

Hens are allowed to lay eggs and raise their young along with their partners. When taken away to race they return to the loft to protect their families and young.

Some 18 members make up the Dubbo Pigeon Racing Club, each a breeder, owner and racer of pigeons from their homes. It's like horse racing says Paul Martin, who doubles up as the publicity officer of the Dubbo Club.

"The system is the same as for race horses," said Martin.

"You breed the birds for stamina, body type and conformation. The best is put to the best, bloodlines to bloodlines and you just don't put any old bird to something else.

"We try to breed the birds to what their parents are and their type but it doesn't always turn out like that — the same as race horses."

The costs involved with breeding and racing the birds are also exorbitant, not quite as hefty as race horses but still pricey much the same.

A good bird in England or Belgium may sell for up to \$50,000. Recently, a bird sold for a world record price of \$57,000.

Known as Vlekje, the bird went to a Leicestershire pigeon stud, after the new owners had to outbid a large Japanese consortium.

Closer to home the expenses do curb, but not by much.

"Birds here in Australia sell for anything up to \$12,000," Martin said.

"But the average bird is usually from \$400 to \$600. We race for Sires Produce race of \$1,500, a sale race for \$1,200 and a special ring race for yearling birds of \$500.

"I guess it's like any sport — unless your professional you can't make any money from it. Out here in the country it's like that because we only race for about \$100 each race."

The club members in Dubbo keep their

birds at home and average about 90-100 per loft.

Most of the times the hens turn out to be the better stayers and usually they win the greater share of distance races.

The poor old cocks, through the ways of habit, fail to see out the long journeys of distance racing and make better sprinters.

"The cocks are better over short distances because it is hard to keep their minds on the job," Martin said.

"The hens are the good distance flyers."

Training and keeping the birds in condition can be an exacting pastime.

Rising early each morning to set the birds on their way, making sure to wear the same clothes and do the same things all the time is just part of the routine of keeping pigeons.

"The birds get to know you so you have to wear the same sort of clothes, not go out one day with a red jumper and the next in a yellow jumper or something," Martin said.

"The birds go out for a fly every morning, usually before everyone is awake and might have training tosses of 20km to 50km a couple of times a week.

The runs get the birds into shape for the gruelling racing season which usually runs from mid-June to the October long weekend.

During that period they may have anything up to 12 races, ranging in distance from 500 kms to a testing of 1050 kms, starting from Launceston in Tasmania.

While a lot lose their way or meet up with friendly and not so friendly characters along the flight home, owners can expect to have 99 per cent of their stock return in a good season.

It's a funny business though. Fed corn and water and trained each day of the week, one wouldn't be surprised if more of the birds gave their owners the 'go bye'.

Maybe they do. I bet the racers wonder why some of their birds get back so late. Could there be a secret rendezvous for racing pigeons?

Who knows?

## BEGINNER'S CORNER

# The Squeakers today are the birds of next flying season

Although it is generally appreciated that the squeakers in the nest at present or walking around the loft are our flying teams of 1990, one is apt to overlook the fact that they do need the same close attention that we give our own birds in full training. Thus it is that many flyers aren't so hard to beat anyway.

It is in the formative stages that the birds need every attention. Actually although your competitive spirit, ego, call it what you will, generally spurs you to devote a lot of time to the birds once they are in training and racing, in reality they don't need it, and in fact, would probably be better off alone once they have been given their training spin and food. The young pigeon is like a baby and requires almost complete attention if development is to be complete. Psychologists tell us that even if a pigeon is prevented from flying at all until three months of age it will still be able to fly equally as well at six months as one that was allowed free flight, and that such things depend on maturation and learning. Maybe they are right for all intents and purposes but flying as they would interpret it isn't flying as pigeon men would interpret it.

### NATURAL CONDITIONS

If we refer to the old time greats you will realise that their birds were reared "naturally" and that they gave the birds as near a "natural" existence as possible, the idea being that the birds that lived and did well under "natural" conditions were the hardy ones.

In other words any sickly squeakers or

those that received a setback were smartly dispatched just as they would be if being reared as a wild bird in the bush, where Mother Nature is a hard task mistress yet one that brings the best out.

Thus it is that by giving close attention to the young stock, one notices any falling behind of any particular squeaker to the others of the same age.

I am not suggesting that you dispatch all small birds and only keep the big framed ones. This thought is farthest from my mind, but the birds that can't find a perch readily, are being pushed around by their fellows, the ones that never seem to relish their food or exercise, and the ones that always look ruffled and despondent.

These are the birds that you can well do without. Some new flyers adopt the attitude "Oh anyone or anything can get sick, and it is only a matter of time for the patient to get better and you'd never know the difference." This is where they err. I know I'll draw a lot of critics to this statement, but I do know from experience and watching others who fell for the same thing end up the same way, and that was in inoculating the loft against pigeon pox.

All the birds naturally got the "wog" as it was given to them scientifically, and all of those birds failed to win a race. The idea was to inoculate them so they wouldn't get the disease during the racing season and get sick, thus losing form. I needn't have worried as none of them ever had any form to lose. I know some flyers will say that they inoculate the flying team and they win. Well those I've known personally didn't and yet the season before and the season af-

ter figured in top races and club main awards. It may have been coincidental but I don't believe in birds that have illnesses either naturally or induced doing as well as healthy ones.

Top greyhound trainers will tell you that they have had large numbers of dogs through their hands and very few good ones, and that the ones prone to illness even if terrific gallopers weren't ever a proposition because you didn't know when they would let you down due to going off colour as it were. With birds the strain on the constitution is much greater than a greyhound during a race. The dog only runs 500 or 800 yards whereas our birds are flying for hours and hours, the dog's effort being less than a minute. It is only by a commonsense approach to such situations and an appreciation of what is really required of the pigeon that a pigeon man can get the right slant on how to care for his birds, which ones to keep and how to feed.

This brings us back to our squeakers. We are looking ahead to the next flying season and we must make sure they are fed the right amount and the right type of food, given the correct and sufficient exercise, free access to clean fresh cool water, plenty of grit, greens, proper housing, and kept free from overcrowding or pulped surroundings.

#### WHOLESOME FOOD

Food should be mainly good, wholesome maple peas. I know they are expensive but better to rear half the number properly than a great flock of no hoppers, that couldn't fly over the fence. In addition to the maple peas which will build the framework of the pigeon heard wheat, commonly called red wheat should be fed. Some small whole corn (not the big grains fed to parrots, as these could be likely to tear the inside of the bird's beak and could set up a cankerous condition) also is most sustaining and body building. While the birds are very young I prefer hopper feeding with the grains all mixed together, not in separate divisions in the hopper as some do. However as the birds get older and the framework has been formed it is only a

waste of good food to leave it in hoppers and moreover encourages them in overeating. In addition there is the trouble to get the birds that are never really hungry to trap, so a little bit of attention should be given as to when the hopper system of feeding is to be discontinued.

Greens may be fed every other day. I suggest washed and salted spinach although some feed lettuce, cabbage or thistles, claiming that the latter is more "natural" and more beneficial. I don't agree with feeding small grains to very young birds as these tend to make them restless and over excited.

Grit may be of the proprietary type or sea shell grit plus some broken red brick, and bush sand with some salt added. Some flyers have a lump or rock salt in the loft for the birds to pick. Many of these additions are a matter of personal preference, just as is the amount of food and its composition. In fact the argument for certain things to be done is merely saying that a routine must be kept.

Birds don't want rapid and varied changes in their lives whether in exercise, food or any other thing. You'll find that the successful flyers are the ones that "a bomb wouldn't shift" in their attitudes.

Some may even be called "pig headed" as they won't listen to what other flyers say regarding handling birds. Where their success lies is in the fact that their birds for generations have been used to particular conditions pertaining in that loft, and they have done well under them. So why change?

I even know of a flyer who through finance worries and certain other factors only fed his birds milo during the racing season and won as many races as he had in previous seasons and he was a good flyer. The reason probably for his success was that the only difference in the bird's routine was the food, and because everything else was identical and they became conditioned to a milo diet they did just as well in the overall picture.

I don't suggest to feed straight milo. I am only pointing out something that did happen through circumstance. Free access to

pure cool water is also essential if a young bird is to develop properly and an older bird to maintain perfect health.

Birds need water more than food. This has been proved under test, so make sure that the water can't be fouled by the birds' droppings. A good idea is to have the water vessels outside the loft and the birds drink through the wire. The water containers can then be covered over, in the shade and easy to get at for replenishment.

I don't agree with automatic water troughs. I feel that it pays to change the water and clean the vessel twice by checking the water twice a day. This is only a personal approach but it does make sure that they aren't ever long without it. Under the other conditions it could occur that the water supply is cut off through some mechanical failure that has escaped your notice.

Sieve all your food before giving it to the birds. This removes dust and possible powders being on the grains. Speaking of cleanliness, make sure that perches and floors of lofts are cleaned at least once a

week. Sprinkle some "Nik-off" or similar material on perches at dusk to clean your birds of any possible vermin. Burn all nests and cleanse all nesting pans several times during rearing and use things such as rushes or pine needles for nesting material. A little tobacco dust in the bottom of the next pan also helps to keep away mites and lice.

Cleanliness at all times, adequate feeding, housing and sufficient exercise and a speedy elimination of all weaklings will give you the best possible flying team for 1990.

## Mystery at 35,000 feet

*Continued from Page 16*

of pigeons over to the decompression chamber.

The decompression chamber is used for training bomber crews to work at high altitudes. It can be decompressed to simulate any altitude and its refrigeration system can pull the temperature down to 90 or 100 below zero. The birds were put in there and pressure and temperature were dropped to the equivalents of 35,000'. It didn't daze the birds. The simulated atmosphere was raised to 40,000' and still the birds didn't mind.

Then temperature and pressure were quickly brought back to sea level stage, and the observers waited to see what would happen. But nothing happened at all. The birds just perked up and looked around for the food they get after each training flight.

And there the matter rests. Officially, there's no puzzle about it; pigeons simply don't need oxygen at high altitudes. But, unofficially, it is still a baffler which was summed up perfectly in an enlisted man's awed comment, "Them birds just ain't human".

**A. Larter.**

## BOLSHIE BAMBOO

*Quality 15 bird cane baskets*

**\$75.00 EACH + FREIGHT**

Rail, Road or Air

5% discount for orders of 12 or more baskets

Send cheque to:

**BOLSHIE BAMBOO IMPORTS**

PO. Box 154,  
Epping, VIC. 3076

PHONE ENQUIRIES: (03) 401 1329  
VIC ZABENKO