

Yet another superlative for Dubai? Feral pigeon *Columba livia* on the 124th floor of the Burj Khalifa

THOMAS DONEGAN & BLANCA HUERTAS

The Burj Khalifa in Dubai is the world's tallest building, rising to 829.8 m. It also boasts the world's highest outdoor observation deck at 452 m on its 124th floor. These are among at least 15 claimed world records for the structure. Here, we report a Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* from a remarkably high urban perch above this observation deck, observed at c17.00 h on 25 April 2015. It was a feral bird with generally white plumage, blackish to purple feathering on the head with light speckles, dark primaries and a dark tail (Plate 1). E-bird



Plate 1. A feral pigeon *Columba livia* at the Burj Khalifa observation deck, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
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includes many records of *C. livia* at and near this locality but without more details or photographs. There is also another photograph on the website 'pinterest.com' from high on the same building, taken by a building climber, also being a bird with overall white plumage and darker marks although with a slightly different pattern. Doubtless, other birders and tourists have observed the species here. The individual that we observed spent most of the c2 h when we were present at the locality perched on external structures above the glazing which borders the observation deck's exterior opening. It occasionally came down to ground level within the observation deck to eat crumbs and scraps left by tourists.

Feral Pigeons are among the most familiar of all birds, occurring in towns, cities, coastal cliffs and mountains throughout the world (eg Baptista *et al* 1997). The original wild Rock Dove *Columba livia* is a species naturally found in cliff habitats and mountains of Eurasia, whose feral pigeon descendants today have adapted to occupy urban environments such as buildings. They have, moreover, adapted ecologically from temperate regions to occupy very hot environments (Arad *et al* 1988) and are widespread in Middle Eastern cities (Porter *et al* 1996). Studies in Switzerland found that 30% of Feral Pigeons remain within 0.3 km of home lofts in urban habitats, with only 7.5% flying distances of more than 2 km to forage, and a 5 km maximum range (Rose *et al* 2006). Our Burj Khalifa bird had presumably displaced itself almost 500 m vertically at some point previously. Feral Pigeons occur at much higher elevations elsewhere, including up to 4500 m in mountainous regions (Baptista *et al* 1997, BirdLife International 2018) and pigeons have been recorded hitting aircraft at over 1000 m (Dolbeer 2006). Finding an individual at such a high elevation is clearly not entirely surprising. It remains to be seen whether the pigeons' local avian predators eg Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* will better this record in due course.

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Thomas Donegan, Unaffiliated. thomasdonegan@yahoo.co.uk

Blanca Huertas, Department of Life Sciences, Natural History Museum, SW7 5BD London, United Kingdom. b.huertas@nhm.ac.uk