

There is a bird in my back garden that has a special meaning for me. Here they call it a dove; in England its name is a wood pigeon. It isn't spectacular to look at, in fact it's quite difficult to see because it is mainly grey. Its looks vary from country to country. Here it is totally light grey, whereas in England, it has a blue-green head, and some pink on its belly. Both, however, make a haunting(1) sound that takes me back to my childhood. As I grew up in a small, rural town, surrounded by farms and woods, I heard the call of the wood pigeon most of the year. I used to climb trees a lot, and sit and daydream(2) in them, so I became familiar with the sounds of all the different birds. The wood pigeon sounds like an owl; it hoots or coos(3) five times in a row. The sound is soothing(4). Now that I live in the country, after spending years in cities, I have found wood pigeons again, and it feels like I'm back, as a little girl, sitting in my tree daydreaming. They are a strong bird that eats a variety of things: young shoots(5), seedlings, pine nuts, worms and ants. They actually produce a thick milk, so their babies get fat quickly. They pair(6) for life, and each year both the mother and father sit on the eggs to keep them warm. The wood pigeons that live in cold, northern areas migrate, whereas those in warmer countries don't need to. I have two pairs in my garden who disappear in the winter, but return in early spring. They are always welcome here, my garden companions.

1. 'Haunting' comes from the verb 'to haunt'. Though the verb is related to ghosts, and their scary presence, the word haunting is used quite poetically and beautifully. A piece of music, a memory, or a sound can all be haunting. They leave a strong impression, an echo of some kind, often deep and emotional.

a. His words still haunt me.

b. Some of Mozart's music is haunting; I keep thinking about it.

2. 'To daydream' is simply to dream during the day.

a. Children need time to daydream; it's good to let their imaginations be free.

b. Sorry! I wasn't listening; I was daydreaming!

3. 'Hoot and coo'. Both are sounds. An owl hoots, other birds coo. Both sounds have the long 'oooo' in them. 'Coo' is often used to describe the noise that a happy, young baby makes when it is making an 'oo' sound.

a. I couldn't sleep. There was an owl on my roof hooting all night.

b. I love baby noises, especially the cooing.

4. 'Soothing' comes from the verb to soothe. It means to give relief, to ease pain or discomfort. It can be figurative as well.

a. The cold water on my hot forehead was very soothing.

b. After a stressful day, violin music can be very soothing.

5. 'Young shoots' refers to very new plants that are just emerging from the ground. Animals and birds like to eat these because they are sweet.

a. I will keep the pea shoots covered otherwise the birds will eat them.

b. I can tell it's Spring; there are shoots all over the

garden.

6. 'To pair' means to join together as a couple.

a. Pair (up) with a partner to practice the conversation.

b. Those monkeys pair for life; they stay with the same partner.