

Mourning Dove with ice ball on bill: On 10 February 1994 late in the afternoon (1600 hrs) I observed a single Mourning Dove at one of my feeding tables and approached to see what was wrong with it. Other doves had been feeding earlier and perhaps this one had remained and was asleep, since I have had this experience before. I have even picked up several fully asleep Mourning Dove from the feeding platform and released them after they had awakened. This Mourning Dove was smaller than normal and an immature based on plumage. It would not let me approach too closely but I did observe and attempted to photograph it. It had a ball of almost clear ice on the lower portion and mostly inside its bill, which severely limited its feeding ability. I could not tell if the ice had formed on an abnormally long lower bill, which I have seen previously in this species. The ice ball was about 1/4 inch in diameter. The Mourning Dove flew off as I approached it and returned a short time later to try to feed again. Another attempt was made to photograph the bird as it tried to feed on cracked corn and white millet seed on the feeding table. How successful it was in this attempt I do not know since I could not get close enough before the bird flew off again.

The winter of 1994 had been very severe up to this date and the temperature that morning was -30°F officially at Watertown. Much colder temperatures were experienced at other locations around the Watertown area on that day. I would guess that the ball of ice was formed from the exhaled breath moisture of this bird. Perhaps it was formed from drinking water at nearby Stony Creek or a spring seep in my backyard. However the location of the ice ball on the upper portion of the lower bill mostly inside the mouth and its size makes me think it was from exhaled breath moisture. Perhaps a droplet froze on the bill while the bird was drinking and then the exhaled breath moisture added additional layers of ice to a nuclei. How commonly this ice ball formation on the bill of birds occurs in these extreme winter conditions is unknown but the risk of death by starvation could be fairly high for any bird in such a situation with an extended extreme cold spell. I checked other Mourning Dove on this and subsequent days. None showed any evidence of ice ball formation on the bill.

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