

# A WORD OF ADVICE...

Courtesy of the Natural Winning Ways.

Natural Cy Belgium.

By Andre Roodhooft

## The Use of Medication in my Loft

When one of my pigeons comes back a few days late from a race, he receives a tablet of *Spartrix* and one of *Spartakon* on his return. The pigeon is put into quarantine for a few days until his droppings become normal again. I am even more cautious when I introduce into my loft a pigeon bought from another fancier or obtained from a friend. These pigeons spend at least eight days in quarantine and receive first a tablet of *Spartrix* and, three or four days later, a tablet of *Spartakon*. *Spartrix* is a treatment for trichomoniasis and *Spartakon* for worms.

I also attach a lot of importance to vaccination against pigeon pox and diphtheria. This vaccination is easy to carry out and may be done by the fancier himself. The best known vaccine, which fanciers usually use, is *Ovo-Peristerine*, which is made by Intervet. I should stress that I only vaccinate once a year. When I decide to vaccinate, I treat all my young pigeons together, both young ones a few months old and those which have only just been weaned. This vaccination is carried out four or five weeks before the youngsters' first race. The young pigeons which will be weaned later will not be vaccinated that year. The advantage of this vaccination is that the racing season should under no circumstances be interrupted by pigeon pox or diphtheria.

Generally speaking I have very few

problems with conjunctivitis or runny eyes in my young pigeons. I cannot say why for certain, but I suppose nevertheless that vaccination against pigeon pox and diphtheria could be at least partly the reason.

I always keep *Neo-cortef* in the medicine cabinet of my loft to use when the condition of my pigeons' eyes leaves something to be desired. I then give them one drop of *Neo-cortef* in each eye twice a day, and continue this for four or five days. The results are always satisfactory. It also happens from time to time, when it is very hot, that I put a drop of *Neo-cortef* in my pigeons' eyes just before basketing.

I cannot confirm whether this treatment is beneficial but in my loft it is a habit — good or bad — which I shall continue as long as I detect nothing abnormal.

You will also find a little tube of *Terramycin* (ophthalmic ointment) in my medicine cabinet. When a pigeon comes in from a race with its eye injured by a peck in the basket, or with a watery eye, I put a little *Terramycin* in the eye.

The use of vitamins is essential for pigeons which have to exert themselves. During the racing season only, my pigeons are given vitamins in their drinking water one day a week — preferably the Tuesday or Wednesday.

Outside the racing season I rarely give vitamins, except sometimes during the breeding season when there are big

youngsters in the nest bowl. There are many kinds of vitamin products on the market. For myself, I use *Naturavit*, which is a vitamin complex. I think it is important to give a complete vitamin complex.

When they return from a race the pigeons will always find some tea in the drinking water container. During the moult too, I give them tea regularly once or twice a week. When they are late in coming in from at the beginning of the racing season, I sometimes give my pigeons tea for a whole week. The result is often a positive one. *Lugol* is used twice during the racing season. Once early in the season after a few races, then a second time in the middle of the racing season. *Lugol* can be obtained from chemists — it is a product which the chemist makes himself. *Lugol* can be given for two days at the beginning of the week at the rate of one teaspoonful per three litres of water.

The pigeons may be basketed the following Sunday. *Lugol* has a beneficial effect on the thyroid gland and — especially in widowers — stimulates good form. But take care not to overdo it use since the result would then become negative.

## Conclusion

I have listed all the stock in the medicine cabinet of my loft. As you can see, my pigeons do not receive just water and seed. I must say straight away that medicines are to be used with moderation and common sense. If my pigeons were ever ill I should not hesitate for a second to consult a competent vet and to carry out the treatment he prescribed. I am not in favour of treating blindly. I should rather consult a vet once or twice a year than attempt a series of treatments.

No infection with coccidiosis or by worms has ever been detected in my loft. Any fancier who cleans out daily and respects certain basic hygiene rules needs have no fear of infection with coccidiosis or by worms.

As regards the "seed and pure water" system, I should like to say that in some cases this system may be worthwhile for speed races but even then it will be necessary sooner or later to call on other substances than seeds and pure water. A pigeon with a minor infection could win a top prize over a distance of 80 to 100 km., certainly at the beginning of the season. But when the distance is greater and pigeons have to contend with heat or a headwind, they will need to be in peak condition to come home in the lead.



The presence of a few oocysts, capillary worms or trichomonas is an immediate handicap. Where trichomoniasis is concerned, it is necessary to point out that there are various different strains, some of which may be more harmful than others. Pigeons infected with a mild strain of trichomonas will not suffer too badly.

As they grow older certain pigeons develop within their organism immunity to most diseases. These pigeons could therefore achieve very good results on the "seed and pure water" system.

But for young pigeons and yearlings which are raced every week, the "seed and pure water" system is not at all advisable.

These are the different medications which Andre Roodhooft has in his medicine chest. He makes considered and sensible use of them, as he explains in this article. Terramycin, Ove-Peristerin, Luogol, Neo-cOrtef, Ridzol, Spartrix, Spartakon.

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*"Medicines should be used with moderation and common sense."*

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How many fanciers restrict themselves to giving their pigeons solely seed and water? Who can say that he never buys anything from the chemist? Who never puts some so-called miracle product in the drinking water? Others use all sorts of infusions and herbs. I cannot say so for certain, but we can surely wonder whether infusions and herbs are not in some cases more effective in helping recovery from an illness than medicines.

To conclude I should like to give another reply to our beginner's second question (see the previous article). I am convinced that pigeons can be ruined even before racing commences by giving them too much medication. Those favouring medication will certainly win a good prize from time to time, but when they draw up an objective balance sheet at the end of the season, they will have to admit their failure.

A good pigeon doesn't need much and he is very often given more than he really does need. In short, fanciers almost always give too much rather than too little. You could give anything to a bad pigeon, and it will never do any good.

## Seed and Water

I do not believe, personally, that it is possible to achieve success in pigeon racing on a diet of seed and water alone. I think these are rumours spread around by one or two very cunning sales people. They boast of the natural strength and resistance of their pigeons, which withstand every infection. When they speak in public they claim to attach little or no importance to vitamins and veterinary supervision, but in fact at home they have a cupboard full of pills and chemicals. Very often the strongest advocates of seed and water are those who in fact tinker most with their pigeons. They often tend to overdo things. Pigeons can put up with a lot but there are limits all the same. It is my belief that many more pigeons are harmed before basketing for a race by too much medication rather than too little.

I am, however, still convinced that today it is no longer possible to achieve distinction in races solely by the use of seed and water diet.

Nowadays good pigeons are to be found everywhere. On this point, competition has become so intense that form probably plays a more important role than quality for winning first prizes.

A first-class pigeon which is out of form will not perform well. A medium quality pigeon in first-class form can achieve miracles. So why should we not make use of the means put at our disposal by modern science to bring our pigeons into peak form? It is only a question of common-sense and moderation in the use of these products. If you overdo things you have to pay for it.

# THE ART OF BREEDING

## PART SEVEN

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### THE EYE MIRROR OF THE SOUL (1)

The most appealing part of a pigeon's face is the eye. From the time people started to breed pigeons, much as been said and written about the subject of the eye. And the opinions have differed widely, often contradicting each other. Today there is still a wide range of views around. We find them in our own country as well as in foreign magazines.

Quite a few authors hold onto the opinion that all that's to be read in a pigeon's eye is its physical condition. Others, (especially English) claim that by looking at a pigeon's eye they are able to discover the most incredible things. In this article I'm going to describe for you those factors which are most essential when judging the eye. My knowledge comes from studying the international pigeon literature, as well as from 20 years of intensive, personal observations during my career as a fancier, and I believe it to be accurate.

When you are evaluating a pigeon's eye, of importance are: the size of the pupil, the richness in color, the surface area of the iris and its pigmentation, the overall expression in the eye, and the "Vermeyen" ring.

The size of the pupil is related to the nervous system and the bird's willpower. Watch out for those pigeons who have large pupils. An increase in the size of the pupil means a decrease in the ability of

such a bird to finish difficult, non-stop races, races in which much is being asked of the birds. They haven't enough "mordant" and without that they aren't able to achieve much. As long as I've been keeping pigeons, I've never seen champion-birds with large pupils. On the shorter distance pigeon stock the size of the pupil is not of as much importance because here the pigeons aren't forced to use up the last bit of reserve strength left in their bodies.

Piet de weerd once made the following, very truthful observation: "We aren't interested in small pupils as such, but in the factors causing them to be small. As these are closely related to WILLPOWER".

I've never held a pigeon in my hand and not looked it deep and intense in the eye. This long standing experience has taught me to be cautious of pigeons who's pupils react fast to changes in light. I'm looking for pigeons with pupils that, even in semi-darkness, are smaller than those of other birds. I don't agree with the much published opinion that a good quality pigeons the pupils react quite noticeably to light and dark. On the other hand, pigeons with pupils that do not change at all under different lighting condition, but always stay the same size, to me are absolutely useless for breeding as well as for racing. I'm not going so far as to say that exceptions aren't possible, once in a while they do happen, but the ratio is less than 1 of 500, so gambling on that is not something I would recommend.

Race after race, the birds with no

expression in their eyes disappear until finally in the biggest races only the birds with the richly colored, clear eyes are left. Also when you visit the nation wide exhibitions you'll find birds with non-descript eyes among the vitesse (speed) pigeons, but never will you find them among the matadors!

When asking some of the big names in the pigeon sport their opinion; men as Jan Aerts, Piet de Weerd and John Lambrechts, the response is always that they like full color. That's also what I look for in pigeons, because I share their opinion, an opinion which is based on years of intensive research.

When judging the quality of a pigeon, the next important measuring scale is the color of the iris. The iris is the colored ring between the pupil and the cornea. Sometimes you may notice a thin, black ring which separates the iris from the cornea. This ring has been named after Louis Vermeyen: the Vermeyen ring, and it is very noticable in the younger birds. It has never been sufficiently proven if a pallid or a vividly colored eye is either good or bad. But I've never disguised my opinion: I prefer a richly colored eye. The color of the eye and the richness of that color depend upon pigmentation. Of course, I'm not saying that everything is subject to eye color, but good color is a positive sign.

The German author W. Schweer writes: "It is always of considerable interest to observe the pigeons in their baskets. At the first race you'll find all types of eyes. But slowly.

For years I've always taken every opportunity offered to examine the very best pigeons and I've concluded, contrary to what others say or write; good quality

pigeons always have eyes that are exceptionally rich in color. It doesn't matter if within the iris the different colors are well divided or not. Neither is it important, or is it desired that the colors are present in regular rings. The iris may show all different color variations as long as the colors are deep, starting from the very inner circumference up to the outside border. What I really appreciate are eyes with many colors blended together as if an artist took all the leftover paint on his palette and painted the iris with it. I read this illustration somewhere and thought it to be very fitting.

A few of my pigeons who looked as this were "Oude Kapoen" (son of Kapoen of Desmet-Mathijs) and the "08" pigeon of Jan van Erp. Both of them produced such wonderful offspring, even when mated together; I'm sure that for many years to come these will bring me much satisfaction.



Pigeons who have white eyes, speckled with colorless grains of pigment can be just as valuable as those who have yellow or brown eyes. Then there are those pigeons who's eyes have little pigment or none at all. They appear to be completely black. Eyes like that belonged to the world famous "Jonge Stier", a pigeon who made his boss Andre Van Bruaene a legend in a very short time. As I have stated before, the color of the eye is mostly the result of pigmentation. To

have plenty of pigment is a positive characteristic. We prefer our pigeons to have full, deep colored eyes.

Besides the color of the eye, an even more valuable tool for judging the performance possibilities in a pigeon is the blood supply to the eye. This is because it is closely related to the components which determine the abilities to achieve and this again allows you to draw certain conclusions which are relative to the general characteristics of a certain pigeon.

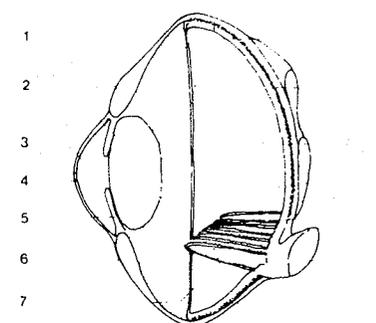
The first ones to do research on this subject were Dorn and Cohrs. By way of tissue analysis, they concluded that small grains of pigment, laying closely together, and filmy thin supple cell tissue, are

1. Ciliary body
2. Lens
3. Chamber of the aqueous humour
4. Cornea
5. Iris
6. Sclerotic plate
7. Pecten
8. Chamber of the vitreous humor
9. Retina, or photo-receptive layer
10. Foveal region of retina — area of acute vision
11. Eyeball muscle
12. Sclerotic coat
13. Optic nerve
14. Choroid layer or pigment layer

characteristic for the outside surface of the iris. An uncountable amount of microscopic size capillaries are found among those and they usually seem to conglomerate in the outer zone of the iris. Laying closely together they find themselves a way to the surface between the grains of pigment making the surface of the iris appear a little granular.

When you inspect a pigeon's eye in direct sunlight, pointing the beak towards the sun, it is possible to detect this phenomenon with your bare eyes. The rougher the surface of the iris appears, the more capillaries will be present in the eye, which again points to a pigeon with a blood-supply.

*To be continued.*



## CONTROL OF COMMON EXTERNAL PARASITES OF PIGEONS

BY DR. C. WALKER VETERINARY SURGEON AND PHYSICIAN

The two main external parasites of pigeons are lice and mites. The entire lice life cycle is completed on the bird, while mites spend much of their time off the bird in the cracks and crevices around the loft.

Treating the bird only e.g. by spraying

and dipping in insecticidal preparations such as malawash will therefore provide only poor control, quite apart from the stress to the birds and time involved.

A good method of controlling the parasites is to use pest strips such as those made by "Shelltox". These are

impregnated with dichlorvos and insecticide well tolerated by birds.

The average strip fumigates 30 <sup>2</sup>/m of air. It is a simple matter to calculate the <sup>3</sup>/m of each loft section and then appropriate amount of strip to hang e.g. 2m x 2m x 2m = 8<sup>3</sup>/m = approximately 1/3 of strip. Depending on degree of loft ventilation. This figure needs to be doubled or tripled. This can be done quite safely. As an example a loft that is fully open on one of its four sides will need this figure doubled.



**Lice Damage**

The strips are easy to cut with a sharp knife. During breeding, nest boxes can be individually treated by cutting the strips into small pieces of appropriate size and placing one in each box.

Lice live off feather material and bloom. Bloom provides weather proofing and enables the feathers to slide smoothly over each other. On birds with lice, the feathers rasp backwards and forwards over each other and become dry. In addition large body lice which live within the feather follicles will eat holes through the feathers.

Mites are blood suckers and cause a variety of problems including anaemia in



**Live Adults & Feather Damage**

adult birds and poor growth and runting in youngsters.

The parasites are therefore important to control. The strips last approximately 5 months and in addition have the handy side effect of controlling the insects that bother our birds such as pigeon feather flies and Pseudolynchia (the little fly that lives on the dropping around nest bowls). They also stop mosquitoes keeping the birds awake at night.



**Lice Damage**

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## WHAT'S IDEAL

Overheard at the Louella imported pigeon sale in Sydney was the remark that some of these birds were too large for Australian conditions. Besides the question of size I was interested to hear just what leading Australian fanciers considered was the ideal pigeon. Doing this later by mail provided a wide range of answers and insights.

Whereas all fanciers warned that the total picture was the answer (sound advice indeed) rather than an isolated feature such as size, some preferences were apparent.

One leading fancier pointed to constitution as being imperative. Constitution to stand up to training, setbacks and racing derived perhaps from a distance heritage. Such constitutions offers abundant health, a quick moult and full potential maximized. Another fancier cited, brains as measure by performance, offering good temperament in and around loft and hamper. Two fanciers from different states rated good winning bloodlines (currently producing families) properly managed. Here they have introduced the flyers capabilities high on the list.

Eyes were mentioned as needing small pupils and good depth of pigment along with brightness. A relaxed wing showing muscle tone was mentioned one flyer describing wings as close to the body and appearing to roll underneath, Wing theory was discarded and there was disagreement on prominent wing butts. Training and particularly the timing involved was stressed. These flyers all chose a medium size bird all rejecting large birds.

Similarities naturally surfaced. A strong back ran through most assessments along with the tail being no more than one and a half feathers width giving the impression at least of downwards pressure. The keel was always to be trim with its continued line to tight knit vent bones. Not to rise above and never to drop below this imaginary line. Often mentioned was the ability to fully fill the hand yet feel light and corky especially when fit.

I did not ask directly why large birds were out of favor but by later discussion and phone calls several possibilities were apparent.

(a) Pacing. Large pigeons often lack early speed. The many of us with knowledge of cross-country running or cycling realise that one lost the lead group is rarely regained.

(b) Runtiness. Large pigeons in many cases represent the opposite of lack of build. They are regarded as possible culls because their bulkiness has not been successful in the past.

(c) Aerodynamics/Wind. There being 360 possible wind directions and perhaps only 20 directly on the nose or behind; the crosswind is most experienced by our birds. Large birds (often deep keeled and large tailed) fare worst. English Carriers by example would not be an aerodynamic first choice.

(d) Manoeuvrability. Besides all the hazards (wires, fences etc.) which a less manoeuvrable bird must fear, birds are known to ground-hop into degrees of wind. These quick changes of direction may not suit the large bird.

(e) Dynamics. Big boned birds (often slower maturing) are necessarily longer muscled often leading to slower movement. Such longer limbs must be catered for by a corresponding change in musculature which is not always present. Interestingly large birds do often have prominent wing butts a plus with many flyers.

(f) Wing Action. A pigeons wing movement, (described by Firth as a rowing action) the one we see in squeaker flight gives way to a clear 'backward' more than downward stroke not available to any other bird. Large birds seem less able to make this action.

Whilst it is interesting to discuss and speculate on the many aspects of the total picture it remains clear that the ideal pigeon is one whose young sell for \$40000 each enabling the early and comfortable retirement of its owner.

*Just a thought.*