

Fancy that happening! You have to stop the hobby due to an allergy . . .

Text and photos: Nico van Bente

In this article I restrict myself to the pigeon fancier who just heard from his doctor (and probably also advised by a specialist) that he has to stop keeping pigeons or even getting close to pigeons. In my case this prohibition was issued after 50 years of keeping pigeons and of course this was a great disappointment, although I knew - or at least had my suspicions already for quite a while.

In my case I had been noticing alarming symptoms for some ten years, such as less stamina, a productive cough in the morning, often cold sweats in the night, having a fever, but in the morning that feeling was gone.

During the years I started to reduce direct contact with the pigeons by adjusting the conditions in such a way that I was less affected. I did this by:

- an 'open front' loft construction, giving optimum ventilation
- always wearing a medically-approved mask when cleaning the loft
- washing hands and changing the clothing after working in the loft
- stop being a pigeon judge

Finally all these measurements turned out not to be effective - mind you, this will be different for each of you - but in my case I decided to stop completely keeping pigeons. The effect of this decision however goes much deeper than I had ever expected, because I also lost my social circuit. I used to do a lot of judging in France and Spain, but these contacts are now lost. Comparable to someone who collects stamps: the moment you sell your stamp albums and stop collecting, few will call on you to discuss stamps, no matter if you are still a member of the local stamp collectors club.

Looking back I think I should have consulted my doctor earlier. However, because these symptoms occur to many pigeon keepers, you seem to rather discuss it between pigeon keepers instead of with your doctor, and from then on an acceptance of the symptoms as part of your life.



Right:

A barn full of dust and cobweb. At the beginning of the 20th century, when the Dutch pigeon specialist Henk Moezelaar was searching for the original 'farmer's owls', he found the birds in barns like this, where they could freely fly in and out. The many wing clapping prevented the appearance of the cobwebs full of dust.

<http://bartenmiekeshoeve.blogspot.com/2009/12/planet-of-pigeons.html>

Literature

Today much information on the Pigeon Fanciers Lung can be found on the internet, for instance on <http://www.pigeon-lung.co.uk/articles.html> – the official resource for this health problem, with Reviews and articles by BPFMR (British Pigeon Fanciers Medical Research). Also many 'Pigeon keeping' handbooks have a chapter dedicated to the subject. In Belgium a very interesting series of articles on the subject was published in the eighties in the Belgian magazine for Racing Pigeons 'Duifke Lacht' written by Prof. Dr. G. Wagenaar and Drs. W.E. Bernadina.

Many pigeon fanciers share their experiences with Pigeon Lung on the internet, the most of them unfortunately had to conclude that they had to give up pigeons. Easy to say, very hard to do. Others have good results by wearing a mask and building a dust free loft.

In the following we provide you with some essential information on the disease:

What is Pigeon Fanciers Lung?

The Pigeon Fanciers Lung is a disease that Pigeon keepers may develop due to an allergic reaction of the lung tissue to the pigeon dust. It is not an occupational, but a hobby disease. The early stages of the disease is usually characterized by severe fever, which occur about 6 to 8 hours after a stay in a loft. Usually the disease develops around the age of forty and an estimated 7% of the population is sensitive to it.

Left: The well-known Modena breeder, M.C.M. Sebregts from Wouw, the Netherlands, has been using a full face dust mask since many years. In the photo he is showing how much dust is collected in the filter, after visiting the loft. He also changes clothes and shoes, in order to prevent as much as possible, the dispersal of the dust.

The main instigator of this allergy is the Proteins released from dry Pigeon droppings and also during the Breeding Season the Proteins in the Pigeons Crop Milk, The problem is the allergy can be aggravated by only a very tiny amount of these Proteins in the Dust, so even brief contact may provoke severe reactions. Each individuals body is capable of building a resistance to these invading foreign Proteins by the production of Antibodies, this can be inherited but is also very individual, even members of the same Family will react differently to the same allergy causing substances. Antibodies can identify and usually neutralise foreign 'invaders' in a person's Body, be it an infection, or an allergy producing substance, this is part of the Bodies complex Immune System. Once the Body has produced Antibodies they may survive months or even years within the immune system, also Anti genes, produced in the Lymph Glands and stimulated by the Antibodies and bind to then and enhance the immune system. The antibodies that survive in the Body are able to remember and 'call-up' these Anti Genes whenever a new challenge is perceived to the Body, so the Body has a faster response to future challenges and move quickly to remove the infection or invading Proteins. Depending on the Persons individual immunity level, length of time exposed to the Hobby and the intensity of the Challenge by these Proteins, a



Fancier may, or may not show varying degrees of symptoms but should certainly have these Antibodies within his/her body.

The Pigeon Fanciers Lung is essentially a hypersensitivity against the serum proteins of the pigeon. Serum Proteins are proteins that occur in the blood fluid. Along with the Anti Genes (most often a protein but not always) which are part of the Antibody, (sometimes called Immunoglobulin, as part of the Blood Serum) plays an important role in fighting off symptoms of Disease. These antibodies once formed, will usually assist most fanciers by removing the incoming pigeons proteins.

However some fanciers become victims of these antibodies, the Antigene, the Protein in this case, binds with the Pigeon Dust Protein instead of destroying it and as a result causes congestion in the tiny blood vessels within the Lugs. As a result of the above mentioned allergic reaction they develop the symptoms known as Pigeon Fanciers Lung.

Symptoms of the Pigeon Fanciers Lung

Initially there are acute attacks, usually appearing four to six hours after loft dust is inhaled, including bouts of influenza-like signs such as chills, shaking, fever, very difficult breathing, cough. Later followed by a sub acute form with unrelenting signs of lower respiratory symptoms that resemble bronchitis, with persistent cough and mucus production. Often there is also a decrease in muscle mass. When no measures are taken - medication, or avoiding pigeon contact - and exposure is continuous and prolonged, a chronic form of the disease develops, and is characterized by progressive respiratory failure, difficult breathing and a decrease in the total respiratory capacity of the lungs. This chronic bronchitis - today referred to as COPD - is rarely reversible and usually gets progressively worse over time, with also a risk of developing pulmonary heart disease - a strain on the heart due to the extra work required by the heart to pump blood through the affected lungs, which is not always discerned until very late, often too late.

Once in the waiting room of the Lunge Specialist, it may not be easy to switch to the Heart Specialist and vice-versa.

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The complete series of 3M™ Maintenance Free Particulate Respirators is available at

Firma KOUDIJS <http://www.koudijskleindiersport.nl/>

3M™ Maintenance Free Particulate Respirators (commonly known as disposable 'dust masks') helps reduce exposures to certain airborne particulates. The mask in the right, with the red straps and FFP3 classification, helps reduce bacteria and mould, thus ideal for the pigeon fancier.



3M™ 8310 (FFP1 NR D)
Stofmasker



3M™ 8320 (FFP2 NR D)
Stofmasker



3M™ 8312 (FFP1 NR D)
Stofmasker
met uitademventiel



3M™ 8322 (FFP2 NR D)
Stofmasker
met uitademventiel



3M™ 8833 (FFP3 R D)
Stofmasker
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3M offers you the widest range of powered-air and supplied-air respirators for the widest range of industrial applications, with unequalled pedigree, gained in the toughest conditions. This range offers all the comfort of refreshing, moving air and possibilities of integrating your protection. A large part of the range is now available to you in an easy-to-choose modular format to fit your requirements: Headtops, airflow regulators and motorunits.

3M™ Powered & Supplied-Air Headtops

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the extra comfort of temperature heater vastly combination welding fumes.

Various helmets with most comfortable and effective airflow, blowing filtered air in via the back side to the face and below. Because of the only slightly 'over pressure' the breathing is as easy as can be. This airflow system is the most optimal and less hindering.



3M Airstream AH4, AH4-A

Lightweight, durable powered helmet with all the benefits of the AH1, but with a higher level of respiratory protection.



3M Airstream AH1

The original powered helmet for heavy duty industrial applications such as saw mills, quarries and civil engineering.

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Ideal for extreme temperatures.



http://solutions.3m.co.uk/wps/portal/3M/en_GB/OccSafety/Home/Products/Respiratory_Protection/

Preventive

Drs W.E. Bernadina, mentioned Belgian

measurements

author of the article in the before magazine 'Duifke Lacht', turned out

to be allergic for the pigeon dust since many years, and had set himself the following measurements; quote:

1. I was always wearing the known paper dust masks.
2. I only cleaned the loft when the birds were flying out.
3. Before cleaning and before feeding, I always moistened the floor with a plant damper, this reduces the spreading of the dust.
4. During cleaning I kept the windows open as wide as possible.

(Note from the editor. Other preventive measures are: after working in the loft, change your clothing and shoes before you go inside the house. Also recommended to wash your hands and face, which all helps to prevent or at least reduce contact with the pigeon dust.)

Drs. W.E. Bernadina continued: "Live up to these principles certainly had some results, but it was not enough. I continued coughing and I feared it would be worse when the winter came. Thus I kept searching for a better kind of dust mask.


Finally, after weighing the pros and cons and after a good talk with the importer, I decided to choose a dust helmet. Ever since I wear it daily with good result. For those who are not familiar with such helmets: You put it on and close the visor. Thus your whole head is covered and protected by the comfortably fitting helmet".

Right: Also My-T-Gear – see their internet site for dealers list – advises the Dusk mask in the class FFP3. As shown in the scheme, this offers protection against mould, bacteria and viruses. I suppose it is clear that any given dust mask, purchased by a local DIY-shop, probably will not offer the needed protection.
<http://www.mytgear.nl/EN/Home>



Right: Product description:

3M AH1 Airstream Powered Helmet with 8 hour rechargeable battery and filter. For use in heavy duty industrial applications. Comfortable unit for head protection (EN397), eye & face protection (EN166

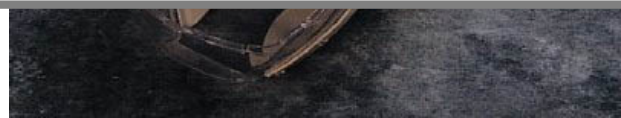


Respiratory protection

The following is recommended:

Working with:	FFP1 Mask 201	FFP2 Mask 212	FFP3 Mask 213
Asbestos (use independent respiratory protection)			
Bacteria ***		✓	✓
Concrete dust		✓	
Beech wood			✓
Cement	✓		
Animal feed (dry)		✓	
Oak wood			✓
Plaster	✓		
Fibreglass			✓
Grain		✓	
Timber ***		✓	✓
Iron (filings, dust)	✓		
Coolant mist		✓	
Quartz dust			✓
Welding smoke (use supplementary protection) 3			✓
Metal dust ***		✓	✓
Mineral fibre			✓
Stucco ***	✓	✓	
Degreaser		✓	
Water-based pesticides ***		✓	✓
Filler	✓		
Rust ***	✓	✓	
Mould/mildew ***		✓	✓
Lubricating oil mist		✓	
Steel (filings, dust) ***	✓	✓	
Paint powder (powder coating)		✓	
Viruses			✓
Waste			✓

** These tables are for information and incomplete. No entitlement can be derived from these tables.
 *** Dependent upon types and concentrations



2B39) and respiratory protection (EN146 TH1P). Battery chargers sold separately.

Category: [Powered Helmets](#),
Product Code: **G-100-60-04P**
£330.30 ex VAT



RPA - The Fit Testing Specialists
Tel: 0117 983 7867 Fax: 0117 985 9324
RPA are official TSI Distributors and
Portacount Training Partners for the UK

Through a fan, air is drawn from the back through a coarse filter and subsequently blown into the helmet through a fine filter. 5 liter filtered air per second is blown along the face and downwards. In this way, only filtered

air can be inhaled. The voltage for the ventilator is supplied by a rechargeable battery. The manufacturer guarantees that particles larger than 0.5 μ m are blocked by the filters (1 μ m is 0.001 mm). Regarding the filter capacity it has to be noted that protein molecules are so small that they could pass the filter. The fundamental question at stake was whether the manure particles containing proteins would be stopped. It appeared likely and was also confirmed by means of a number of laboratory tests. For those fanciers where it may be beneficial to wear a helmet (and there are many), it is again important that the helmet is actually worn in any possible contact with pigeon dust, i.e. not only in their own loft, but also when the pigeons go in the basket or when visiting an exhibition. Strangely enough you don't see this in Holland or Belgium, but at the British Pigeon Shows, more than half of the judges wear such a helmet during the judging.

The great advantage of such a helmet is that the filtered air passes freely along the face and it takes no extra effort to breathe. This in contrast to the use of a dust mask, which in fact is only for single use which will get moist by breathing out, another limiting factor.

A Helmet user did call me with one disadvantage of such a helmet in the winter, that is, the very cold air that was flowing over his head. He therefore used a proper dust mask during the winter time.

In Conclusion

Today Pigeon Fanciers Lung is one of the diseases of the lungs diagnosed as COPD which is short for 'Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease'. In fact it is a chronic bronchitis with inflammatory response in the larger airways, causing shortness of breath and regularly coughing up sputum. Finally the inflammatory response causes destruction of the tissues of the lung, which decreases the capacity of the lungs to exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide during breathing; a process known as emphysema. Medically speaking, there is currently no cure for COPD.

The most common cause is Cigarette smoking and the long term inhalation of very fine powders, Asbestos is the most notorious one of these. Risk factor reduction, thus by stopping smoking or by avoiding ongoing dust exposure, can reduce the symptoms. Treatment usually includes the use of corticosteroids by mouth to decrease the intense inflammatory reaction. Several researchers pointed out that a neglected Pigeon Fanciers Lung can also lead to heart failure. Other research showed that 40% of the people diagnosed lung disease, also had a heart disease, which was not initially been discovered. Fortunately there is only a relatively small percentage of actual cases of PFL among those of us who are so commonly exposed to dust from pigeons on a daily basis. Nevertheless it is a good idea for everyone with pigeons to be reasonably cautious about the exposure to dust in lofts.

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