

CHAPTERS

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INTRODUCTION



This book is meant to offer information and advice to those starting out in the sport, or hobby, of racing pigeons in Canada in the 21st century. There are circumstances which occur in Canada which are not addressed in most pigeon literature aimed at the novice.

I grew up in, what was then, a small town called Oakville in Southern Ontario, Canada. In the 50s and 60s pigeon **lofts** were quite common in town, but as time passed, bylaws were introduced to ban pigeons from Oakville as well as many other towns and cities throughout Ontario and the rest of the country. As a result, the once common practice of raising pigeons as a pastime is a rarity and the knowledge has also gone by the wayside. As cities sprawl and pave over farm land, society has become removed from practices common forty or fifty years ago. While maintaining a small loft of pigeons is fairly straight forward, and the pigeon predictable, the how to's and whys astonish and baffle the novice as they often do the seasoned veteran. These mysteries you can ponder during our long winter nights.

The practices outlined in this book have been followed successfully by novices in my area, as well as others, and are merely a starting program to get your birds up and running through your first **young bird** season. You will undoubtedly get advice from many different sources with many differing views. Hopefully you will have many years to try many different techniques, but the age old methods described in this book will give you a good start.

CHAPTER 1

THE LOFT & IT'S FITTINGS



While the loft is where your colony of pigeons will spend most of their time, it is also a building that your neighbours, family, visitors and potentially new flyers will look at regularly and interpret as being representative of the sport. The loft needn't be elaborate and expensive but it must be tidy and well maintained. It is in effect a branch office in your neighbourhood and will reflect your interest in the sport.

In your introductory year you will need housing for five to ten young birds. Accepted thinking considers two square feet of floor space per bird as necessary. A four foot by five foot space is adequate for ten birds. Bear

in mind that the loft must be comfortable for you to enter to feed, clean and handle your birds. Spending time in your loft will go a long way to familiarizing yourself with your birds and vice versa.

There are different ways to get loft space. Chiefly, converting an existing structure, or building a new one. Some clubs may be willing to lend a small loft for your first year. In converting an existing building bear in mind that flight access is necessary. While pigeons are adaptable, there's no use in over taxing their young minds.

One of the main concerns in any loft in Canada must be predator proofing. In central Ontario where I live, there are many wild animals that will decimate your colony in one night. The list includes raccoons, weasels, martens, rats, fishers, mink and the odd fox. Owls and some hawks will follow pigeons into the loft. Owls have been known to enter a loft at night.



This cute little fellow would be only too happy to help you cull up to a hundred pigeons in one night. This is the weasel that lives along with his mate under and around my pigeon loft. I let them live there as a constant reminder that they are always around and I must be vigilant. Note the piece of $\frac{5}{8}$ inch plywood behind his head and image the size of opening he could weasel his way into.

A good set of box perches is all you will need to house your young birds. Box perches suit this set up for several reasons. Perches eleven inches square by six inches deep work well. The birds are easy to catch in their individual perches. They will soon pick a favourite perch and defend it. Inverted "V" shaped perches can also be used. They stay clean but the young birds are harder to catch. The bottom perches should be no higher than three feet from the floor, enabling the youngest birds to access a perch once they are weaned.

Good ventilation in your loft is a priority. There should not be the smell of pigeon droppings in your loft, period. An adequate amount of fresh air must enter the loft at or near the bottom and be exhausted near the ceiling. The cool clean air enters at the bottom, is warmed inside the loft, rises, and leaves through the vents at the top taking the moist foul air with it. Your vents need to be rain proof as well as vermin proof. Rain entering the loft through the vents will soon become a problem. All openings like these should not have mesh larger than one half by one inch. To keep mice out you will need one half by one half inch mesh.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of protecting your pigeons from predators. In the last few years our club members have had one raccoon, three weasels, one rat, two martens and a fisher enter their lofts and kill several hundred birds.

The material used for the floor should be of a quality that is fairly wear resistant and smooth enough that it can be scraped. I have found that fir tongue and groove plywood floor sheathing is ideal. Put three coats of a white alkyd paint primer on it before installing it and the primer will last for years. This type of flooring is seven years old in my loft and still going strong.

Pigeons need sunshine to achieve and maintain good health. They absorb vitamin D through their feathers. It is believed that the benefits, other than warmth, do not pass through glass. Some system of opening windows, or an aviary, should be incorporated into the design.

If a new loft is being built then good ventilation under the structure is also required. The loft should be a minimum of ten inches off the ground. This will allow air movement under the loft which will lessen the chances of the floor joists rotting and will make the space less attractive to animals which might take up residence under your loft.

Your loft will have to be equipped with a system for letting the pigeons in and out. A rectangular opening nine inches high by fourteen inches wide

will be adequate to get you started. A system of what are referred to as **bob wires**, or in the old days “**bucking bars**” is used to let the birds enter the loft. Once in, they are not able to pass back through them to get out again. This line of swinging bars is hinged at the top and you can swing them up to let the birds out. This opening will need a secure door or flap on the inside to keep out unwanted visitors.

Lining the interior of the walls is a personal choice. There are different types of South American and Asian plywood on the market these days which would do the job nicely at a very reasonable price. My own preference is to paint the interior of the loft white. This will give you a bright, clean looking and easy to maintain interior which will add to your enjoyment of the sport. Some will argue that your loft will be damper but I have never noticed this downside as I have a well ventilated loft.

Any and all interior partitions or dividers should be made of wooden dowelling or lathe. Wire mesh is hard on the feathers. One of our most important jobs is to maintain as close to pristine condition as possible the feathering of our little athletes. The feathers are part of their transportation system. Birds hanging on wire mesh are usually fraying their tail and flight feathers. Aviaries are a necessary evil when it comes to the birds' health. We must also minimize the risks in these areas if at all possible.

There are many resources available these days to find a suitable loft design to suit your needs and situation. There are also many experienced pigeon flyers out there who would welcome a visit from a novice to run through the pros and cons of their particular loft design. The Internet has thousands of pigeon related web sites to browse.

There will need to be a ceiling in the loft. Six foot six is a good height for most people these days. This low ceiling height allows you to work with your birds more easily. With a high ceiling the birds will realize that they can fly over your head to evade capture. A suspended ceiling in a renovated building is an option. The four foot by eight foot sheets of plastic lattice at building centres would allow excellent air flow and keep the birds at a reachable height.

CHAPTER 2

ACQUIRING BIRDS



Since this book is a guide to the basics, we will deal with two basic methods. As a beginner the most uncomplicated method is to get a **kit**

or small team of **squeakers**. Young pigeons are called “squeakers” because of the loud squeaking noise they make to remind the adult birds that it is feeding time. This squeaking persists until the young are about fifty days old. This is a few weeks after they have been **weaned**. You will need a kit of from five to ten depending on the size of their new loft. Loft size has been addressed elsewhere in this book.

All Racing Pigeon clubs in Canada need new flyers whether they want to admit it or not. It is probably easier now than ever before to get a kit of the finest young birds available donated to a serious novice flier. Bear in mind at this time that these birds will be worth every dollar that you might have had to pay for them under different circumstances. If the flyer donating the pigeons to you has advice on how to handle his kit of birds it is a good idea to consider it because different families of birds may respond better to a certain management style.

The young birds you will be looking for will be weaned in late May or early June. This means that you will need to get your groundwork done over the winter months. The breeder that you approach will need time to organize his breeding schedule in order to fit in a kit of birds for you.

You will want your squeakers to be between twenty eight and thirty two days old, or in this range. You will also need to mention to the breeder that all the birds must be eating and drinking well on their own.

Have the number of squeakers that you can accommodate in mind and stick to that number. Do not make the mistake at this time of becoming top heavy with regards to numbers as you start out. This will keep the maintenance low and the enjoyment high. If you do suffer losses for whatever reason, you can acquire replacements at a later time. What we hope for is a modest number of high quality birds to start off with.

Another way to put young birds in your loft is to raise them yourself. This can be one of the most rewarding aspects of the sport but there is more effort and attention needed. The breeding of your first young bird team will be dealt with in a later chapter.

If you are getting started in the sport later in the season, say the summer months, then acquiring breeding stock may be a viable option for the following reason. It is later in the season that some of the finest young birds are bred. These are referred to as “**late bred**s” and if you wish to breed your own stock in the following spring then the acquisition of late bred s as breeding stock makes good sense. These late bred s will not be old enough to race the first year but can be trained with a few tosses in the

late summer. If you are happy to manage your birds and get acquainted with the ins and outs for the first year, then this would make sense.



Red checker cock at 31 days of age in a box perch.

It is during the second half of the summer that flyers may put their birds back together to breed a single round of late breeds in order to keep the birds that have raced that season content. This is the time when you might get squeakers the quality of which was not available earlier in the season,

CHAPTER 3

YOUR FIRST WEEK



We are able to enjoy this sport because pigeons are fairly predictable. They are birds that live in a colony for safety reasons, and due to their diet of seeds and grains, must travel several times a day to far off fields to find their food and return to their nesting site to roost or feed their young. It is this instinct to home that leaves the pigeon no option but to do whatever it can to return to its home. The modern loft system in which our birds find themselves living is very similar to their ancient

ancestors. It is this bond between the pigeon and its loft that the **fancier** exploits when racing pigeons. Since our pigeons have little or no say in where they home to, it is our duty to make sure that they are well housed, fed and maintained. They have nowhere else to go, nor do we want them to start looking for alternatives.

We will assume at this point that your loft is ready to house the squeakers that you are now ready to introduce into it. At the age of thirty days your squeakers will be able to fly a little and will be able to at least reach the bottom perches which you have installed.

At this point it is a good idea to put a small amount of bedding on the floor, and especially in the corners. Through the day the squeakers will lay on the floor in one big pile while catching a few rays. Coarse sawdust dampened a little, straw or coarse pine shavings will do fine. The reason for keeping the coarse sawdust a touch moist is to keep down the dust.

These squeakers are very resilient and have a good reserve of energy and fat stores to draw on which helps them get through the stresses of weaning and starting life on their own. When you arrive home with your squeakers put them on the floor and don't worry about feeding them until the next morning. This introduction to the new loft is best handled on a weekend so that you will have Saturday and Sunday to spend with them.

The next morning you can feed and water them. Put your feed in a trough which they will not be able to climb into. You do not want them to soil their grain as it may end up sitting in the trough for a day or more. They may not eat right away but will pick at it over the course of the day. Once they see a loft mate eating they will soon join in and start eating. The trough or feeder and water container can be put on the floor. The feeder must be of a type that will allow the squeakers to easily see the grain, and the same goes for the drinker. If the breeder has them eating and drinking well at his or her loft then you should have few problems. Pigeons usually fight for all the food they want and then walk over to the drinker and have a long tall drink. It is a good practice to rattle the grain in a can at feeding time so that the birds will associate the sound with feeding time.

The squeakers will take to eating with little trouble but drinking can be a different story. You should pour the water into the drinker in front of the young birds. They need to see and hear this. This is when your powers of observation will need to be honed to their finest. It is times like these that you must pick up on what your birds are up to. You will have to stay with your birds while they eat for the first few days to determine

whether or not they are drinking. There are two clues that they are not. If a squeaker is running around after it has eaten and is flapping its wings and trying to get a loft mate to feed it, or is sitting on a perch with its eyelids closed or half closed opening and closing them very slowly, it is a good bet that this bird is getting dehydrated. If this happens and you cannot remember seeing the bird drinking at feeding time, you will need to catch the bird, hold its head just over the water in the drinker and gently push its head down into the water until its beak is under the water. The bird will soon plunge its head into the drinker and have a drink while you are holding it. If it doesn't drink at this time it may be that it is drinking on its own and you missed it. At least the birds will know where the water is after this exercise.

In the past few years I have been giving advice on starting out with young birds. For some reason, which is not evident to me, I have found that the most difficult rule for beginners to follow is that of leaving the young birds in the loft for a week. This seems fairly basic as concepts go. The squeakers need time to adjust to their new loft. They need to become accustomed to a new owner, their new loft mates, their feeding schedule, claim a perch, find the drinker and in general recognize this new loft as their new home. If this seems like foreign thinking to you then it is time to look at the new loft in your back yard as your new rabbit **hutch**. Rabbits are simpler to keep and you are not going to realize the full potential for enjoyment and satisfaction from your birds. You won't have to remember to band your new rabbits, and if I'm not mistaken they will eat the young if you get a bit lazy with your feeding routine. This is another bonus with keeping rabbits.

For the first feeding put about an ounce of your **young bird mix** in the trough for each squeaker. If the feed is all eaten by the second feeding on the second day, feed the same amount for the second feeding. By the time the third feeding has taken place, the birds should be cleaning up all the feed in five to ten minutes. At this time it should be safe to add a quarter ounce per bird to the daily feed ration. If they are not cleaning up all the grain and there is a bit left in the trough, cut them back a bit until all the feed is cleaned up at feeding time.

If you have the time then this is an excellent time to get acquainted with the new birds. Get down on the floor and let them eat out of your hands. They will probably be timid at first and then creep forward and grab the end of a finger. If you don't bite back then they will all soon join in and start to eat out of your hand. The more things you do at this time inside the loft, the more comfortable the birds will be with you outside the loft when the time comes.

HOLDING A PIGEON



This is how you hold a pigeon. This makes it easy to hold the bird in your right hand and examine the wing or eye or throat with your left hand. Lefties, you're on your own.



Note that the legs and feet of the pigeon are securely held between the fingers of my right hand.

During the first week it is also a good practice to let the squeakers have a bath. You should have realized that the squeakers fluffed up at the drinker where not trying to end it all but instead where trying to have a bath. They love baths. A shallow pan the size of a garbage can lid, with an inch of water in it, on the floor of the loft will do just fine. Pick a warm sunny day. If the floor gets wet then throw some bedding on the damp spots and remove it. We don't want a wet floor. A bath is something your pigeons can have every week. A bath on Sunday is a good ritual to get into. Once the birds are flying, a bath on the lawn in front of the loft is usually a good place. Bear in mind that a wet pigeon cannot fly as well as a dry one so that it is a good idea to keep an eye out for a cat or dog that may try to take one of your birds when they are bathing. If cats become a problem then put the bath up on the landing board or inside an aviary where the birds can enjoy the bath at their leisure. It will take an hour or so for the birds to preen themselves and dry completely on a sunny day.

CHAPTER 4

GETTING THEM OUT



Now that you and your kit of young birds have become acquainted with each other, they are eating and drinking on their own, dropping to the floor at the rattle of the feed can and have been sun bathing for almost a week, it is time to let them have a look at the loft from the outside.

The safest system for the novice is to put the birds into a small cage on the landing board. The **orientation cage** is something you will have to fabricate, although I have seen some smaller dog cages used successfully. The cage is basically a wire box with three sides and a top. It is simply a wooden frame with wire mesh applied to it. It will sit on the **landing board** and be pushed tightly against the loft wall. Since there is no back in the cage you will have access to the entrance to the loft and the system of bob wires you have installed. A size of twenty four inches long by eighteen inches wide and about twelve inches high will hold about a dozen birds comfortably for this purpose.

Once you have installed the cage on the landing board, you will place the birds in it by placing them one at a time out through the bob wires. This may take a few minutes if you are alone because the birds will probably keep coming back into the loft once you have released them into the cage. This is a good thing. This will get the birds used to entering the loft through the bobs. This may seem unimportant at this time but once they are at liberty outside the loft and have had a flight or two around the loft for the first time they will be very nervous and any familiar objects will

be a blessing. Eventually you will get them all into the cage and you will have to close the **security door** on the inside of the bob wires in order to stop them from entering the loft. They are outside to have a look around and, just as importantly, you have them in a controlled space as they become aware of the entire goings on in their new space.

Try to pick calm days for this step. The birds will need to go into the cage three or four times on consecutive days if possible. A light rain or gentle wind will not affect them. They will need to be in the cage for three or four hours at a time. At the end of the allotted time open the security door and let them wander in on their own. This may take a few hours, it is hard to say, but be patient. This is when bad habits are picked up in an instant that may last a life time. You can coax them in gently if you wish but it is best to leave them to their own devices at this stage. It is imperative that the birds be comfortable on the landing board.

The time of day really doesn't matter that much, as long as there is time for them to sit out for three or four hours before dusk. If you put them out first thing in the morning without feeding them then you can call them back in with the rattle of the feed can and this will also go a long way in your training. They should be clambering over each other to get through the bobs.

It would be a good idea by the fourth day to leave the bobs and security door up and let the birds find their own way out for a time or two. Remember that you are laying down the ground work for a team of birds which should race for you for many years barring the inevitable loss of a bird or two. Once your team is familiar with going in and out on their own then it is time for the big day.

There are several things to do in preparation for their release. We must bear in mind that the only real control we will have on our birds, apart from their own instinct to return to the loft, is their appetite. Young birds are controlled by their stomachs for the most part. The day before the first release is scheduled, cut their feed ration back to a third of what they are normally eating. I am assuming that you are already having some control over their feeding habits and will understand the importance of cutting back their feed. You want them responsive to you if at all possible even though they are at liberty.

Another very important step to take at this time is to talk to your neighbours about what is going to happen. I'm assuming that they already know that you have the birds and everything is cool. Keep in mind that you are now an ambassador for your new sport and it is up

to you to spread the good word. This is important because there is every possibility that your young birds will end up on their roofs for the first week or so until you have them under control and landing on the loft. If your neighbours are at all friendly then they will probably take an interest in your birds also. As with the young birds on the landing board you are setting the mood in your neighbourhood for your future dealings with your neighbours and the enjoyment of the sport. You must be considerate. Pigeons leaving their mark on neighbours' roofs are probably the chief contributing factor to poor relations in the sport today, and in the past. The birds pick up this habit quickly and therefore must be controlled from the get go. A race bird on your neighbour's roof is of no use to you either.

If you are in school at this point, or are leaving for work early in the morning, and you are trying to put a schedule together, put the birds in the orientation cage in the late afternoon when you arrive home. You can plan their **first liberation** for a weekend. It would also be safe to plan the first liberation at around three or four o'clock in the afternoon with the lengthening days in late May and June.

With all the preparation done the first liberation is fairly simple. Pick a calm sunny or overcast day that is not too threatening and lock the bobs open. The birds should not be fed that day until they return when you call them in. It is also best to let them venture out on their own for the first few attempts. It may take a while, or they may all rush out together, there is no way to tell and every kit of young birds will have its own **dynamic**. This is where patience comes into the equation. You just have to let them be at this stage. Remember bad habits and how easily they are picked up at an early age. Typically the birds will wander around the landing board and tentatively check out their expanding universe. They will probably look over the edge of the landing board or may just lie down and stretch out a wing in the sun. They may just as easily fly onto the loft roof and have a look around. A common practice is flapping their wings and spinning around in circles with their toes just off the landing board. They may also dive towards the ground and then fly back to the landing board. It is rare for them to just take off and fly the first time out. Short test flights of ten or fifteen feet are more the rule. This behavior may continue for a week or more before they actually take a flight around the neighbourhood. It is important to be patient at this time, in a week or two your birds will have **kitted up** and be ranging through to skies with the exuberance of youth. This time taken to get airborne is not any less frustrating for the seasoned veteran.

The young birds will want to return to their perch before dark. Some

may wander in sooner. It is rare but on occasion the odd bird may elect to spend the night outside. This is not the end of the world. The bird may disappear and find a **roost** other than the loft. They usually find a safe place in a tree or something. At dark it is necessary to lock up the loft for the safety of the other birds. If one stays out at night it will no doubt return the next morning. Open the security door in the morning and the stragglers will wander in at some point. After this first outing your birds will soon adjust to your routine and be easier to manage. Once out and about your yard, and returning to the loft, it is rare that you will have trouble with birds not coming in when called.

When your birds enter the loft give them a light feeding because you want them responsive at all times for the first week or so. Adjust the feed in relation to the numbers that are actually in the loft eating. It is no good to put down feed for all the birds when only half are in the loft. The slow pokes will be a little quicker the next day. Feed once, that's it. It won't hurt the slow ones to miss a meal as they obviously weren't that hungry in the first place. Once outside the birds will have a different attitude as to their hunger. YOU are doing the training.

As mentioned before a young bird team runs on its stomach. It is their feed you will use to control their exercise, their return to the loft, and their physical development.

Once your birds have started to fly they will naturally start to fly as a **flock**. This is referred to as "kitting up". This will take a few days of the young birds flying alone around the neighbourhood in erratic patterns, but they will soon become accustomed to their new wings and will find each other. Within a week or so of the team kitting up they will start to take short flights away to explore their surroundings. These flights will get longer as they gain strength and confidence, and the norm will be flights of from one to two hours daily. This is called "**rambling**" or "**ranging**". A healthy team should fly two hours a day. These flights will cover a hundred miles a day or more.

When your team returns from its daily exercise, you will want them to land on the loft and **trap** immediately. Entering the loft is referred to as "**trapping**". At first they will probably land on your house, your neighbour's house, etc. This is a problem which again must be nipped in the bud. This is fairly simple to correct. The birds know where the loft is but after a long flight on new wings they might not be able to negotiate a proper landing on their own loft. This again requires patience. Don't throw things at a bird that is already having trouble hitting the correct spot. The bird should be hungry and will probably respond to

the feed can. If it persists in staying on the roof then its next meal will be tomorrow. One bird resting on the neighbour's roof is a lot easier to explain than a stone through their window.

In general terms, if the birds have been ranging for about ten days and are not trapping within thirty seconds or so of alighting on the loft, then it is time to cut back on the rations until they will. You should also be handling the birds every day and should notice that they are starting to bulk up a bit. Cutting back at this time to say one ounce per bird until they are on track will not hurt them. If some are constantly trapping well then they are already reaping the rewards of fast trapping. The others will soon follow suit. Birds, as with other living things, have different appetites and each bird's needs will vary slightly from its loft mate's. This is one of those situations where it hurts you more than it hurts them. They pick up on this scheme quickly and will only miss one meal as a rule. If your birds land on someone else's roof after an exercise flight they will do the same after a long race. It becomes the path of least resistance for them and you become a nuisance in your own neighbourhood.

For the first season at least, your team should be either in the air or in the loft. You don't want them to become **delinquents**. I can't stress enough, although I'm trying, that the young birds should never be let out of the loft after they have been fed. It takes a very short time to undo all that training which you have spent the time putting into them.

Your team should be let out daily for exercise if at all possible. They should be on a schedule so that they are let out roughly the same time each day. There may be circumstances from time to time which will alter it but as a rule they should exercise and be fed at the same time each day. This is also important in so far as noticing irregularities in the birds' health, etc. If there are going to be high winds then keep them in for the day. A strong wind can carry a young and playful team beyond their abilities to return during the early days of their training. Once May rolls around, the **old bird racing** starts and it is not a good idea once the young birds reach the rambling stage to let them out on a Saturday. They could join up with a flock of racing birds and get carried away with them, unable to return due to exhaustion. This is also a courtesy extended to those racing on Saturdays.

If you are letting the birds out before you leave in the morning then you can leave the bobs down and put their feed in the trough. The birds will return and should trap immediately upon their arrival. Keep in mind that less is more in the feeding department during these early days. It would help to have someone watching for the birds' return if you are not home

so that you can regulate the feed. Even your neighbour might have an interest in this. It might not hurt to engage them if there is no one else.

CHAPTER 5

FEEDING



I will touch briefly on the basics which you will need to know to get you through your first season.

A good quality **young bird mix** will cost you about \$15.00 for a fifty pound bag. At this rate it costs about two cents a day to feed a young pigeon. A kit of five will cost about ten cents a day. You can feed your whole team for a week for the price of a can of pop. When we talk about raising the protein levels in our mix we are looking at increasing our costs to two and a quarter cents a day. Your birds are growing and exercising each day and they will need a high protein feed to develop properly and reach their full potential. You will be astonished at how round and full your birds will become on an ounce and a quarter of feed per day. I should add here that this is not a hard and fast ration amount, but a good amount to start with and to keep them under control.

A bag of feed will last a small team six or seven weeks. It needs to be kept in a dry container inside a building. For our purposes two five gallon plastic pails with lids on them will hold your bag of feed. Much has been written about feed storage and moisture retention, some will argue that feed will go moldy in metal or plastic bins but my experience is that as long as the feed is dry to start with it will not rot or go moldy. If you are taking flack from an authority on the subject you can ask them if they would be a darling and make you a wooden one from three quarter inch fir plywood, and clad the outside with metal for vermin protection. This will no doubt end the criticism. It is always wise to determine what was in the pails if they are used, and if at all in doubt purchase a new pair from a building supply store.

Water is one of the most important elements in the keeping of healthy stock. As far as vessels go you are better off to purchase a proper pigeon drinker right from the start. They are usually plastic these days and are built to take apart easily for cleaning. Your water will stay much cleaner in a proper drinker. It will be a constant effort to keep clean water in front of them, and this will make the job that much easier.

Water must be changed daily, and in some instances more often. You will need to monitor the water levels each time you are in the loft because

working birds can drink an incredible amount of water. The drinker is best kept off the floor if possible. A platform large enough to hold the drinker and allow the birds to stand and drink is ideal. On a wire mesh floor in an aviary is also an ideal spot.

Winter is always a challenge for your water supply. With a plastic drinker you may be able to insert a smaller freezer proof container inside the existing one which will allow you to remove it daily to clean out the ice. The inside container can be put into a small pail of warm water and the ice block should come right out. Another solution is to have two old plastic bleach bottles with access holes cut into the sides about two and a half inches from the bottom. The access holes, or holes, need to be big enough to allow for several birds to drink at the same time. One of the bottles is put into the loft while the other is ready to use the next day. Bring the frozen one in to thaw out and it will be ready to use the next day. Make sure that all your birds are drinking. Most birds seem to be able to get by with one good drink after eating. It is essential that the birds be fed and watered at the same time.

Grit is another essential for the birds' good health. Purchase a mineralized grit from your feed supplier and make it available to them either in a grit feeder or via a small amount in the trough every day or two. It is not a good practice to allow the unused grit to stay in the trough for more than a day. If there is salt in the grit mix it will draw moisture to the trough and you will start growing unwanted organisms in the feeding area. Even the grit you put into a grit feeder should be monitored regularly, and renewed if need be.

In the late fall you may want to change the feed over to a winter maintenance feed with less protein and higher carbohydrates. Your young birds will start to molt in late July or early August. The body molt should be finished by the end of September but the flight feathers will continue to drop possibly into December. It is a good idea to leave them on the higher protein young bird mix until the early part of December. In the winter in central Ontario, and other parts of the country, the temperature can get as low as forty five degrees below zero and stay there for several days. This is why more carbohydrates are needed in the winter. The amount of feed will also need to be increased at this time. Since the birds will probably be kept in for the winter it will not hurt at this time to give the birds all they will eat and drink at these times. Bear in mind that the more they eat the more water they will need to drink to digest their increased ration. If not the birds may become crop bound as the grain cannot soften up and start its journey down the digestive canal. We will discuss this further in the chapter on winter care.

Feeding time is perhaps the best time to commune with or observe your birds. If there is a problem with your birds' health then this is a good time to pick up on it. We must first observe normal behaviour so that we will be able to recognize abnormal behaviour when it presents itself. Healthy birds should be anticipating your arrival at feeding time and be on the floor craning their necks to see and greet you. As you put the feed in the trough you will have to brush them aside. Their **plumage** should be tight and the eyes wide open and glimmering as they jostle for a position at the trough with their wings spread out a little to elbow their loft mate out of the way. The feed should be all cleaned up in about three minutes and all the birds should walk over to the drinker and take a long drink. At this time they will probably ruffle their feathers and poke around the floor looking for a morsel of grain they may have overlooked, or they may return to their perch and settle in. Some of the birds may eat too quickly and end up with grain temporarily stopped up in their throats. They will strand there with their necks extended upwards for a few moments. This is often the case in the winter, and is normal for some birds at any time of year.

If, when you enter the loft, a young bird is fluffed up on its perch or is on the floor away from the other birds then this bird should be noted and observed for the rest of the day. We all have bad days but after six or eight hours it is time to remove the bird from its loft mates, and a determination must be made about its condition and what course of action needs to be taken.

During the late part of July and the early part of August the young birds that were hatched in April and May will start to molt their body feathers. It is at this time that the higher protein feed is needed to grow entirely new feathers to replace the **nest plumage** that they have just about worn out by now. This is also a maturing stage and in six to eight weeks you won't recognize them as your team. They will now appear as they will look as yearlings, and as much older birds. During this period of re-growth it is a good practice to add a handful of flax to the ration for added protein and the added oil. Flax is a good additive at any time for you and your birds. Remember that the feathers they grow at this time are the feathers that they will race with next year.

CHAPTER 6

BASKET TRAINING



Eventually you will want to start putting your pigeons into the training basket and experience the thrill of having your team return from a

training toss. But before you can do this you must take the time to familiarize the birds with the basket.

There are all sorts of **baskets** on the market to choose from but the most commonly used and available is a rectangular shaped box about sixteen inches wide by thirty inches long by about eleven inches tall. It will have a thin plywood bottom with some sort of fabric sides stretched over a light wooden framework. The top will be made of wooden dowels with an access door in it. On one side will be a fabric flap which will be secured at the top with either snaps or Velcro, this is the liberation door. The dowels on the top come with different spacing. My experience is that the young pigeons will try to escape through the dowels if the space is greater than one inch. They will get their heads out and will also get a wing or two up through the dowels and can easily damage a wing if left unattended. This behavior only lasts for an hour or so but the narrowly spaced dowels will cut this out altogether.

There is no reason that you cannot build your own basket, as many that are a little handy still do. Just remember that the afore mentioned basket will hold about fifteen pigeons and this means fifteen pounds of added weight. Picking up a loaded pigeon basket with extended arms is a great way to strain your back especially with a few twists and turns thrown in for good measure. Just try to keep it as light as possible. It is never a good idea to leave openings on the sides that a bird can get its head out of. This will only become an ongoing source of concern and you will inevitably end up with an injured or dead bird on your hands. Put a little thought into the engineering.

A basket is something that you may be able to borrow from a club for your first season. Everyone seems to have a basket laying around in the way that needs a little repair that never seems to get done. If you're are at all handy then maybe a repair in exchange for borrowing it would seem attractive to someone.

Once you have come to terms with the basket selection, you will have to put your birds into it for several **familiarization sessions**. You can do this at any time of the day, but it is a good idea to feed and water the pigeons in the basket at least once before they are sent on their first race. This must be done so that in the eventuality that the birds are held over for racing the next day, they will know enough to eat and drink in the trailer. This may not seem necessary but it will give you an edge on a **hold over**. The drinking is very important in young bird racing as they will drop down on the course and have a drink if they need it, eating up valuable minutes during a race. On a long hot race they will probably go down for

water anyway, especially in central Ontario or other parts of the country where they fly over a small lake every few minutes.

Once you have put the birds in the basket remove them from the loft and put them in a safe location inside a building or somewhere where the neighbour's cat won't be able to get at them. This is not the experience you are looking for, for their first time in a basket. Two or three hours at a time should do the trick. If they have been fed during the basket training, or prior to, then put them back into the loft. If they are hungry then let them go in your back yard and feed them when they return to the loft from their ramble.

Now that your team has been ranging day in and day out for six to eight weeks, it is time to start their training tosses. These tosses should only be done on clear days with little or no wind. Do not take anyone else's advice on this matter. You will have many years ahead of you to do stupid things that you will regret immediately, don't make tossing young birds away for one moment's lack of discretion be one of them. Even if someone in your club or circle of enthusiasts is offering to do it for free, use your own discretion and have your pigeons fly another day. There are enough obstacles out there in the best of conditions without borrowing more. We are hopefully developing a plan and it is your job to stick with it. If there are thunderstorms expected in the afternoon then take a pass as one cannot predict with any accuracy what your birds may encounter on any given route on any given day. It may take many hours for what one might expect will take a few minutes. Leave a large margin for error in the early days of training.

Let me add at this time that while things may be running along as we hoped they would and as much as the pigeons are predictable around the loft, they are just as apt to run off the rails once basket training starts. Remember that you are now picking the locations to release the birds and they must now develop their skills at finding the loft no matter where they are released from. These are stressful times for young minds and bodies so it is a good idea to take it slowly and think your way through it.

For the first few weeks of basket training it is preferable to let your birds take their morning flight as usual and feed only half of their ration. This will take the edge off them. Later in the day you can give them a short toss and then the rest of their feed ration when they return to the loft. They shouldn't waste any time coming home and should trap promptly. A lot is going to depend on your personal circumstances and perhaps co-operation from family members or club members. After a couple of tosses as described then the morning flight can be eliminated and with

the distances increasing it will be safe just to basket them early and train them. Basket them in the evening if there are time constraints. You may end up relying on a family member to release them for you on their way to work the next morning.

For your first toss select a location four or five miles away from the loft in the direction of the race points. Make sure that it is off the road and that there are no overhead wires that the birds can get tangled in. Believe me that if there is only one small wire the birds will head straight for it. You also don't want to be too close to a highway or the birds may wheel around and meet an oncoming transport trailer. You can use this same location for a couple of tosses or move out to eight or ten miles. You can start to toss them every day or every other day. From ten miles, go to fifteen and then on to twenty. Twenty mile tosses a couple of times a week will be alright until about ten days before the first race. In the last ten days a thirty, then a fifty mile toss should be worked in. Most clubs will have a joint release a week or so before the races to give the pigeons some experience at breaking away from other's birds and heading for home. Give your birds three or four days off before their first race. Don't let them go after five o'clock in the afternoon. You don't know what they might get caught up in, and they might end up overnight or something worse.

It is also necessary to mention here that if you are on the so called **line of flight** and a lot of pigeons are being trained in your area each morning, then it is possible for your birds to get caught up with a larger experienced team and dragged off for many miles with them. It isn't that big a problem later on, in fact you sort of hope it happens to give your birds the experience they will need during the racing season. Having said that, it may be a good idea to try to stick to training tosses later in the day for the first few weeks. Remember that these birds were squeakers only a couple of months ago. Some birds seem to mature at different rates and as a result all might not be **homing** at the same level of ability. There might be a few followers in the flock. Take this into consideration at all times and err on the side of caution.

A **single up toss** is when you take the time to release each bird individually. This can also be done in two's. It takes a while but you know that each bird is finding its way home on its own set of skills. Young birds on their own can take fifteen minutes to circle before leaving the release site so that it is a better plan to release a couple and drive a few miles and let a couple more go, and so on .

With the price of gas inching higher all the time we are all going to

have to become more accepting of helping one another with respect to combined travel. You can still work out having your birds released separately or in group releases which are also a good idea to sharpen your bird's instincts. Leaving the security of a large group and coming home is something that the birds will have to master.

CHAPTER 7

LOFT MAINTENANCE



Way back in the sixties in Oakville, where I got my start in pigeons, it seemed like a different world. Most of the fliers had a thick accent.... Dutch, Scottish, German, Italian, Irish, etc. Loft management was taken very seriously and my new club mates had no reservations about letting you know what you were doing wrong with respect to keeping your loft's interior clean. These chaps had been raised in the old school and believed that this was the best way to a healthy and robust colony of racing pigeons.

Let me mention here that in order for your pigeons to do a respectable job of racing for you they have to be fit and at the peak of their powers. If they are sent out to a race in less than the best of health, then staying alive in a strange environment becomes their first priority, and homing is down the list. All the pieces of the puzzle must be in place before you ship your birds to a race.

Most lofts are cleaned daily during the breeding and racing seasons. This entails scraping the perches and the floor daily. It takes about five minutes to clean a small loft. The birds can be eating their grain while you work around them. This is a good way to get to know your birds better anyway, and to notice if something is amiss.

If you are part of a project affiliated with an existing club then it is possible that you may receive visitors at a moments notice. These visitors may be new members or prospective new fanciers, and as I have mentioned before, you are now representing the sport. You must make the decision as to whether you are maintaining a loft of racing pigeons in your neighbourhood, or if you are the one next door with that shack full of those "darn pigeons".

CHAPTER 8

WINTER MAINTENANCE



By the time November rolls around and the days draw shorter, things have changed in your loft. By now your pigeons have finished their body molt and you don't recognize them as your young bird team. There will be an empty perch or two as well, as is almost inevitable it seems. You should also be observing that they are becoming more sexually active at this stage. This is the time when you must put some thought into next year's breeding season. You may think that this is a bit early but if you don't have a plan of your own the pigeons certainly have one of their own, and will waste no time in implementing it. It is time to separate the cocks from the hens. If the birds are allowed to mate on their own over the winter months then you will have little success in the spring trying to mate them the way you may wish to. Just letting them mate up on their own in the spring is not a plan, and will not get you very far down the road with respect to gaining knowledge about the ins and outs of pigeon breeding.



The seven pigeons in this group are all from the same breeding pair in 2008. The first two eggs from the pair were moved to another pair for rearing while the other six youngsters were raised by the breeding pair. The four birds on the left were raced lightly as young birds and the other three were trained out to thirty miles several times. One youngster was lost off the roof. It is early November and all the birds have finished the body molt and are ready for the winter months. This should illustrate just how quickly pigeons multiply their numbers and that a very few good breeders is all that you need to get started.

Young hens can start to **lay fertile eggs** from four months of age onwards depending on the individual hen and its maturity. While we expect birds to mate and raise their young in the spring, pigeons do not read the

thermometer and can lay at any time if the weather is a little mild and there is a good supply of feed on hand. The winter is a time of reflection for you and a time of recuperation for the birds. You want them healthy and rested in the spring so that they will produce the best young possible.

The next stage in your hobby is to prepare for next year's breeding season and old bird racing if that is the direction you have decided to follow. As far as breeding your first kit of young birds you will want to give some consideration as to which cock to mate to which hen. The breeder who supplied you with your first kit will be a valuable resource from which to draw on. If they were from his or her family then this is where you will probably get the best advice. You must also consider which system of old bird racing best suits your circumstances, and combine the two into an overall plan for success on all fronts. Whatever the decisions are, you will need both cocks and hens in good physical condition and unmated when March rolls around.

Any partition that you use to keep the cocks and hens apart for the winter will have to be solid so that the sexes cannot see each other or get close to each other along the floor area. Even a small hole along the floor is all the access a cock will need to attract a hen or vice versa. You must also take air flow into consideration when putting a partition into the loft. No sense in blocking off the good ventilation system we have built into the loft already. A sliding or swinging door with the top half made of dowelling will make an excellent choice.

Towards the end of October you may notice that your birds are going into a feeding frenzy when you enter the loft at feeding time. This is normal as the birds are bulking up as winter approaches. You can increase their ration to two ounces a day but monitor the birds and don't let them get too fat, as I often seem to do. When it is forty five below zero I think it is a good idea to have a bit of extra weight on the birds for my own piece of mind if nothing else. The weight can be taken off a month or so before mating as it is not good to have your hens fat when they are trying to lay eggs.

An often asked question is whether or not the loft needs to be heated during the winter months. The short answer is no. Even at the forty fifth parallel, only one hundred and twenty five miles north of Lake Ontario, the temperature can fall off to forty five below zero and may stay there for several days or even a week at a time. During these times the pigeons need as much food as they will eat in order to maintain their body temperature. Whole corn becomes an inexpensive supplement at this time and the birds will eat it with gusto. Don't forget that with the

added feed consumption will come added water consumption, and it is at this time also that warm water will go a long way to helping your birds through the cold snaps. Nights where the mercury drops to minus eighteen or minus twenty five are easily handled by the birds. Check your water twice a day as you don't want **stopped up crops** and problems digesting food at these unforgiving extremes in the weather.

One thing that you may notice is that after a cold snap with the increased grain consumption, the birds will seem to lose their appetites for a day or two once the temperature reaches the freezing point again. This is a normal course of events. They have enough energy stored for a few days and don't need as much feed until a balance occurs. In this eventuality, cut back the ration a little so that they consume all the allotted feed in a few minutes, as if you were feeding young birds again. Remember that feed lying around getting soiled and tracked around is not what we want.

A system for delivering a supply of fresh water to your birds each day throughout the winter months must be devised. Heated drinkers are a nice option but can be expensive and are not a necessity. Not everyone has hydro in their loft, especially if they are young and just starting out. I use a set of frozen food containers which fit just nicely into the drinkers that I use throughout the year. When I go out to the loft I take warm water with a teaspoon of bleach in it in a small pail to dip the frozen inserts into. In a moment the ice will slide out of the container and it can be refilled with fresh warm water that you have also brought along. Even at forty below this will make water available to your birds for a couple of hours and this should be enough time for your birds to get the water they require. Twenty five pigeons will drink from a litre to a litre and a half a day during the winter. Check the water twice a day to start and offer them a little bit more later in the day until you get a handle on their drinking and eating routines.

Another option to consider is collecting several empty plastic bleach bottles. You will have to cut elongated slots into them. The slots should be about two inches high and run half way around the circumference of the bottle. The slots should be about two and a half inches from the bottom to allow for a capacity of about a litre and a half or two litres. You must make sure that the birds realize that these are the new drinkers. It is a simple system to take a fresh bottle or two out to the loft with you and bring the frozen ones back in to thaw out for the next day. You may want to find a location in the loft where the bleach bottles will not get knocked over before all the birds get a chance to drink. These are things that are best sorted out before the real cold weather hits, and you are left scrambling for a solution.

It is important that your birds be fed in the morning through the winter months. They may have just come through a bitterly cold night and they will need to replenish their feed stores. In the wild their ancestors would be on the wing at dawn searching out a supply of food. Bear in mind that the food goes into the crop and water is added. The grain then has to soak until it is swollen and soft so that it can start its journey down the digestive tract and eventually supply heating energy that the bird needs to stay warm during the night. This means that you have to plan a little further ahead for your pigeons than yourself. It only takes five minutes in the morning if you plan ahead and have a routine.

If you have been scraping your loft religiously throughout the summer and fall you would notice by November or December that pigeon droppings freeze. Hard!! Once the droppings have frozen hard to the perches and floor it can become difficult to get them scraped off without doing damage to the perches and the floor. In central Ontario, and no doubt other areas of the country, we are able to get our hands on coarse, damp sawdust which is referred to as **green sawdust**. This means that it is cut from the milling process. It does not mean that it comes from pressure treated lumber. This coarse sawdust is large enough and slightly damp so that there is virtually no dust created in the loft atmosphere when the birds go about their daily routines. The sawdust is put in at a depth of two inches or so with a depth of six inches under the perches. It can be cleaned away in the centre of the floor for feeding purposes or brushed away from your trough as needed. Once in the loft the sawdust starts to dry out a bit and the birds just love it. The droppings freeze on the top of it under the perches and can be removed as a clump during a mild spell. You don't need to disturb the sawdust that much and a little goes a long way if managed properly. Other bedding materials used are straw or hay, hemp chips and pine shavings. Try to use something that does not create dust. Avoid using cedar shavings as the oils and dust are detrimental to the birds' respiratory systems. At any rate a bedding of some sort should be used to protect the floor and stop it from decaying if droppings are left on it all winter. You will also have to check for dampness under the perches throughout the winter.

Whether you let your birds out through the winter is a personal preference. The majority of lofts these days remain closed for the winter months. Hawks and owls find pigeons to be easy prey during the winter when wild birds have migrated south for the most part. With the sexes separated there is always the chance that a pigeon might wander off looking for a mate. The winter exercise will keep them in shape for spring breeding but they will also get into shape fairly quickly in the spring. This is a decision you can make for yourself.

Something else to consider when working in the loft and creating a lot of dust, or even a little, is the use of a mask. A small percentage of fanciers, of which I am one, develop a response to the white powder on the birds' feathers which is referred to as **bloom**. It appears to be both a water repellent and a feather lubricant. Even if you are not one of the small percentage at this stage, you may some day develop a response and it is always a good idea to protect your lungs over the long haul. Most building supply and hardware stores carry masks. I prefer a small black rubber respirator made by American Optical that is available at this time from Canadian Tire.

CHAPTER 9

LOSSES



One question that I am asked, whenever I am discussing the sport of racing pigeons with newcomers or interested parties in general, is whether or not you lose pigeons when racing.

If left to their own devices, pigeons will kill each other and each other's young fighting over territory, all while trying to raise up to eight pairs of young a season even if it kills them. In the grander scheme of things the lowly pigeon is a supply of food in the food chain. They are aware of this and this is why they reproduce at the rates that they do.

When we decide to keep racing pigeons, all we are doing is enticing a colony of pigeons to take up residence in our loft. We can do what we can to control their lives in this symbiotic relationship but once the birds leave the loft they are on their own. We can give them an edge perhaps with vitality but they have lost a certain amount of cunning by being domesticated. There are any numbers of perils which a pigeon may encounter which include birds of prey, hydro lines, guy wires from cell phone towers, severe storms, and up north we have had reports of pigeons being eaten by pike when they alight on a lake for a drink on a hot summer day. This may seem odd but as a young lad in Oakville, Ontario my old bird team would return from exercise and alight on the surface of our swimming pool and take a drink. Sport fishermen also report seeing flocks of racing pigeons landing on lakes and drinking.

If the fact of losses is a concern for the beginner, as it is for many seasoned veterans of the sport, then what I can recommend is that you keep back a few of your favourites for breeding, etc. and fly their young. Whatever makes you comfortable and keeps you enthusiastic and interested in the sport is what is most important at this time

CHAPTER 10

RAISING YOUR OWN TEAM



In a previous chapter about acquiring birds, we discussed getting a round of high quality late bred birds to be used for stock purposes. In the fall you may also be able to acquire older birds of excellent quality which may be surplus after racing season is over, and the fancier has sorted out the birds needed for next year's race program. Whatever the source of the birds is, you will need a plan and a timetable for implementing it properly.

We must assume that by the time December arrives your cocks and hens are living in separate sections of the loft. Whether late bred birds, older stock birds, or your own race experienced young birds this must be the case.

God blessed Canada with a long and relaxing winter so that there would be lots of time for hockey, skiing, pigeon shows and meetings. There will also be time for researching, planning and building the furnishings needed for breeding your birds in the spring.

You will no doubt have observed that your cock birds have become very territorial and spend a lot of time defending their perch or perches. They may have several if there are plenty of spares. For the mating sequence to operate smoothly or as smoothly as can be expected, the cocks must each have their own **nest box**. The cocks will spend almost all of their waking and sleeping time in or on the perch in front of this box, and defend it to the death if need be. This is a fact, and it is because of this that the nest boxes must be installed no later than a month before you plan on putting your hens and cocks together. There will be enough problems to deal with during your first attempt at breeding, and the cocks fighting over nest boxes while you are trying to introduce the hens is not going to make things any easier. It will be your downfall.

There are many variations on the nest box these days and a lot will depend on how you wish to race your old birds if that is the case. For our purposes we will deal with a common size which will serve as a good basis for breeding and can later be adapted for different uses or racing methods.

Pigeons will naturally seek an out of the way place to raise their young, and since the cock has already claimed a nice little bachelor pad, the hen will readily accept this as her new site. With multiple pairs of pigeons in a relatively small space trying to settle down to choosing a mate, it becomes a bit of a wild scene. We can control to a degree some of the insanity

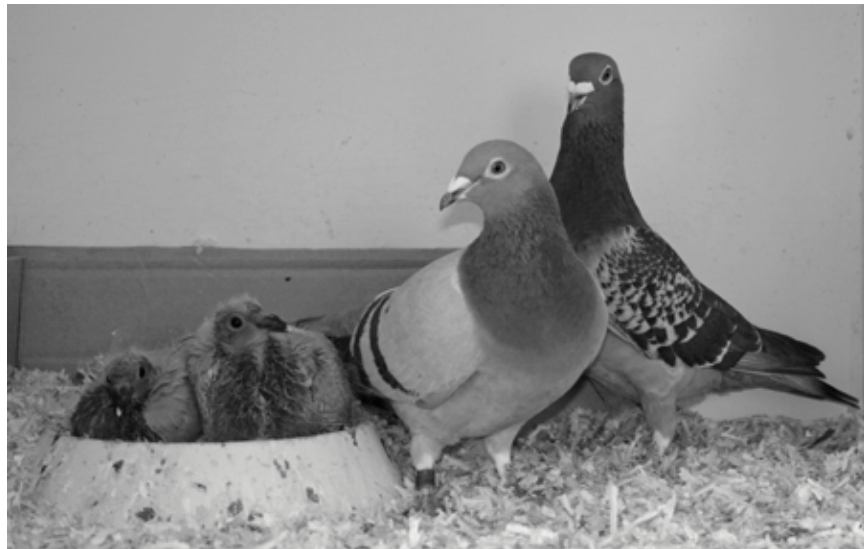
if we are prepared ahead of time and are aware of what is predictable behavior. The simplest way to do this is to restrict the birds' movements in the loft. It is for this reason that you must have a functional front on the nest boxes. It will become necessary to lock the birds in the nest boxes at times.

The nest boxes are typically built in units of three or four high. You would then group so many units together in the breeding section of your loft. A good height for the boxes is about eighteen inches with a width of from twenty four to thirty two inches depending on space available. The depth from front to back should be sixteen to eighteen inches or more if space allows. If plywood is being used then take this into consideration for economical use of the sheets. There is a sample of nest boxes illustrated with this chapter.

The nest fronts are also varied, but regardless of design, they should be made using dowels or wooden lath for good ventilation and light. There must also be a perching area of some description and a door with a method of locking one or both pigeons in the nest box at certain times. There are illustrations of two types also in this chapter.



A typical nest box front with a hinged door at the right side at the landing board. Squeakers can be seen nestled in their nest bowl.



Nest box front is removed showing the cock in the rear and the hen at the front. Squeakers are expecting a meal at this time. Cardboard liner can be seen in the nest box, this makes clean up much easier.



This hen prefers to sit her eggs 24 hours a day. The cock does his shift by sitting beside her. Not a typical couple.

When constructing the nest box units it is a good idea to allow for a five or six inch space at the bottom for a recessed base. This recessed area will need to be about five or six inches in depth so that any squeakers that end up on the floor will have a place to hide from aggressive cock birds. This is one measure taken to prevent scalping of the young.

The unit should run right to the ceiling of the loft to stop birds from trying to nest in inconvenient places. All holes should be blocked off to avoid birds becoming trapped behind or around the nest boxes.

I prefer to paint the nest boxes white. It gives increased light and makes the job of cleaning them out a lot easier.

The nesting section of your loft should have a bank of perches included in the plan. The birds will appreciate being able to get away from the nest box once the hormones have settled down and the incubation of the eggs has commenced. I prefer to cover the box perches I use with a sheet of plywood temporarily while putting the pairs together. This seems to focus the hens and keeps the young cocks a little less frantic.

If you are breeding from prisoners then some sort of aviary is a must. The pigeons need direct sunlight for good health, and this is a great place for them to bath. While the birds are incubating the eggs the moisture from the bath is believed to keep the egg shells at the correct moisture level. This aviary need not be huge but the birds should be able to stretch their wings on a nice day and spin around a little to dry their feathers after a bath. Remember that the mesh should be no larger than one half by one inch.

Once your eggs have hatched the feed consumption will increase considerably and a larger trough is in order. You will find that you will have to give your birds more of a free choice system. Remember that your adult birds are using more energy themselves to raise their young, and the young will be almost full size in a month and be able to fly. This takes food energy. You will not always be able to put food in front of them when their time table tells them that it is time to feed the squeakers. They must have access to food most of the day. The adult birds typically pump the young full of food around nine in the morning and in the early evening, but this isn't written in stone.

You are going to need nest bowls for your nest boxes. The birds will build their nests in the nest bowls. There are many types but the two most commonly used are made of clay or compressed paper, much like egg cartons. The clay bowls are excellent and reusable but are getting hard

to find, and the paper bowls are inexpensive and are discarded after use. Break them up and put them in the compost pile.

Another handy piece of equipment to have on hand at mating time is a nest box divider that can be installed in the nest box. This will come in very handy if you encounter a cock that becomes overly aggressive with the new hen you put him with. If you take time to make these for every box then the mating process becomes almost fool proof. The divider needs to run from the front to back and top to bottom of the nest box, and should be made of dowels so that the birds can see each other but cannot get at each other until you decide the time is right.

CHAPTER 11

MATING



If we are going to breed our own birds then as breeders we need to do what we can to improve, if possible, the pigeons in our loft through a process of selective breeding. At this stage advice from the fancier that supplied you with your stock would be the most direct route to take. This breeding process may be a good question to approach with the breeder at the time of original selection of the young bird kit. It is not an easy job to find someone who knows what they are doing when it comes to selection for mating, and it may be difficult to get those that are knowledgeable to share their secrets.

When to mate your birds together depends on where you live in Canada. I live one hundred and twenty five miles north of Lake Ontario and our weather is about three weeks behind those living near the lake. We can get temperatures as low as -35 degrees C in the last week of March, and in an unheated loft in my region, mating up in the middle of March seems soon enough. Even on this timetable we will have birds sitting eggs with the temperature at night of - 20 degrees C. If you live further south then earlier is possible, but for your first year or so there is no rush to get a lot of young birds hatched out in questionable weather. Some of my best young bird results have come from **second round hatches** that were born in early June. You want the nutrition spent on growing the best young possible, not keeping them from freezing to death.

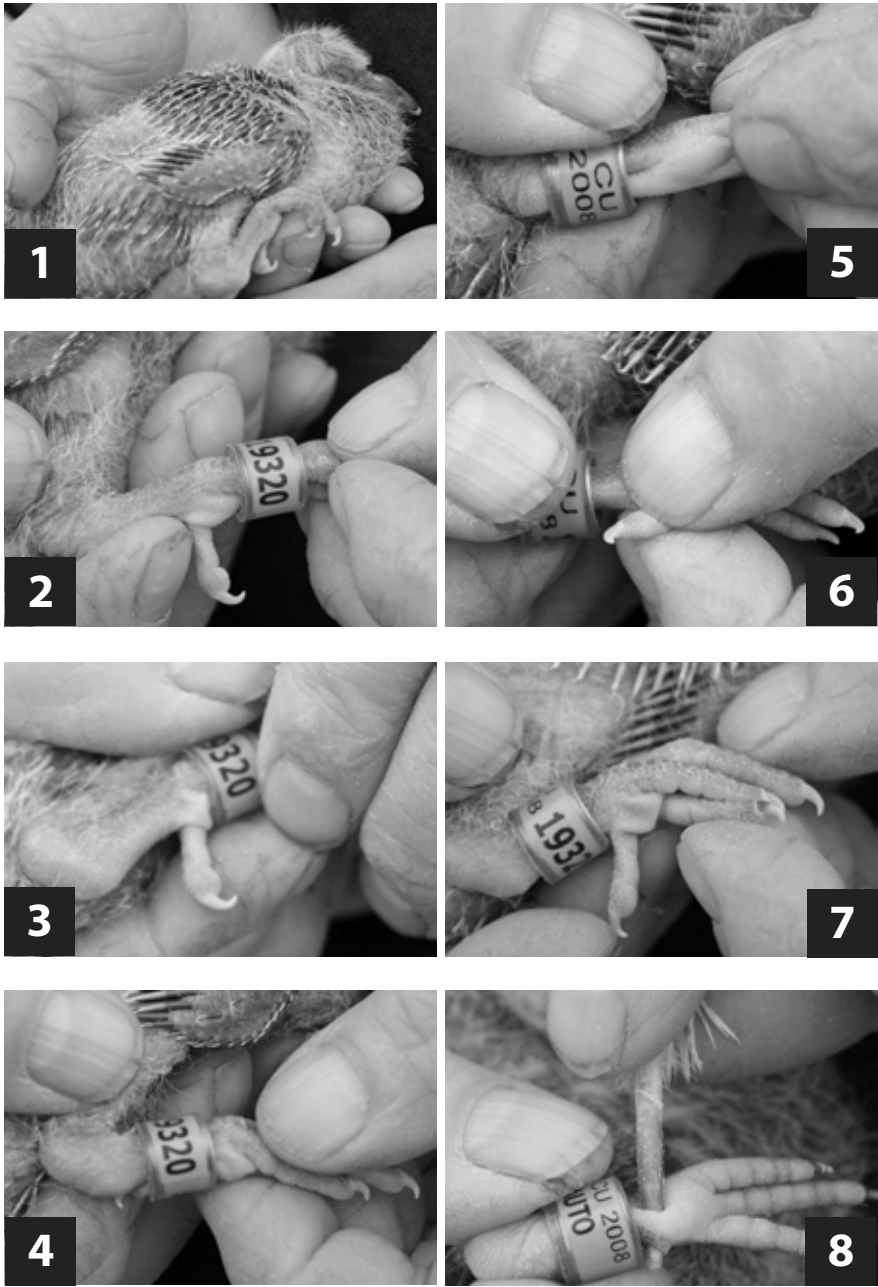
Once you introduce the hens to the cocks you are in for a few days of volatility. For this reason you are best to set this up for a weekend. On the chosen morning, feed the cocks and hens separately as usual. Make sure that all the hens have had time to eat and drink. After about a half

hour has passed, select your first hen and lock her alone in the nest box of the cock she is to be mated with. Repeat this sequence until all hens are locked in their corresponding nest boxes. By the time all the hens have been locked in their nest boxes all of the cocks should be on their nest fronts dragging their tails and cooing up a storm. It is important that the cocks do not stray to another box at this time. If they do, catch them and return them to their own nest front immediately. It will not take long for a cock to become interested in the wrong hen. Murphy's Law and all that. A few of the hens may try to escape through the nest fronts but this will soon stop. Stay with them for a half hour or so to monitor the situation, and then check back with them every half hour or so. There is nothing wrong with spending as much time as you can afford to spend with them as this is a learning experience for you also. This is an excellent time to learn about motivating the cocks when it comes to racing season.

After three or four hours have elapsed you can start to introduce the cocks into the nest boxes with the hens. You will know by now that each bird has its own personality and temperament and this becomes very evident at this stage. Most cocks are fairly gentle with their new mates but others have to make a statement. Yearling cocks especially can be a bit rough.

Typical behaviour that you can expect to observe will be an initial rushing at the hen by the cock dragging its tail and cooing. The hen may or may not reciprocate this behaviour. The cock may grab the feathers on the back of the hen's head and neck and be a bit rough with her. The cock may try to drive the hen into the nest bowl. After a half hour or so this rowdy courtship should settle down as the cocks tire themselves out. Some of the hens will almost immediately lie down and accept the cock's advances as soon as he enters the nest box. This makes it simple. What you must keep your eye out for is a cock that is more aggressive than the behaviour you are observing in the other nest boxes. With hormones raging he may not see this hen as a new mate, or at least not one he would have chosen, but another bird after this nest box. This overly aggressive behaviour can lead to scalping of the hen. The skin may also be torn off leaving a permanent bare patch on the hen's head. If you observe this behaviour and there is a bit of blood present then the cock must be removed immediately and the hen left locked in the nest box alone. The cock can be left on the perch out front to think this over for a while. Any of the cocks which are still a bit more aggressive than the normal behaviour observed should also be locked out of the nest box. All of the cocks should be left out of the nest boxes over the first night. Offer the hens a drink in the evening in a **galley pot** or small tin inside the nest box.

This sequence shows the steps involved in banding a squeaker. This youngster is about nine days old. The process is easier at seven days. The last picture shows the inserting of a flight feather between the back toe and the leg to help pull the toe back through the band.



The next morning is the time to put the more docile cocks back into the nest boxes with their hens. You can now feed and water the cocks and hens inside the nest boxes. The chasing should only take a few minutes this morning, if at all.

As far as the happy couples go, they can be let out of the nest boxes one pair at a time for a half hour or so at a time. They may be more comfortable eating and drinking out of the more familiar common trough and drinker. You will also find that some of the hens will not dirty their nest boxes and will hold their droppings for a day or so. For this reason they must be let out a couple of times a day. You can figure that a hen starts to sit the eggs at about four in the afternoon and doesn't leave the nest until about nine or so the next morning, let this be your guide. The hen will also take a bit of time to become familiar with the new nesting location. This is usually left up to the cock to straighten out, but you may have to put them back into their box once or twice. It becomes a mad house if you let more than one pair out at a time.

Once all the pairs seem to be familiar with their location then you can start to let several pairs out at a time. Keep watch for the first few days because if a hen ends up in the wrong nest box at this stage they will sometimes fight to the death to defend a nest box that they think is theirs. The cock will follow her into the wrong box and all heck will break loose. If you are at work or school during the day then it is better to leave them locked in their own boxes, and let them out as a group in the late afternoon or evening when you can watch for problems. Don't worry, the eggs are already on the production line, and nothing is going to alter the rate of delivery. You can probably understand already that for your first year the fewer pairs of breeders you have the easier it will be to achieve success in your first year. Just imagine... one pair of breeders.

The eggs will start to be laid from about eight days onward. It is important that all the birds be familiarized with their neighbours and new surroundings before this happens. We don't want the birds fighting in each other's nest box with broken eggs, etc. as a result. They must be eating and drinking together in the community trough and entering their own nest box afterwards. If you have covered the box perches then this is a good time to take the cover off.

On the third or fourth day you should put **nesting material** in the corners of the loft if you haven't already done so. The cocks will start to keep a close watch on the hens at this time, and will start a process referred to as **driving the hen**. This usually entails the cock chasing the hen around the loft floor so that other cocks will not help themselves to

her charms. I have a rather gentle older cock that pulls his hen around the floor by the leg band, which is a slight departure from the norm. Once the hen starts to stick closer to the nest then the cock will start to gather nesting material and take it to the hen. The hen may or may not collect material for the first nest. The amount of nesting material used will vary from almost nothing to a huge pile, some of which you may have to remove.

The hen will lay the first egg like clock work at about five o'clock in the afternoon. The second egg will be laid at about one o'clock in the afternoon on the third day. The hen will probably stand over the first egg to keep the chill off of it if the weather is cold, and will not start to incubate in earnest until the second egg is laid. The incubation period is about eighteen days after the second egg is laid. Both eggs will hatch at about the same time. Both parents sit on the eggs, the hen from about five o'clock in the afternoon until nine o'clock in the morning, at which time the cock takes over the day shift. This is an approximation and not a hard and fast rule.

The adults feed the squeakers a highly nutritious milk like substance which is secreted from the lining of the pigeon's crop. At five or six days the food or "milk" as it is called changes and whole grains which are well soaked in the crop are added to the mix. More liquid is added also. At this point it is necessary to increase the food supply a little so that there is ample for the adult birds to feed the growing young. Feed left in the trough is not a problem at this point. Remember that each pair of breeders is now filling four crops, two of which will need to be filled twice a day. Your feed measure will basically double.

The little pigeons grow at an amazing rate and are fully feathered and able to fly at thirty days. The squeakers must be banded on about the seventh day. This is the stage of growth at which the band will go over the toes of the foot snugly but will not come back off during normal activity. The **banding process** may take a bit of getting used to. For right handed fanciers, hold the seven day old squeaker in your right hand with your palm facing up. The squeaker should be laying on its stomach with the beak next to your little finger, and its back side next to your thumb. We are going to put the band on the bird's right leg with the numbers upside down when the bird eventually is able to stand up. That is right, **up side down**. This is important because when the bird is mature, the bird is being held by most people in the right hand with the leg extended out towards the tail while having its band read. This will mean that you will be able to read the numbers the correct way up. If you are left handed and obstinate then I believe that the Flat Earth Society is looking for

new members. With the bird in your right hand, take hold of the right leg and slide the band over the three forward facing toes. It should be a snug fit and a little lubricant may be in order. Vaseline, or vegetable oil, or the old tried and true spit will do. Ease the band in a back and forth twisting motion over the knuckle or foot pad, whichever you prefer, until it comes to rest at the knee joint. The back toe is now inside the band and must be pulled forward out of the band. If you can pull it through with your fingers then fine but it may be slippery and a small blunt **flight quill** or match stick may have to be inserted between the back toe and the leg. Make sure that the toe nail is not caught behind the band. The little squeaker may seem to fidget a bit but it is soon over. Make sure that the band turns and all is well. Then on to the next one. It is a good idea to check all bands the next day or so to make sure that all is well. Some smaller birds may lose their bands if not monitored for a day or so.

By the time the squeakers are nine days old the **pin feathers** will be showing. By fourteen days they will appear fluffy and their colour should be evident. They will also be able to stand and move around the nest bowl, and perhaps the box, at feeding time.

When the squeakers are twenty one days old it is time to introduce two feeding tins or galley pots to the nest boxes. One is of course for water and the other for grain. These are for the squeakers to start to explore. They should be affixed to the nest box front so that they don't get knocked over. They need to be removable for cleaning and filling. The young are quite mobile at this time and will soon join their parents eating and drinking out of them at feeding time. This is not to replace the trough feeding for the parents, but only a supplement for the young. This time taken now will pay off at weaning time.

As mentioned previously, your squeakers can fly at thirty days, but days before this you will notice them out on the nest box landing board flapping their wings and spinning around. It is at this time that they might end up on the floor and accidentally wander into the wrong nest box. Young birds can easily get scalped, or worse, at this time. It is up to you to be vigilant. If they are getting into trouble, then wean them at twenty seven or twenty eight days.

Another system used these days is to place all the squeakers on the floor at twenty one days of age. They cannot fly at this stage and the parents will go to the floor to feed them. Most cocks will feed anything that squeaks. There should be some bedding supplied on the floor and a low shelter for the squeakers to take cover from aggressive parents if need be. If you have a pair of adults starting a second nest site on the floor then

you will have to watch the adult cock around the squeakers.

If your birds are sticking to their schedule, they will be preparing to lay another clutch of eggs about the time that the squeakers are about fourteen days old. This may vary a bit with different hens. You may have noticed the cock **treading the hen**. The hen will have her own ideas about the location of the second nest site. Some hens will just lay their second set of eggs in the nest with the squeakers, some prefer a second nest beside the first nest. Others will take a new nest box if one is available, or choose a site on the floor. If you have room in the nest box then you can try to introduce a second nest bowl. They may or may not accept it.

One item that you will need is a supply of plastic eggs. You will not need or want all the eggs that your hens will produce, and the practice of throwing them away is very hard on the hens. It will keep you hopping to stay on top of the birds' time tables and avoid any hatches which you did not plan for. The plastic eggs can be put in to replace the genuine article about a week after the hen has laid. The parents will sit on the plastic eggs for the full term and then abandon them a couple of days after they have not hatched. This way the hens have time to recuperate from feeding and laying. When the birds are sitting there is usually peace and quiet in the loft, and if you are planning to race your birds on what is referred to as the **natural system** then you will have plenty of options and opportunities to race both your cocks and hens. This can be a more pleasant and relaxing time for you and your birds.

I prefer to keep the nest boxes dressed with a little coarse sawdust or pine shavings once the squeakers are ten days old. Remove the droppings every couple of days and sprinkle some dressing around the outside of the bowls. This will keep your nest boxes fresh, dry and tidy.

You may have an opportunity to obtain a pair of eggs from another fancier's excellent stock pair. This is a very good way to upgrade your own stock. For this reason it is a good practice to keep accurate records of the goings on in your breeding compartment. If you are lucky enough to get a good pair of eggs, they will have to be put under a pair of foster parents that have laid their eggs within a day either way of the donor pair. The timing is crucial as the milk production of the foster parents must be aligned with the hatching of the donated eggs. It is also possible to keep the freshly laid eggs in the fridge for a couple of days if the timing is off a little. This can only be done if the incubation process has not started and the donor fancier should remove the eggs from the donor hen as soon as they are laid. This coordination should be planned with the donor fancier well in advance in case you must manipulate the timing of your foster

parents' egg laying.

There are many options open to the fancier that keeps an accurate record of breeding, mating and laying times of their breeding loft and their racing team. These are some of the first steps to creating winning habits down the road.

If you want to know if eggs are fertile you can gently put them on a bright flashlight in a darkened area on about the sixth or seventh day of incubation. You should be able to see what looks like a large red spider inside the egg. If you don't see anything then leave them for a couple of days and have another look. If they do not appear fertile at this time then you should have an experienced fancier look at them to make a final decision. If they are infertile they can be removed at this time. It is best to leave the eggs under the parents for ten days anyway to give the hen a chance to regain her strength before starting the cycle again.

In order to mate the aggressive cock birds we must take a more cautious approach. In the chapter which included the nest furnishings (Raising your own team) we talked about the nest box dividers. This is where they come into play. Take the rejected hen out of the nest box that she is in, and install the nest box divider leaving the nest bowl in the half of the nest box away from the door opening. Put the cock into the nest box on the side that is away from the door opening that contains the nest bowl. Put the hen back into the nest box on the opposite side from cock. It is safe to leave them in this arrangement and the cock can now take the time to observe the hen and realize what a wise choice you have made. If all goes well the cock will settle down and soon settle into the nest bowl and start to coo and call the hen to the bowl. This may take a day or so but it all takes time and it won't matter if it takes a little extra time in the long run. Once the cock starts to call the hen to the nest bowl, you can remove the partition and all should progress as normal. Keep an eye on these pairs for a day or so to be safe.

CHAPTER 12



FEEDING BREEDERS

The feeding of breeding pairs is a little more involved, but it needn't be complicated. One of the most important things is to keep to a routine. The parents have young to feed and must also maintain their own health.

Most pigeon feed suppliers make a **breeder mix** which makes it simpler. It will be higher in protein than the **maintenance mixes**, and will

probably be comprised of smaller grains to make it easier for the parents to pump into the squeakers. With the higher protein comes a few extra dollars in cost, but spread over the weeks a bag will last it is a few cents a day. This feed should be introduced a few weeks prior to mating your birds. It can be gradually mixed in with your other feed until it is straight breeder mix by the time the birds are mated. This is the feed that the breeders will be fed until the fall. The exception would be a **racing mix** if the breeders are being raced as well. There won't be a great difference between the mixes.

Pigeons feed their young at least twice a day, in the morning about nine o'clock and in the evening around six or seven. You will need to give the birds access to free choice feed most of the time. The birds will be the best judges of how much feed they need at this time. It is a good idea to let the supply run out once a day as the birds can be a little fussy about what they eat if left to their own devices. Once they have cleaned out the trough then you can restock it. The feeding trough will have to be of a kind that will keep the feed clean, and not allow the birds to spread it all over the floor as they search for their favourite tidbit. You will be feeding about twice as much feed as before mating, and the trough will have to accommodate the extra. Water consumption at this time will also increase and additional water must be provided. It is of utmost importance that there be food in front of them first thing in the morning and around supper time. If the morning is going to be a problem for time then load the trough and water up after the evening feeding has been done and the pigeons are settling down for the night. You should still take a look in on them in the morning before school or work.

For a long time now some of our domestic pigeons have been unable to get enough iodine from their diet to produce a robust youngster that can chip its way out of the egg each time. For this reason it is necessary to supplement their diet. You can purchase a small bottle of 5% Iodine solution at a drug store. This needs to be added to the water at a rate of one drop for two litres of water about three times a week for a month prior to mating your birds. If you plan to continue breeding, then you will need to continue this supplement about once a week throughout the summer.

Grit and minerals are very important to the birds, especially at this time. The birds will also need a supply of salt if it is not in the grit or minerals. You will have to have a pot of grit in front of the breeders at all times. This needs to be a commercial grit mix with minerals mixed in. Salt is something that should not be overlooked. Get a box of free flowing salt from your grocery store and add a couple of tablespoons to the birds'

ration twice a week in their feed trough, or in a separate grit pot. The free flowing salt does not appear to attract moisture. The adult birds will also be feeding the squeakers grit to start their **gizzards** working.

The hens are going to need a lot of calcium in their diet as well. They draw on their reserves to form the egg shells, and this is a drain on their systems. A large supply of ground oyster shell needs to be available at all times. You will be amazed at how much they will consume. Remember that while they are feeding the ten day old squeakers their reproduction system is in high gear making more eggs and needing more calcium and other nutrients. Don't scrimp



GLOSSARY OF TERMS



AVIARY: an open structure, usually made of wood and wire, which is attached to the loft to let the pigeons stretch their wings, get some fresh air, and take a bath

BANDING: putting an identity band on the squeaker's leg on or about the seventh day; all pigeons must be banded to race

BLOOM: a fine white powder found on the pigeon's feathers; it is assumed to act as a water proofing and lubricant for the feathers

BOX PERCHES: a 12 inch square shaped box that is 5-6 inches deep, usually built in sets and attached to the loft wall; these are good for Young Birds as it is easier to catch the birds in this style of perch

BUCKING BARS/BOBS: a set of heavy wires in a line covering the opening into a loft where the pigeons enter; the pigeons can push them one way to enter, but a stop at the bottom will not allow them to push them out, so they are locked in the loft

CLUTCH: a pair of eggs (three is rare with pigeons) that are laid at the same time by a hen

DRIVING THE HEN: as laying time approaches a cock will start to chase his hen around the loft pecking at her a little; this will last for several days and is meant to stop the hen from window

shopping for an alternate mating

DYNAMIC: some force or combined intensions shared by a group of birds living or exercising together

FANCIER: an English term used to describe someone who has a special knowledge, especially of the breeding of animals, for example Racing Pigeons

FERTILE EGGS: an egg containing a fertilized embryo which will form a squeaker when incubated

FIRST LIBERATION: the first time the Young Birds are basketed for racing and released with other fanciers' birds at the Race Point

FLOCK: usually refers to a group of pigeons flying in a tight formation

GALLEY POT: a small container used to supply feed and water to pairs of birds raising young in the nest box; they may need extra feed and it also helps squeakers start eating and drinking on their own before they leave the nest

GIZZARD: a pigeon's internal organ which retains grit and grinds the pre-softened grain from the crop before it enters the stomach

GREEN SAWDUST: sawdust obtained from a sawmill which is

a by-product of freshly sawn logs and is slightly damp and contains no dust

HOLD OVER: a delay in the release of racing birds due to weather or whatever; usually refers to next day release

HUTCH: small building used to house rabbits

KIT: a team of Young Birds

KITTING UP/KITTED UP: the act of a group of Young Birds forming into a flock or Kit of birds as they learn to fly; a team of Young Birds that start to fly together as a flock

LANDING BOARD: a board attached to a side of the loft at the point of entry for the pigeons; it can be any size but should be large enough to facilitate the orientation cage

LATE BREDS: youngsters born as a second or third clutch during the warm weather in the Summer

LINE OF FLIGHT: an imaginary line flown from the race release to the general area where the greatest concentration of race lofts is located; good pigeons ignore this imaginary line

LOFT: a building used to house pigeons

MOULT: the yearly shedding and regrowth of the bird's feathers;

flights are shed and regrown one at a time while the body feathers are shed in large quantities in the summer and early fall; tail feathers have their own sequence and area changed within a couple of months

NATURAL SYSTEM: racing your old birds during the season while they go about their natural breeding cycle

NEST BOWLS: a bowl made from clay, compressed paper, plastic, wood, etc in which a pair of pigeons will lay their eggs

NESTING MATERIALS: pigeons will build a nest in their nest bowl using hay cut into eight or twelve inch lengths; they will also use discarded flight feathers and other things if allowed outside at mating time

NEST PLUMAGE: the total set of feathers grown within a month by the newly hatched pigeon

OLD BIRD: any pigeon with a previous year's band

OLD BIRD RACING: races involving pigeons one year of age or older

ORIENTATION CAGE: a cage which is put on the Landing Board; the Young Birds are put into it so they can become familiar with the outside of the loft before they are released from the loft to fly for the first time

PLUMAGE: the entire feather covering of the pigeon

PRISONERS: birds kept for breeding purposes which can not be let out of the loft due to the fact that they will return to their former loft; birds imported from overseas are usually kept as prisoners as they are expensive and cannot return home

RACE POINT: a suitable site selected for the release of the racing birds

RAMBLE: a flight taken by a kit of Young Birds to explore their surroundings; it may last from one to ten hours

RAMBLING/RANGING: usually refers to a flock of young birds that, while taking their daily exercise, may travel fifty to seventy five miles from their loft either through sheer exuberance or it may be a natural process that enables them to hone their homing ability

ROOST: a perch

SCALPING: an aggressive act usually by a cock bird in which the feathers and sometimes the skin is torn from the head and neck of another pigeon; usually involving squeakers which have ventured into the wrong nest box; may also occur with hens at mating time; this condition is not usually fatal, but the bird will carry the scars for life

SECOND ROUND HATCHES: pigeons if left to their own devices will raise up to six pairs of young in a year; once a pair of squeakers are about 14 days old the hen will lay two more eggs; Second Round Hatches are the squeakers which are the second round that year; usually they are born in warmer weather and are old enough to race or may be obtained by a novice to start their loft

SECURITY DOOR: an interior loft door used to prevent the escape of the Stock Birds which are not to be let out

SINGLE UP TOSS: a training exercise for Young and Old Birds during which each bird is released individually from the training location in an attempt to give the bird more experience flying and homing on its own; hopefully this will encourage the birds to leave the main flock and head for home on its own

SQUEAKER: a young pigeon from hatching to about fifty days of age that makes a squeaking noise to let its parents know that it is hungry or in trouble

STOCK BIRD: a cock or hen which is purchased, raised or retired from the racing team for breeding purposes

STOPPED UP CROP: a pigeon's crop which is not passing the moistened grain further along the digestive tract; two of the

more common causes may be an inflamed exit duct or an obstruction due to foreign matter in the crop

STRAGGLERS: birds that arrive home late for any number of reasons

TOSS: training pigeons by transporting them to a selected location and releasing them so that they can practice and enhance their homing skills (ability to know where home is)

TRAP: an entry box with four and a half inch wide stalls used to restrain a pigeon upon its entering the loft to facilitate the removal of the race band

TRAPPING: the act of

entering the loft through the trap

TREADING THE HEN: the hen will lie on her stomach while the cock climbs onto her back to consummate the act of fertilization

WEANING: separating a young bird from its parents so that it can start fending for itself

WOODEN LATHE: strips of wood used for interior fittings in the loft; it is 1/4 to 3/8 inch thick by 1 1/2 inch wide and made from white pine

YEARLING: a pigeon in its second year of life

YOUNG BIRD: a pigeon in its first calendar year of life



CANADIAN RACING PIGEON UNION INC.

At a meeting held in March of 1929 in Toronto a motion to form the Canadian Union was made by Mr. W. Sillifant of Stratford, the motion was seconded by Mr. Frank Bottrell of Bowmanville. The motion carried. Centralizing a ring registry was becoming necessary and was the main reason the Canadian Union was formed. At this same meeting it was decided to purchase 15,000 bands to be sold at 2 _ cents each. Membership fees were set at \$1.00 annually. From these very humble beginnings the Canadian Racing Pigeon Union Inc. was born.

In March of 1944 the CU was officially incorporated receiving its charter from the Honourable Norman Alexander McClarty the Secretary of State for Canada. We become known as the Canadian Racing Pigeon Union Incorporated.

The CRPU is an organization that is dedicated to the growth, preservation and support of Pigeon Racing in Canada. Our constitution states as some of its objects the following:

- (1) To promote pigeon racing in the DOMINION OF CANADA; and
- (2) To promote and hold pigeon races and to give prizes, awards and distinctions to persons and associations, incorporated or unincorporated, which may be interested in racing pigeons; and
- (3) To promote the breeding and distribution of knowledge of all matters related to pigeon racing; and
- (4) To provide for and procure the lectures, conferences, contests, shows and holding of public meetings, exhibitions, other gatherings calculated directly or indirectly to advance pigeon racing; and
- (5) To provide means for registration and identification of racing pigeons, and to promote uniform standards and classifications in all kinds of matters related to racing pigeons; and
- (6) To provide a central bureau to deal with all matters relating to lost and straying pigeons and the transfer or other disposition of racing pigeons; and
- (7) To establish a central bureau for the collection and dissemination of information and knowledge relating to racing pigeons; and

- (8) To render aid and assistance to persons and associations, incorporated, or unincorporated, interested or likely to be interested in racing pigeons; and
- (9) To consider and discuss all questions affecting the interests of racers of pigeons and to promote the welfare of racers of pigeons; and
- (10) To subscribe to or become a member of or co-operate with any other association whose objects are wholly or partially similar to those of the Corporation; and
- (11) To buy, sell and otherwise acquire and dispose of or deal with any goods, wares, apparatus, devices, buildings or other real or personal property which may be requisite for the purposes of, or can conveniently be used in connection with any of the objects of the Corporation; and
- (12) To carry on in the same or a modified form and extend the work heretofore undertaken by the unincorporated association known as Canadian Racing Pigeon Union; and
- (13) To do all such other things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objects.

We have grown from these small beginnings to an organization that has members and clubs from coast to coast. We have a Head Office in Tillsonburg ON, a full time and a part time employee. The band registry and the retrieval of lost and injured racing pigeons are still our main functions to-day.

We are in the process of developing an online database to enable us to have race results and national awards based on these results. This database will also allow the general public to search for the owner of lost and injured racing pigeons online, greatly increasing the efficiency of our lost and found service.

Membership and recruitment to our sport are ongoing efforts along with educating newcomers to our sport. We hope you enjoy this booklet and look forward to answering any questions or concerns you may have.

Racing Pigeons

A Beginner's Guide to THE CANADIAN SPORT OF RACING PIGEONS



CANADIAN RACING PIGEON UNION INCORPORATED

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Nick & Erna Oud Loft



Joe Koster's Lofts



The Lofts Of Roland Paret



Paul Gaurin (Gaurin Lofts)



Jack Eerenberg (Star-Lite Lofts)



Lee Richardson Lofts



Tom Foote (Rectalouse Loft)



JS Lofts



Orlando Madrusan Lofts



Flandria Loft



R. S. J. Hastie Loft



John Jacques Iron-Wing-Lofts



Marcel D' Hondt Lofts



John Farkas Loft



Verheyen & Collins Lofts



Federation Loft



Ronison Sandham (BDR Loft)



Zeb Talach Loft



Csaba Stucz - Szylvia Lofts



Sky-Way-Lofts Terry Humberstone



Empire Farm



Stonehedge Lofts

Lofts

MANY STYLES & SIZES