

Keeping Fancy Pigeons



By: Mick Bassett

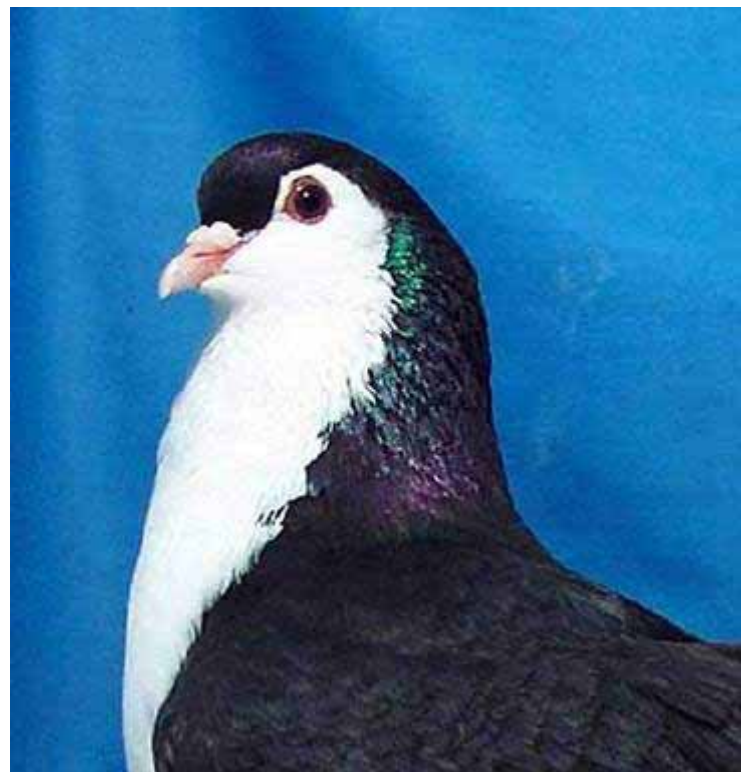
PART 7 (Last Part) - Inbreeding

These notes are written from my own breeding observations and from various sources.



Brother x Sister,
Father x Daughter,
Mother x Son,
Uncle x Niece,
Aunt x Nephew and 'Cousins'; all these
would be considered 'Close' in-breeding.

Left: Lahore, lavender.



Right: Lahore, black.



Left: Franconian magpie (Heart Pied) black.

I had one 'Family' all descended from 3 pairs of birds, Almond Oriental Rollers (and these birds were probably, closely related anyway!), that had no outside blood-line introduced for over 20 years. During that time I had no substantial reduction in fertility or vigour BUT the pigeons were selected only for flying, fertility and health, not for exhibition, although I do believe their 'type' was not so far removed from the breed as I see it in Germany today. During that time I had NO illness in the birds, but on the other hand they had no contact with pigeons from any other source except for the odd 'stray' that was quickly separated.

Right: Frillback (plain-head), white.

From talking to learned friends here and what I have read, generally 7 generations seems to normally be the optimum with that sort of close inbreeding and I would be willing to concur with that, if you also have to select for show properties as well in form and colour, and with some breeds difficulties could crop-up much sooner. Basically with 'in-breeding' you will only get OUT, what is already IN there! So if you know you are going to have a limited 'Gene-Pool' for whatever reason, then the 'breeding' of the birds you initially acquire is of the utmost importance; far more important than getting diverse 'unrelated' blood-lines, that anyway may not even 'compliment' one another in the slightest degree when actually bred together, and is much more difficult to control the health, fertility and 'type' produced. The wider the mix, the greater the variability of what is produced.



Left: Frillback Crested, white.

The 'Base' you build in that first 3 years, will be what you have to work with for the lifetime of the 'Family' and hopefully strong enough to absorb and make good of any 'outcross' that is *Carefully* introduced. I highlight the 'Careful' bit; one bird is often enough for this project and is much easier to control.

If you get a pair of 'outcross' birds, then I would breed them together the first season, as many young as possible, to see what they produce BEFORE introducing them to 'Your' Family.

Right: Danish Suabian, plain head.





Left: Nuremberg Swallow, black. Showing the desired 'Mucke' or 'Tear –Drop' mark by the eye.

Any early bred young males can be then put to an older hen (the best you have available) of your own breeding in the first year. (I have done that with my Arabians now, in June, just time for two nests before Winter in this climate!)



Right: Nuremberg Swallow, blue.

With any 'New' project, I would hesitate to call the birds 'My Own' until at least the third generation! The first generation produced (Unless you have intimate knowledge of the bloodlines!) is calculated 'Luck'! The Second is your judgement on pairing what is produced, it's not until the 3rd generation bred that what YOU have selected knowing the 3 generations, comes into play! (With some 'Marked' breeds i.e. Lahore, I would extend this to 7 generations, or more! They can give some horrible surprises! And some nice ones!) The credit (or not) for what is bred in the first two Generations is really going to the breeder of the original birds.



Left: Starling, Monk Marked, black.

Again, Lahore and some of the other 'Marked' Breeds are a bit of an exception regarding markings. With that Breed/Breeds, you get good years, bad years and Awful Years, regarding what is produced in the Markings! Basically I have found as a general rule: the more you breed together pigeons with near perfect markings, the lower the percentage of 'Show' offspring you will get! That 'One Generation' may work, but believe me, it will 'Re-bound' again! Talking to Top Breeders here of Caucasian, Rostover Posture Tumblers and Königsburger Colourheads (and German Beauty Homers) who want Pies and Tigers (Remember here, Tigers MUST

have solid colour flights and tails in almost every Breed Standard) the 'normal' mating for these two Breeds is a Self, almost Self or Pied Bird to a White (bred from 'correct' coloured birds off-course.) This is from Breeders with more than a lifetime of experience in these Breeds. The lesson there is: as long as the type and health is there, nothing is 'wasted' in the breeding program.

Right: South German Coal Lark, showing wonderful Breast Sheen.

It stands to reason that, the more young bred from a pair for selection, the better choice you will have; that is regardless of how good, or how good you 'think' your birds are!



Left: Field Colour Pigeon, pale blue.

We have all often seen the phrase "Quality not Quantity". Now that is fine if it refers to the pigeons actually 'left' at the end of a breeding season, but NOT if it indicates the 'number' of young produced!

Any decent pigeon pair should be capable of producing 8 young per year from which to select from. This should be looked on as a minimum, especially when 'Building a Strain'. With some Breeds that should rise to 10 or 12 per pair.

For breeds that NEED Fosters/Feeders (The 'Short-Beak' Breeds) it is then dependant on the number of eggs laid and fosters available,

taking into consideration the egg-laying of the hens, who do need a rest! And it's also nice to allowed them to at least try and rear a nest or two of Long-Beak youngsters; some get very good at it!

Right: Romagnol, ash red.

Apart from the Calcium depletion of the hens, it is the 'rearing' that really exhausts the parents, but any good, fit and well looked after pigeons should easily give the above figures.

I personally have had pairs rear 12 and 14 young in a February to August season, that certainly did not look 'the worse for wear' at the end of it; in-fact I am sure they would have tried for more if let to their own devices! And before anyone say it, the next





year they would have done the same, but as I already had enough quality young from them I split or limited the numbers, they had 'proven' themselves, if you like.

Once you have achieved a good, stabile 'Family Line' then it would be possible to breed less, say 4 to 6 young per pair and still be able to select enough from 5 or 6 pairs to:

- a) maintain and improve the Breed
- b) have a decent selection to exhibit or fly

Less than that, there is absolutely no-way a 'Family' can even be maintained within a Breed from year to year without constantly diluting and if you like, 'polluting' the Mixture.

**Left: German Modena (Modeneser).
Gazzi bronze-blue chequered.**

Right: Franconian Velvet Shield (Mealy Chequer a rare colour).



Left: Franconian Velvet Shield, red.



Without at least initially, this type of 'expansive' breeding, you will never know how your birds can perform in either fertility, vigour or type. Also with rearing only 'a couple of nests' per pair per year, it could be several years before 'nasties' crop-up, or even that Top

Bird! Probably after you have already passed on the birds and/or youngsters to other Breeders! So you are not really giving the birds, or their Breeder, a fair chance at proving their worth, therefore you really 'owe it' to yourself AND more importantly, the Breed, to find out what your birds can do, given good care and sensible selection.



Left: Nuremberg Lark chequered.



Right: Mookee, Lavender (one of mine!).



Left: Bernhardin Magpie, pale blue chequer.



Right: Bernhardin Magpie, pale blue.



Left: Krasnodar Tumblers.

That is the 'responsibility' we owe to the Breeds and to the Past Breeders of the many wonderful Types of Fancy and Flying Pigeons available to use today; the Best of the European Breeders I know take that responsibility very seriously.

Below right: Runt, white.



Above left: Runt, lavender grizzle.



Right: Franconian Field Pigeon, red. This breed is especially noted for its depth of colour and sheen.

But wait a minute! Maybe you just like having Pigeons around, want several breeds and colours and don't want to take on the responsibility of breeding, selection, finding owners (not always easy).





Left: Montauban, red pied.

On that point, also anyone who can 'Make Money' by breeding 'Quality' pigeons I would definitely give a wide berth!

If they are making money it is probably by selling sub-standard ones often to unsuspecting 'New-comers'! I think we have all been on the receiving end of that one!

The ever adaptable pigeon can easily fill the gap of the person who just wants the company of Pigeons. A mixed flock composed of one sex (with males you have no eggs problems!) is the perfect solution. Pigeons can live to 20 years or more, with a good average span of 7 to 9, so such a flock will give years of pleasure, without either the stringent control or selection needed to maintain, protect and further the Breeds.

Right: Hungarian Giant, red pied.





Left: Romagnol, blue barred.

Although?

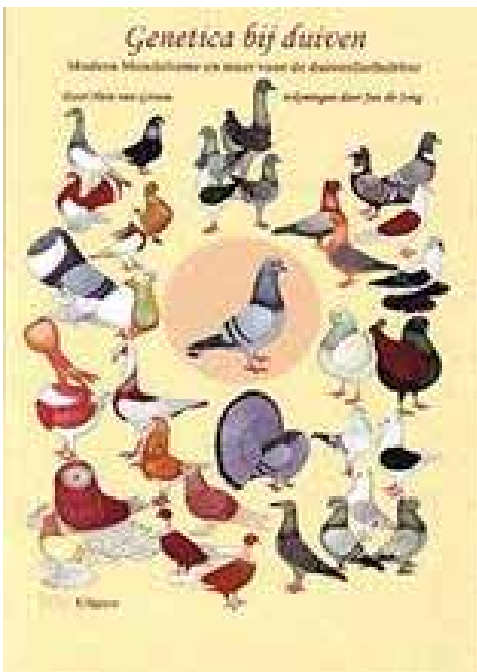
If those pigeons are also really 'good' specimens and as 'Pets' can be very tame, they can be used for Public Displays, School visits, or kept in the actual School, with perhaps just the one pair used for 'educational studies'.

As yet another alternative: Stable male 'pairs' can, if given fertile eggs, often make excellent foster parents! Hens are naturally, more reliant on the egg-laying cycle.

So IF the birds are good 'Typical' Breed quality and in good condition, a superb advert for the Pigeon Hobby.

This is the last part of my series on 'Keeping Fancy Pigeons'. If you have any questions concerning your pigeons, you can contact me at pigeonbuff@yahoo.co.uk or visit the pigeon forum at http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/Pigeon_Bratt/

Right: Dresden Trumpeters.



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Soon to be published! A very detailed and richly illustrated book on Pigeon Genetics. Read all about it in Various.