

Red-Headed Wood Pigeon

Red-headed wood pigeons are found only in the Ogasawara Archipelago. They have reddish-purple heads, iridescent green necks, and dark, glossy body feathers. Like other animals native to Ogasawara, they evolved without land-based predators and have no natural fear of humans or other animals. When people arrived on the islands in the 1800s, they brought cats, rats, and other invasive species that became the bird's main predators, and the birds were also likely hunted for food. Red-headed wood pigeons are categorized as "critically endangered," and in 2005, there were only 30 to 40 birds estimated to be living in the entire archipelago. Since then, conservation efforts have increased the population—around 600 birds were reported as of 2018. One of the most successful conservation programs has been the live trapping of feral cats. The cats are caught, neutered, and sent for adoption at animal shelters run by the Tokyo Veterinary Medical Association.

The birds fly between the islands of Chichijima, Hahajima, Anijima, and Otōtojima. On Chichijima, a fenced sanctuary has been created to keep out feral cats and other invasive species that might prey on the birds. There are also patrols who monitor the birds. Visitors to the sanctuary must be accompanied by a licensed guide with an entry permit. As the pigeon population has rebounded, the birds have become a more common sight around the islands and can even be seen outside the sanctuary. Finding them on your own, however, can be challenging, and the tourist association recommends hiring a knowledgeable guide to help you find and observe the birds without disturbing them.