

# *A visit at Aad Bransen in Kwintsheul*



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Drawings: Jan de Jong

Aad Bransen is living in Kwintsheul, a small village with approximate 3,500 inhabitants, situated in the West of the Netherlands, in the area between Wateringen, Monster, Honselersdijk, Poeldijk and Naaldwijk. Together with De Lier and 's-Gravenzande it recently formed the new municipality 'Westland' - known for the Greenhouses - which will soon welcome its 100,000<sup>th</sup> inhabitant.



Right: Aad, holding the big winner NBS National show 2004-2005 on his hand. It was the Best young male in Show and also won the 'Jan Giesbers prize'.

It is Friday April the 27<sup>th</sup>; a 'summer' day with temperatures up to 30° Celsius (86° Fahrenheit), and without a drop of rain for at least four weeks; a sign that the climate is completely inversed. (In Holland we are supposed to have 'spring' now; being 15° C / 60° F and lots of rain!) The reception is in the garden of the former freesia nursery company of Aad. We are in the so called 'glass city', the area with the greenhouses in the West of the Netherlands. But the cities in this area are expanding and pushing further and further, occupying all the farming land. As his children did not want to succeed him, Aad sold out in the year 2000. The company buildings remained and his house with garden and a small greenhouse. In the greenhouse he grows several varieties of grapes plus his own vegetables and potatoes.

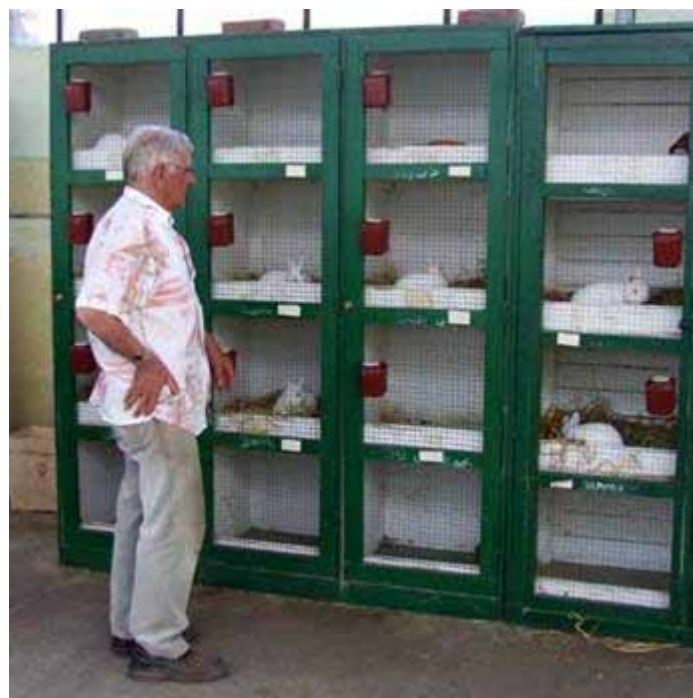


**Left and above:** These white racing pigeons are the foster parents of his Norwich Croppers. They are allowed to fly free all day and are in top shape, proved by their continuous flying. And if they land on the roof, it is only for a moment.

In a separate part of his greenhouse, he keeps his Norwich Croppers and white racing pigeons, which he uses as foster pigeons. A month ago, Aad reached the age of 72 years; hard to believe if you see how much work he is still doing. His Norwich Croppers take a lot of his time and they are still at the top of the hobby. But he also is – and has been for many years - a faithful assistant for the Avicultura show, responsible for the maintenance and storage of all the show material. Still now, getting older, he sometimes wonders if they (the show organisation) realise what to do with all the stuff when he is no longer around.

### **How it all started**

When Aad still lived at his childhood home, his parents kept utility-rabbits for commerce. His father had about 200 rabbits in stock and they were fattened for consumption and sold, mostly at Christmas. Besides that, his boss had empty pig pens and at the age of 15 he started with his own rabbits, and eventually it was one of his boss's truck drivers who told him about the exhibitions and brought him in contact with this phenomenon: showing small live stock. And years later even his son (one of the two) started breeding rabbits for the exhibitions.



**Above:** Aad is standing before his blue eyed Polish Rabbits, an old love from the first days in the hobby. He started these Blue eyes, just because they became rare in the area.



**Left:** A very good example, sitting on a balance.

**Right:**  
 The first young Norwich Croppers under the racing pigeons coincidentally hatched today. The foster parents are no longer provided with nesting material, because they steal it from each other's nests. Now they only use some material that they pick up from outside.



Aad has had a busy, hardworking live. After being an employee at the greenhouses for many years, he started his own company in Kwintsheul in 1972. That meant even harder and longer work, from early morning at daylight and often till 10:00 o'clock in the evening. On Saturday at eight or nine o'clock in the evening he finely found some time to clean-out his rabbits. This became too much and suddenly he decided to stop with his rabbits, although he had very good Alaska rabbits at that time. Aad found a fancier in Delft who was interested in buying all the rabbits but could not effort a lot. When the man came by with some empty boxes, he could not believe his eyes when Aad started to fill them up with all his rabbits. Eventually they agreed an amount of 20 gulden (today about 10 Euros) for the total of 30 rabbits. Aad then started with the Antwerp Bearded bantams and he remembers as if the day was yesterday that on the first show that year, he became champion of that show with one of his Antwerp bearded bantams and the man from Delft was best in show with one of his (former) Alaska rabbits.

Left: The loft with the foster parents, with 9 breeding compartments. In the breeding season the white racing pigeons have free flight all day, while the breeding goes on.

In 1957, Aad remembers participating for the first time with his rabbits at a local exhibition from the WPKV association. He still sees himself on its

bicycle with the boxes on the luggage rack with the boxes leaning against his back and what happened next Aad got the front wheel stuck in a rail track from a small transport company that transported passengers and goods in the area. Consequence was that he fell off his bicycle and had to catch the rabbits in the field.

**Right:** Here is Aad in a picture from 1986, at the 60 year's Jubilee Show from 'Loosduinen en Omstreken' with a transport lorry with his boxes.





**Left: Spacious breeding compartments for his Norwich Croppers.**

In 1988 he had a house build and lived with his family in the barn of his company for months. You must know that the greenhouse farmers are known to be economically, call it miserly, but at Aad's place it was different. The construction workers of his house were being welcomed with coffee in the morning and provided with every thing they needed during the day. On Friday there was a beer and everyone went home in the evening with a bunch of flowers for his wife. Aad had the impression that there where more

workers around each week, due to his good care. Recently a family member, who is working as a supervisor at a painting company, told him that after 20 years, several builders are still talking about that greenhouse farmer in Kwintsheul, called Aad Bransen, where they were treated so well. As writer from this article I can endorse this only; when you visited him, he always offered you flowers to take home with you and when the workers for the Avicultura show after many years needed a big party as a small compensation for all their good work, he spontaneously offered to use the large building on the grounds of his company, without asking any financial compensation.

**Right: One of the couples in their breeding compartment with a nest pan. On the floor Aad always uses newspapers and some ordinary dry sand. It's the easiest way to keep clean. So all he has to do is just wait for the eggs.**



### **The pigeons**

A lot of different pigeon breeds were kept by Aad Bransen during the years. So he had Modena's in black Schietti, which he kept together with another fancier called De Zeeuw; this was under the name 'combination Zebra'. Further on he had Hagenaars, a typical Dutch Tumbler/High-flyer breed, at that time a very rare colour red, which are now completely disappeared. He used the Hagenaars as foster pigeons for his Modena. In the beginning of the eighties he was visited by Barend Versluis who suggested and encouraged him to start breeding and showing the Norwich Cropper together, because Barend had a lack of space and wanted to start breeding earlier in the year. The loft of Aad Bransen, situated in a part of his (always heated) greenhouses, were excellent and very suitable for this purpose.



**Left: The wing of a Norwich Cropper must have more than 7 white primaries and preferable no more than 10, because that would be visible at a closed wing. The rosettes consist of several white feathers on the upper wing shield; usually 7 to 12.**

This combination, Bransen and Versluis, presented top material at the shows for many years. At that time Aad was also a member of the board from the local Poultry and Rabbit fanciers association, the WPKV.

**Right: The female presents herself here very nicely, but could show some more blowing in the back of the neck. A Norwich Cropper in complete action must have a round globe (crop).**



At a certain moment the cooperation between Bransen and Versluis was ended and they decided to separate. The pigeon collection was split up in good consult; each could have his choice by turns. After Aad had chosen two males and a female, he was satisfied and later on he completed his collection with some Norwich Croppers from some different German top breeders. With this collection he built his own stock, performing up till now to a very high standard. Aad thinks it's necessary to keep a sufficient variety for successful breeding. One of his principles is that Champions leave his loft, with the exception of a single real big winner that won a special price, like the winner of the 'Jan Giesbers award' at the national championship of the Avicultura show in January 2005; they are kept 'for life' and become very confiding during the years. The stock birds are the most important, although they may even have faults, but they always complement each other, so what's lacking in one bird, must be completed by the other pigeon of the couple. The many years of selecting and breeding taught him that a couple formed by two champions will never make a winner.

One of his challenges was to improve the length of the legs; eventually he succeeded by selection on longer legs. Remarkable to see is that some pigeons in his stock bird loft have some feet feathering; according to Aad this is a remainder from the German import birds. He also has from time to time youngsters that have too much white feathers in the wings and especially at the crop, so the bib became too big.

**Below: Quality grain, of which the adult Norwich Croppers in there separate pens will have a measurement in the morning and in the evening. Exactly enough, not too little, but also not too much.**



Nowadays the crop is no longer wanted 'as big as possible' but must be supple and blowing in the neck. Aad has put special attention to the maximum size of the white bib. According to some fellow breeders the size of the white bib is less important, but Aad is happy that he has always tried to follow the rules of the official standard. That's why he does not understand that people have so little knowledge of the standard, but on the other hand they have a lot critics at the judge.

### **The Breeding season**

As usual, for Aad the breeding season starts halfway into the month March, with four couples of Norwich Croppers, while he keeps two females as reserve. The breeding pans are wrapped in newspapers, for better isolation and it's really easy to clean; he simply changes the papers every week. The papers are the only breeding materials used, besides a breeding pan felt which he buys in a box of 10. These insulate even better and please Aad very much. Incidentally today his first young Norwich Croppers hatched under the

foster pigeons and they look good. He has tried breeding without foster pigeons and assisted the Norwich Cropper parents by feeding the youngsters extra parrot feed with a pipette. Eventually it did not give the right result. The Norwich Cropper parents had problems with the big crop and the pigeon milk production. The crop loses its firmness, making the bird useless for the show. But Aad must honestly admit that if you want a tame and confiding pigeon, the best way is to feed it yourself.

**Right: North Caucasian Posture tumblers, white black tail. A nice breed, it was given to him to keep for a while because the owner had not enough room, but in the meantime they started breeding and Aad ordered some rings.**



**Left: The NKPT (North Caucasian Posture tumbler) breeding. Pied coloured parents are usable, but a white tailed parent will never produce a coloured tail. The disadvantage of this breed is that they become dirty quite easy, because the wings are carried under the tail and drag the floor.**

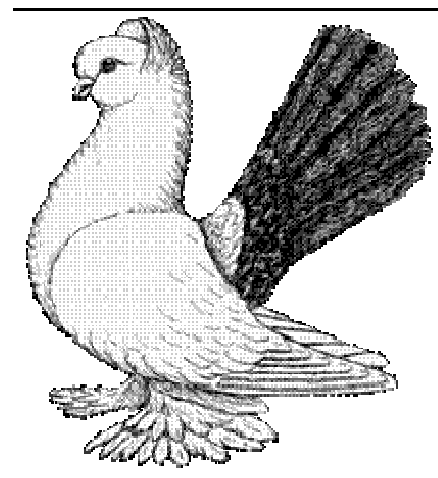
As soon as the youngsters can eat by themselves, they are separated from their foster parents and housed together with the other young pigeons in a big aviary, where they can fly around and eat out of the collective feeders. It is here that selection starts; the pigeons are under daily observation and when the Croppers start to blow and 'presents' themselves, they are put in a separate pen. From that time they are fed the same amount of food as the other adults, being twice a day an adjusted amount of grain, exactly the amount the pigeon needs. This time in the separate pen is considered as a training- and observation period to prove its

value, but maybe after a couple of weeks the pigeon is put back in the aviary between the others and Aad will try again a month later.

As mentioned before, the only colour he has in the Norwich Croppers, are the blue black barred pied. But sometimes there are spontaneously brown barred pied youngsters, a colour that was called 'liver colour' for 30 years. These brown youngsters are always a lot less in quality and these browns have the typical half pearl coloured eye, which also influences the eye colour of the blues. Further more it is believed that the brown influence gives the so called 'russet effect' or brown smut in the black bars.

**Right: A North Caucasian Posture tumbler. The shell crest may end in a rosette. Drawing: Jan de Jong.**

Sometimes he counts the number of tail feathers, and once he found 13 tail feathers instead of the standard 12. So he pulled this feather out and he never found another 13<sup>th</sup> tail feather again.



For 20 years he used to buy at least 60 rings yearly. In those years he sometimes sold all the birds he could spare. But later he bought 40 rings and now only 30, because today he doesn't know what to do with his birds. It seems that no one wants to have them anymore.

If I ask Aad in which colour the Norwich Cropper is as best represented, he thinks that this is no longer as clear as it was before. It used to be the colour blue black barred pied that had the best types, but now you can find top birds in all the colours, even in whites and yellow.

**Right: Aad also uses to keep some chickens. At the moment he has the Plymouth Rock, a beautiful breed and in fine quality, coming from the well know top breeder Auke van der Does.**

**Below: One cock and three hens all laying very well at the moment.**



**Right: So, what to do with all those eggs.... Well, if a friend puts some in the incubator for you, then in no time you have a nice collection of young chicks running about the place.**



### **Showing and the club**

In the last years, there is a considerable loss in the number of club members from the Norwich Cropper Club; a phenomena for the fancy pigeon hobby in total. This also influences directly the number of Norwich Croppers on the shows. Before 25 years it was not an exception to have 200 Norwich Croppers on a National Show. In those years there was a lot of interest for the breed and a lot of birds where sold on a show, also to foreign countries, like France. Aad even sold eggs to a Dutch emigrant in Canada. The contact in Holland was made by the brother of the emigrant and when the deal was done and a date was set, Aad send 4 eggs, which had already been incubated for 12 days, in a shock-free package to Canada. The shipment was a success and 3 eggs hatched in Canada.

Aad has no solution on hand for the lacking interest in our hobby. It's a mentality of the people; they don't want to spend any money on it and on the other hand, no one is really helping one another. He himself always tried to help, but in that respect he was disappointed as well. There was a breeder with Norwich Cropper that had entered a very bad collection of birds on the show. He said that it was the best he had, so Aad offered his help and invited the man at his place to make a choice out of ten pigeons.

The man chose a pair but said that he had not much money to spend on it, so Aad offered him the pigeons for a very friendly price, but at the farewell, when the man left with his pigeon box, Aad saw a big expensive racing car in front of the house and he was even more disappointed when later he saw an advertisement from that same man, offering Norwich Croppers (the bad ones) for an enormous price.



**Left: A wonderful male, with the real character of the Norwich Cropper. They are confiding, friendly and always moving and blowing their globes for your entertainment.**

**Below: The same male, which jumped back from the hand straight into the breeding compartment. Notice the good round blowing crop, but the crescent marking could be more regular.**



At the moment Aad is a board member of the Norwich Cropper specialty club for about 6 years now. A club that had not so long ago, over 40 or 50 members. The club days were held in Doetinchem and the wives were also invited in; those were pleasant days, but when the number of members decreased, the location became too expensive. A new location in Leerdam also became too expensive, so now they have the Club Day at a member's home, if put at the disposal of the club.

The young animal days are important for juniors and new fanciers, but in fact they are important for all the members of the club. You can learn so much and it reinforces friendship between the club members, so it is good for the association. Young Animal days are a very old usage in our hobby, although in early days it was organised for rabbits only; a judging straight from the transport box and it was meant as a help in selecting. Later, when the clubs started to buy cages for the chickens and pigeons, these fanciers could also participate.

### **Participating in the shows**

The number of shows he participates in is less than in former years. Each season he starts with the local show from WPKV, next the Championship Show of South Holland at the EZHSV in The Hague and finally the National Championship, the former Avicultura Show, now called Avicorni and organised together with Ornithophilia. In former years he also used to go to The Oneto in Enschede and the Lichtstadshow in Eindhoven, but the latter show no

longer exists. He once participated in a Norwich Cropper show in Germany, and as far as he concerns, that was once and for all!

### **The health of his pigeons**

During the last years when Aad did all the caring for the pigeons by himself, he never had a dead or even a sick pigeon. Quality nutrition for good health and several times during the year a 'cure' from the Belgian racing pigeon pharmacy 'De Weerd' mixed in the drinking water and the results are amazing! His birds never have Trichomoniasis or worms, the droppings are looking very good and found without any bacteria and other illness by laboratory research. The white racing pigeons, which he keeps as foster parents, enjoy a permanent liberty for flying, and seeing them fly, I can see they are in a top shape. I was surprised to see that during my visit from 2 till half past 6, the racing pigeons were almost constantly in the air. In the mean time Aad keeps an eye on the loft, because the magpies and the crows even have the guts to go in, taking the eggs and the young birds right out of the unattended nests; he saw them flying around one day, with the young birds in their beaks.

### **The end**

After such an interview we had the impression that we heard it all, because we never spend so much time and discussed so much at one visit. Still the story we printed is only a small part of what we discussed. Aad also has a number of North Caucasian tumblers; they were put at his loft for 'a while' by a fancier-friend. These tumblers are black pied and black tailed; only the black tail is recognised, but you need the pied for the reproduction of the right markings. In the mean time the first eggs are laid, so Aad already ordered some rings.

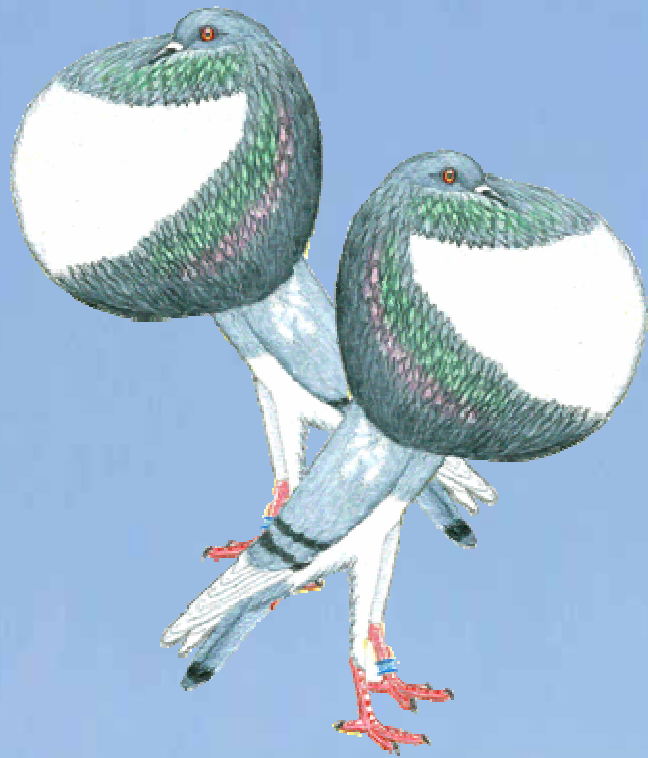
We also added some pictures of his Plymouth Rock chickens, the Blue eyed Polish rabbits, and the greenhouse with different sorts off grapes. As a new hobby, Aad and his wife joined a choir that specializes in Dutch sentimental ballads. Choirs like this are immensely popular in Holland at the moment, and the singing is fun to do. As it happened the choir was just looking for a treasurer, so he added another function to the collection. In short, Aad is a splendid fellow.

### **Right:**

**The grape plants in different varieties, like Muscat and Frankenthaler. The latter being a very precious speciality of the Westland's greenhouses.**



## History from the Norwich Cropper and the standard

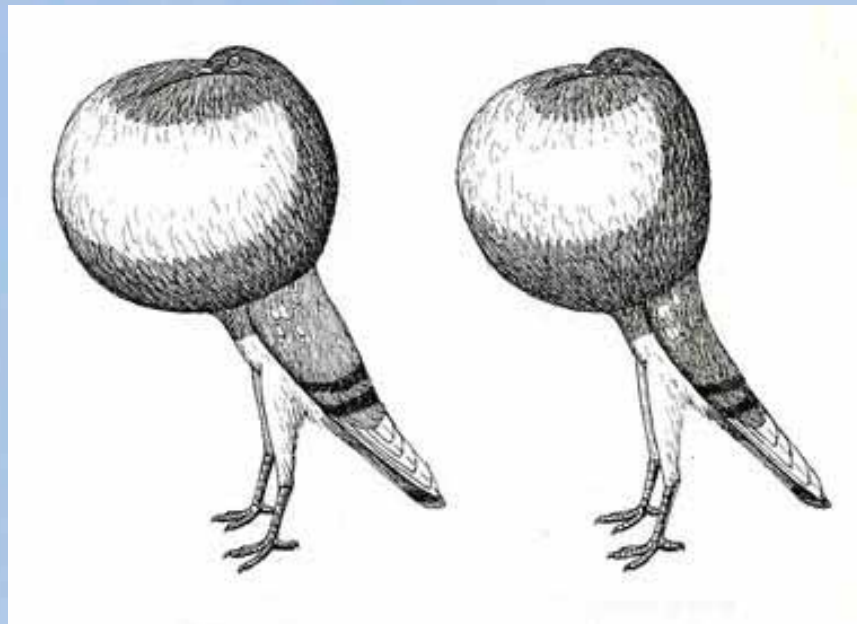


It's always nice to say that this breed is originally Dutch, named the 'Uploper', a smaller breed, meant to fly with. It was taken along by Dutch textile workers when they immigrated to England. This took place in Norwich in the English county Norfolk. This county is in the eastern part of England at the North Sea coast and 'as the crow flies' the nearest to The Netherlands. The origin of the Norwich Cropper is described in the book of C.A.M. Spruijt called 'The Cropper breeds' (in Dutch language) from 1929. In his book Mr. Spruijt is referring to the book 'Pigeons' written by W.A. Tegetmeijer and also to the oldest English pigeon book from John Moore published in 1735, called 'Columbarium'. John Moore wrote about the 'Uploper' as an unmistakable Dutch created breed. His description is of a pigeon with a relatively big, totally round globe that almost hides the beak. The male trips on his toes and jumps towards the female, so that explains the name 'Uploper'.

*The Norwich Cropper has a very friendly and confiding character and is always full of action. Together with the big, round and always blowing globe and erect stance of its body, this gives the breed its outstanding characteristics. The below 'standard' is an extraction from the English standard with a pointed scale, giving a different approach to the Norwich Cropper as described in the Dutch standard.*

### **25 points (out of 100) for the globe**

*The globe is the most striking aspect of this delightful bird. Therefore this component has thus the highest appraisal value. This does not, however, mean that the larger the globe the more points the bird gets! The globe must be round, from all sides, without flat areas. The globe should break at almost a 90° angle from the waist and shoulders. Globes who are too much extending forwards lack back globe and give the impression of a number 9. Other faults are uneven or lopsided globes, over blowing and refusing to blow at all.*



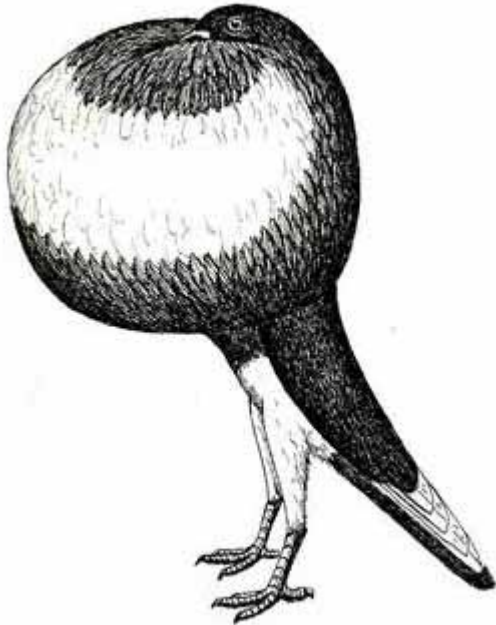
**Left pigeon has a big globe but is too broad in shoulders.**

**Right pigeon has a small body, but the globe is too small.**

### **17 points for markings**

*This 17 points are divided into; crescent: 6 points, rosettes: 3 points, flights: 3 points, and body markings: 5 points. The crescent should appear as a crescent moon shaped marking that extends just below the eye on each side with the widest part of the crescent just below the beak. The crescent should not extend through the eye or behind the head. Also crescents that extend through the eye seem to be associated with cracked (2 coloured or split) eyes. The rosettes on the upper third of the wing should consist of 6 to 8 or so white feathers that dot the upper wing. The typical*

dotting pattern is very difficult to obtain and many birds will show a small white patch on the middle upper wing. While not perfect this is acceptable. The flights (primaries) should be white. A common fault is to have one or more coloured flights. This is very difficult to see in reds, yellows, browns, khakis, mealy's and creams. The breeder must be aware of this problem and be careful to not mate 2 birds with this fault together. The white line that appears across the waist should be a straight and even line. The thighs, feathers under the wings, and on the rump should be white.



**Left: Legs are too short and rosettes are missing**

**15 points for the body**

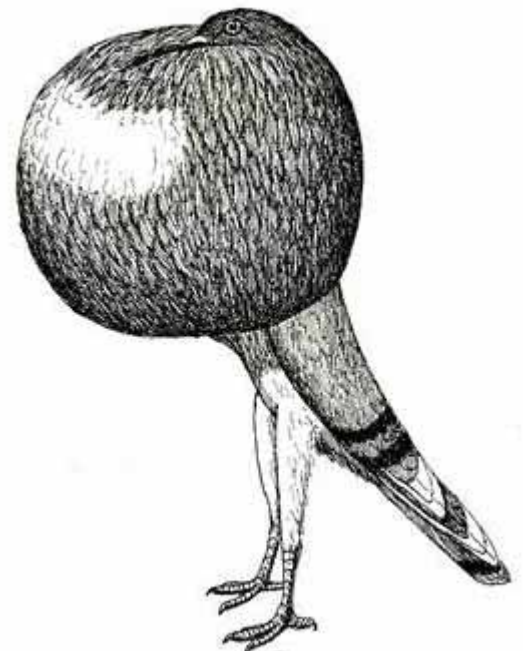
A thick bodied bird will not allow proper globe break and will destroy the roundness of the globe thus affecting that 15 points! When revising the standard, the description of the body was changed from "wedge shaped to "cone" shaped. This was done in the hopes of clarifying an often misunderstood point about a good Norwich Cropper. Wedge shaped may mean a "narrow" wedge or a "wide" wedge. Many people felt that wedge shaped meant that the bird should be thick across the shoulders and taper quickly to the tail. The correct interpretation is that, while the widest part of the body is indeed at the shoulders, it should be narrow even there! What is wanted would be a body narrow across the shoulders tapering even narrower to the tail. Narrow shoulders are a must! The visibility of the narrow waist also allows for better globe break. Another often overlooked point is the need for the upper back between the shoulders to be "hollow" or scooped in. This also accents the narrowness of the body and allows for proper break and roundness of the globe when

viewed from behind. To finish off the picture of a narrow body is the need for short tight fitting feathers. Loose feathering is a fault and can destroy the image of a slender body.

**Right: This pigeon shows a 'rigid' leg and has coloured flight feathers and lacks crescent volume.**

**10 points for legs and feet**

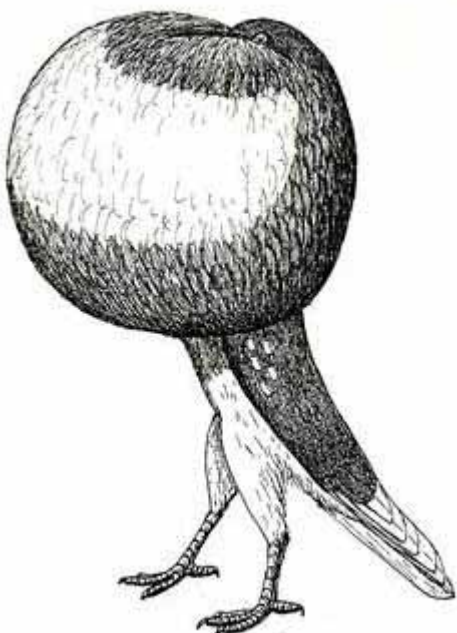
The upright posture and the narrowness of the body require long legs. The legs should be only about 1 inch apart - farther apart indicates a wide body- and should be straight when viewed from either the front or the side. The thighs should blend into the waist without hinging or showing an obvious connection. A good Norwich Cropper should actually stand on it's tiptoes and appear to be 'reaching for the sky'.



**Left: Rigid stand and legs are spread.**

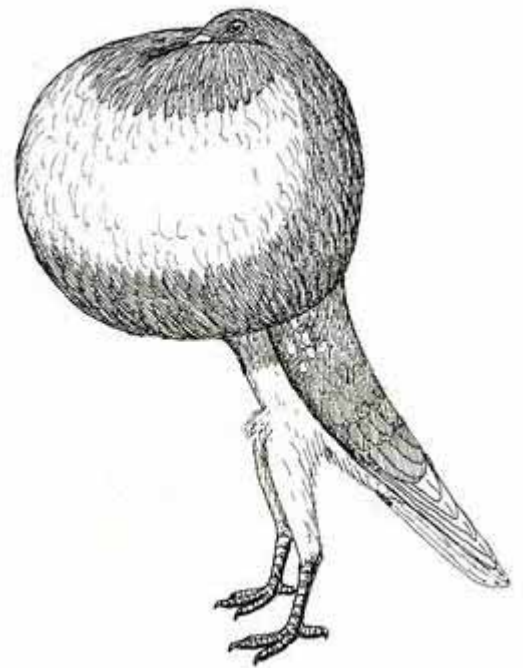
**10 points for action**

Statues will not win in competition. Action is indeed part station with the eye directly above the ball of the foot with the crop well inflated at all times. The other half of the equation for 'action' (approximately 5 points) is that the bird should respond to people by strutting, spreading its tail, bowing, and bobbing its head.



### **10 points for the colour**

All colours should be as intense as possible, barred birds should have clear wing shields with dark bars. Sootiness and smutty wing shields in barred birds and the evidence of bars in blacks are all faults. Mealy, Cream, Red, and Yellow birds are to have white tails. We must keep in mind however, that these birds are actually ash red and a light grey tail is acceptable.



### **5 points for the head, beak and the eyes**

Only 5 points total is allocated for these parts. This means that while a cracked eye is a fault, it is a minor fault (worth only 1/3 from 5 points) It is certainly not enough of a fault to prevent an otherwise superior bird from winning its class! The head should be small and dove shaped and the bird should have a slim beak with a small smooth wattle.

**Right: Extending upper legs.**

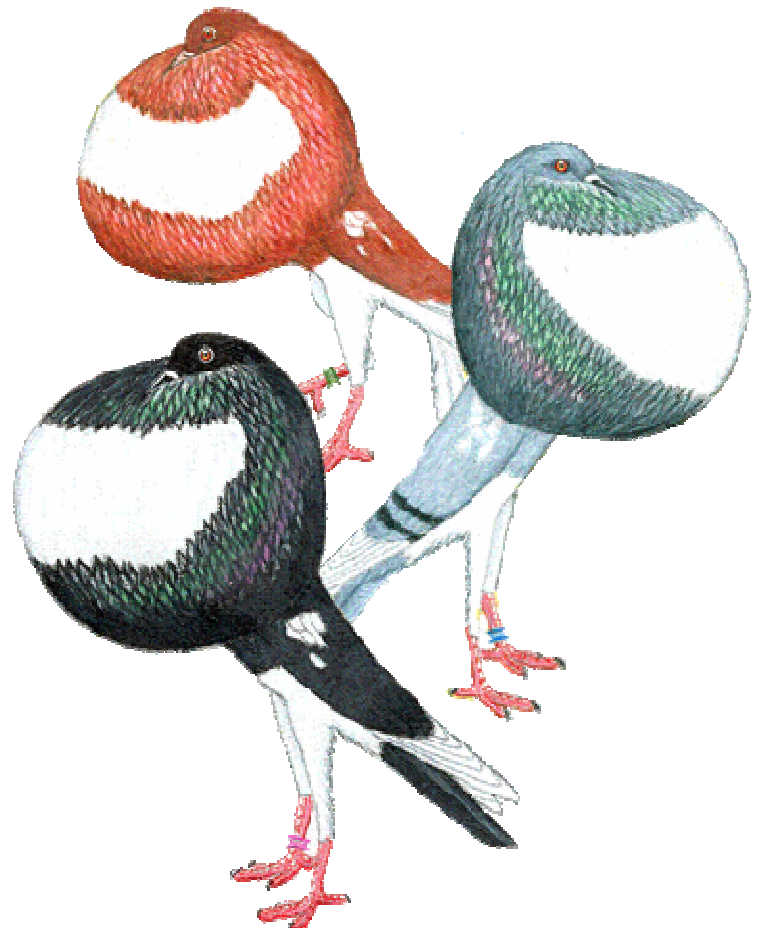
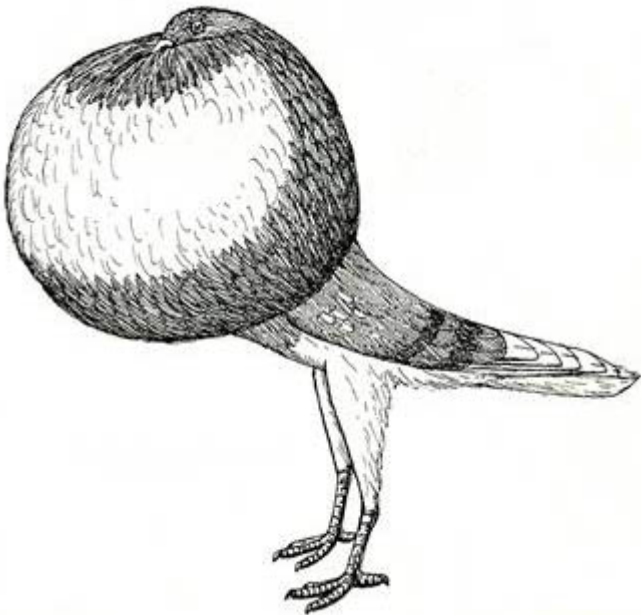
### **5 points for the tail**

The tail should be tight and carried off the ground. Split tails and wry tails are major faults.

### **4 points for the wings**

The last 4 points of the standard are for the wings. These should be narrow and held close to the body. The wings should rest lightly on the top of the tail and the flights shouldn't cross. Again, an otherwise superior bird with lightly crossed wing tips should win its class. The key is to look at the bird as a whole- not look at individual parts!

**Left: Horizontal stand.**



For more information you can always  
Contact the Dutch Specialty Club for the  
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