



Randy rock doves join party with the dead

It seems that ducks are not the only birds which are known to practise necrophilia. Donald MacLeod reports on an earlier finding that proves pigeons have copulated with corpses too

Monday March 14, 2005

Guardian Unlimited

The sad tale of the Dutch homosexual necrophiliac duck last week inspired enormous interest among readers all over the world and researcher Kees Moeliker was soon fielding calls from the United States, Canada and a radio station in Belfast.

EducationGuardian.co.uk has also elicited news of equally shocking behaviour in a British bird - recorded many years before the journal article that gained Dr Moeliker his coveted Ig Nobel prize for his discovery of the first case of homosexual necrophilia in the mallard (*anas platyrhynchos*).

That most respectable journal, *British Birds*, reported in 1987 the case of a feral rock dove (more commonly known as the pigeon) run over at a traffic crossing in Settle, north Yorkshire, on June 23 1983. "As soon as the traffic had cleared a second dove alighted by the corpse. Clearly a male, it began to 'parade' by the headless body, puffing out its chest and strutting back and forth.

"Despite receiving no response, it mounted the corpse and engaged in vigorous copulatory movements. It was so stimulated that it did not move when cars approached and a small queue of cars built up as the dove went through its energetic performance. It then flew off."

The authors, Evelyn Slavid and Julie Taylor, said they examined the corpse, which appeared to be tagged with a metal ring round its foot - evidence the bird had been bred in captivity. "It may therefore have been exhausted from racing at the time it made its fatal landing on the road."

But the real author, we can now reveal, was the research scientist Jonathan Adams, now head of the Evidence data analysis company, who says he now regrets his cowardice in not putting his name to this bizarre item.

Dr Moeliker was fascinated to hear of this earlier publication - until Dr Adams came forward he thought the only other scholarly recording of necrophilia in the bird or animal world involved an American squirrel run over by a truck.

But the Dutchman is the one who went on to gain the Ig Nobel - another example of a British research failing to follow up on an early breakthrough.

EducationGuardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2006