

Keeping Fancy Pigeons



By: Mick Bassett

PART 3 - PIGEON BREEDS AND THEIR TEMPERAMENT

First I will give a general idea of the temperaments found in the different Groups of Pigeons and then specific Breeds that I have personal experience of. This will off-course vary, sometimes dramatically from other people's experience! So much depends on the birds owners; that goes for ANY Breed! This starts in the nest, the young learn from the reactions of their parents.

COLOUR PIGEONS

These are generally of the 'Field Pigeon' shape and size, which is a 'normal' pigeon with or without the addition of muffs and crests.

Breeds in this Group have a reputation for being 'flighty' or wild. This probably dates back to the days when they had to 'field' for their food and needed to be alert and respond quickly to danger, or they didn't get back to the loft! It goes without saying that even the heavy muffed varieties are good flyers and do better with decent size flights.

If you want nice steady birds the process may take a generation or two if the original pair are, as is normal here in Germany, very flighty! You get them

accustomed to you, the young learn from hatching and should be an 'improvement' on the parents, and in turn their young will be even more socialized!



Nuremberg Lark (left)

Early on these were two separate breeds; the Lark-marked and the *Nürnberg Mehlicht* (translates as Pale Meal or 'Flour' Colour).

Of the two varieties, I have found the Lark-Marked very easy to get 'docile' and steady, the young especially flying onto my shoulder when entering the loft! This I hasten to add is NOT typical Colour Pigeon behaviour!

The *Mehlicht* are definitely more nervous and unless carefully selected, do also become 'courser' in type than the Lark-Marked. For this reason crossing the varieties is not normally done.

Right: Thuringian wing pigeon, red whitebarred.



Thuringian Spot

Like all the Colour Breeds these are naturally 'wild'! They will steady down, but patience will be needed. The same goes for the Thuringian Swallows, although I have found these can be very steady when nesting, but again this depends on the owner.

Gimpels (Archangel) on the left

These will steady and fairly rapidly give patience.

Thuringian Wing Pigeons

These birds can steady quite quickly. I have one that was reared under a pair of my Lahores and is almost tame! They generally sit tight on the nest when they know their owner.



Right: Thuringian shield pigeon, red.





Left:
Saxon shield pigeon, red white barred.
Photo: H. Schwarz.

Franconian Velvet Shield

These appear 'typical' but some do less wild than others, especially when nesting.



Thuringian Goldbeetle (right)

I have seen these sit tight on the nest although I was a stranger. Also the fledgling young can group on the floor and the parents will feed as needed; this I have observed at a friend's loft. That should give some idea of the Colour Pigeon Group.

SWISS BREEDS

All these 25 breeds are active flyers, and need access to good flights, especially the Lucerne's that tend to 'overweight!' Of these, the Lucerne Sub-Group, with its 'Owl' ancestry tend to be the most docile and can get very tame. They are also very steady nesting. All the breeds are good parents as all originally (except for the youngest breed) would have 'fielded' for part of their food. The oldest breed goes back well over 500 hundred years.



Left: Luzerne Copper Collar.

STRUCTURE PIGEONS

I only really have any experience of three of these Breeds.

Generally, due to the extra care needed with their feather ornamentation, they do tend to be more docile.

Schmalkalden Moorhead (right) (Mohrenkopf)

This was love at first sight, rapidly tame and confiding! They are not shy but can be easily 'bullied' so I do not advise keeping them in with very domineering breeds and certainly not with breeds that tend to aggression. The pair I have seem fine with my Lahores and Mookees and Siebenburgers, but the Arabian, despite their small size, they found a bit 'busy' and they avoid them! They will not push their way to food hoppers or drinkers either, so you do need to observe they get a chance to feed and drink if kept with even the docile breeds. This is especially important if you 'short feed'; if that is the case I would keep them as a breed on their own.

They DO need a good long flight though, as they are basic 'Field Pigeon' Shape with good wings. They also need 'pedestal' perches to protect their long muffs. With their muffs trimmed back for breeding they rear their own young with little problem.



Exhibition Fantails (right)

Many years ago, mine were tame and reared their own young with no problems (with the tail trimmed) but I have heard of breeders using 'fosters' nowadays? I am not sure why... They do need special perches; a 'board-walk' seems favourite!

Indian Fantails (right)

These birds certainly should be able to rear their own and the ones I have come across seem generally very tame and easy to handle. For all these breeds a DRY loft is a MUST and for the Fantails plenty of 'walking' space!



Frillbacks (left)

These can be docile if some time spent with them, from 'picking the brains' of friends with lifetime experience in this breed, they seem to brood and rear fine. (With a bit of feather trimmed around the vent to aid mating!) Like many heavily 'ornamental' and also the Heavy Breeds they do seem to like the floor, for nesting as well!

The 'Pure Bred' Crested Whites also seem to be different in temperament! They are apparently not good to mix in with other Breeds or even the other varieties of Frillback, as the males have a reputation of being very 'slow' in the process of actually mating! They are fertile enough but just like to take their time, so if mixed in with other varieties, the other cock birds always getting in there First!

If you see the Crests perform a 'normal' mating, I have been told it's 99% likely NOT to have worked!

TUMBLER BREEDS

Most 'flying' breeds, descended from performance flyers do tend to be easily trainable. The Viennese Tumblers I have handled do vary, the Hellstorks I had here definitely were quite steady, even when temporarily nesting in the holding pen. The Blues, although from the same Breeder, were definitely more shy.

The Budapests were also very alert.

Right: Budapest Tumblers in black en red magpie.





The Viennese White Shields were young birds but I would think it's a Breed that could become steady with a bit of effort; an interesting breed as the young are often 'solid' colour in the nest.

West of England (left)

No problem, docile, good parents, not a 'Muffed' Breed (at least not the English ones!) so no special preparation for nesting needed and easy to train if you are lucky enough to be able to fly them.



Birmingham Rollers (right)

A special 'flight' training and feeding regime is needed if you want them to perform at their best. They are also liable to 'roll-down' and actually hit the roof or ground! If they do this and survive, they would be best kept in a flight as useful breeding birds! Like all Breeds you need to 'balance' matings, so these are useful to pair to birds with good 'Spin' but a shallow 'Roll'. This breed gets very tame! Super

parents, and as they are generally a small bird, they are often used as 'fosters' for other small breeds that need feeders.



Mookee (left)

Mokees can get so tame they can be a pest! You have to watch where you tread as they don't get out the way and try and nest on you if you stand still too long and the babies when mobile like to sit on you! Also super parents; I have even had young Mokees from a previous nest help incubate and feed later nest of their parents when not separated from them!



Siebenburger Double Crested Tumbler (left)

What can I say? Docile but active, small, sweet, colourful, easy to breed (14 young from one pair!) Intelligent little birds that still 'Purzel' (Tumble).

I have had youngsters even attempt it in my flights! (7 feet and a bit high.) Not aggressive; I have 3 hens all sitting in the same nest at the moment!

I hope if this Breed become as popular in the West as in its Native Romania, it doesn't become a 'Victim of Fashion' loosing its flying abilities through crossing to 'improve'? crests etc. (which should NOT be large!)

Felegyhazer (right)

A compact, charming and docile breed; I found no problem with these at all. Interestingly birds that are otherwise excellent but without the colour marking on the forehead, can be very useful for breeding to control the size of the forehead marking.



Left below: The Vienna Short faced make a good job of rearing the young of their foster parents, in this case the Birmingham Rollers.



Old Austrian Tumbler (Kiebitz)

A small, very attractive and active breed but not shy. This breed is reputed to be one of the almost 'Hawk Proof' breeds when freeflying! Barely medium beak but good breeders and feeders. They now are fairly rare but a very old Breed; one of the ancestral Breeds of all the 'Viennese' Austro-Hungarian long and short faced Tumbler.



FORM PIGEONS

These can vary somewhat due to their divergent 'roots'!

The Coburger Lark is reminiscent of a large meaty Field Pigeon, whereas others come from the 'Homer' Breeds.

German Beauty Homer (right)

A '*Doof!*' (as we say in German), meaning NOT the most intelligent of breeds! But I have found them very affectionate to their owners, very docile, good, attentive if rather 'slow' parents (everything about a GBH is layed back!)

A lovely breed to have and especially good for getting young fanciers used to pigeons, as they actually seem to 'like' being handled! (The same goes for the Mookie!) I rarely have seen true aggression with this breed, even to other pairs youngsters that want to be fed.

Coburg Lark (right)

This is really a BIG Field Pigeon, still a strong flyer and active. They will steady but need time. Some strains I have noticed that



they can be aggressive while breeding (mainly the cock birds) but otherwise no problems. It is an old 'meat' breed.

Lahore (left)

Another Breed not noted for intelligence, but tame, docile and easy to manage. The only 'nesting' aggression I have seen is in young cockbirds and then rarely. A breed that seems to take a while actually sorting out where it's going to nest! Often



preferring the floor!

Very good parents, again young cocks for their first couple of nests may neglect the young at between 10 and 14 days old when they want to 'push' the hen to nest again. (Penning them in with the young and hen for 4 - 7 days generally solves this problem) Once this period is over they return to being attentive parents. When experienced they are really good, when needed taking young of any age and colour/markings and feeding them. This is another Breed where I have had two or more pairs share the same nesting place.

This is a breed where the young grow large quickly but without too much 'feather cover' so are liable to chilling if not covered adequately by the Parents in cold weather.

Damascene (right)

This breed is probably the most intelligent I have ever had!

They 'think'!

When free flying I have seen them look down, even from a considerable height, as if recognising the person on the ground. They can be trained for a very rapid decent, by using a corn tin or a 'flightless dropper' a bird that lives with them (they Must Recognise the bird). They do like their own nest Space, however small but the young will group on the floor and the adults will feed any young that need feeding. (You need to split colour ring the young for easy ID). They also get very tame, flying onto their owner when entering the Loft, regardless of whether arriving with food or having just been fed; with naturally 'tame' Breeds, food is not the prime incentive.



Cauchois (left)

I have found these to be docile and non-aggressive, even when mixed in with much smaller breeds. They fly well and being big, need a fair amount of space (and food!)

TRUMPETER

I only have personal experience of the Arabian Trumpeter.

Arabian (right)

This Breed is a danger when kept in with other breeds! It will 'cross' with anything, even Lahores!

It's mainly the fault of the cock birds! They are a 'busy' breed that generally can get very tame but can be 'bullies' at Nesting time, with lots of hen chasing! Older birds however do appear more docile and nest very close together, with little problem. Excellent and very fertile parents!



German Double Crested (left)

From speaking to friends, these are docile and generally good breeders, although like the Lahore, seem to prefer the floor and young slow to feather. Some feather trimming around the vent and off-course the muffs, needed to aid successful mating with the Double Crested.

The German Beak Crested.

(right a barred yellow pea)

This breed give less problem; the young feathering faster, later in warmer weather breeding easier. Muffs and vents do need trimming back.

With the Double-Crested the Beak-Crested may need some crest trimming, as vision should not be impaired with these breeds.



Bokhara (right)

The same goes for the Bokhara. Some pairs will successfully rear their own young but generally for this breed, feeders/fosters are used, but nice to let them at least attempt rearing when the weather has warmed-up!, Very heavily feathered so trimming is needed to aid successful mating, generally VERY docile to the point of stupidity!



CERE (WATTLE) PIGEONS

Dragoons, Carriers, Nuremberg Bagadettes (Scandaroons)



Scandaroons (left) Dragon (right below)

Starting with the Scandaroons, the ones I looked after here in Germany were docile with me, not aggressive with other breeds



given space, but were amongst themselves to a certain degree. Certainly they 'brooded' on 'dummy' eggs very competently, not moving from the nest and appearing very stable, according to

an English friend, a breeder there who virtually 'lives' with his Scan's even during the breeding season. But reports from America, and one from Arabia, give a very different picture of exceptionally shy nesting birds? I think this is one where the birds/breed act according to the owners expectations! Shy parents WILL make shy, nervous youngsters which in turn will demand seclusion when nesting. But obviously this circle of behaviour CAN be broken though, as proven by the English breeder and the birds I had here!



Carriers and Dragons (left)

These are not Breeds I have much personal experience of. The Dragons I had here appeared docile, Carriers not so, both seeming to need fosters, although all should be allowed to attempt to rear there own (or the fosters' babies!) where possible.

CROPPERS (POUTERS)

Most of these breeds I have come across seem basically docile. The ones with less 'extravagant' crops should be able to rear their own young without to many problems. All birds can get 'sour crop' where food gets 'stuck' in the crop and ferments, and need immediate treatment, but Croppers do seem to be more prone to this; some breeds and some birds, more than others, also due to usually fairly sparse feather cover on the breast area and narrow bodies, (not a problem with Hessian and Czech Croppers!) If you want early young in a cold climate, then fosters will be needed. In fact with all the breeds other than the

ones with 'modest' crops, the 'back-up' of another suitable breed (possibly another 'Show' breed) that can act as feeders is not a bad idea.

For exhibition, Croppers do better with some 'pen training' to get them to 'perform' to the Judge and passers-by; this hold good for the true 'Voice' breeds as well, being the Arabian, Franconian, Altenburger, Beak Crested and German Forktail Trumpeter.



Right: Norwich Cropper, red barred pied.

OWLS

All the Owl breeds tend to 'tameness' it's a family trait! All have a reversed feather structure ('jabot') on the chest. (This is not always essential with a good 'breeding' bird.) Many need fosters due to short beaks, but even these when given the opportunity (and they always should!) can make a good job of rearing the fosters' young, from egg to weaning; a good case for using a dual purpose 'exhibition/feeder' breed.



Left: Oriental Frill, Blondinet

The main requisite for a foster is sitting tight and ideally having a broad beak base, although many birds from the Colour Pigeon Group have proven ideal. Some like the tiny **Figurita (Valencian Frill)** and the **Italian Owl** are excellent flyers if you can freefly. These barely medium beaked breeds are also excellent parents.



Right: Figurita Valencian Frill.
Photo: A.N.C. van Benten

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