US bird illustrations guidebook.

Collectively, the Mourning Dove represents the common understanding of the birds Americans expect to observe throughout the day. New Yorkers have long complained about the many lofty nests the prolific species creates (Taft 1)[[11]](#2uottxyzxkem), and I myself have grown annoyed by their constant coos invading the thin walls of my room every morning. However, the Mourning dove is not only a pervasive nuisance and game bird, but it is also a symbol of peace across the US and an important symbol of grief in Native American culture, and its pervasive existence has come to give us a sense of home.

**References**

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