

The Gelderse Slenke with Pieter Jansma in Nijmegen



**Text and photos:
Aviculture Europe and Pieter Jansma**

Picturesque and very, very Dutch. On Thursday June 24th 2010, the first warm summer day of the year, the editors of Aviculture Europe were guests of Pieter Jansma's in the ancient city centre of Nijmegen. On his balcony, the topmost storey of the building, we viewed the cafe terraces on the square below, where World Cup Soccer could be watched on a big screen. The square was beginning to fill with "Orange" fans for the Soccer game; Cameroun in the Netherlands of the FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

The known Silezian Cropper breeder, Jan Bosch, was also present. It was shady and pleasantly warm on the balcony. The lofts with Gelderse Slenke were around us; an ancient breed, newly recognized and gaining more and more interest by a new generation of enthusiastic breeders.

And no place could be more appropriate: the historical skyline of the city of Emperor Charlemagne was the ideal décor for our interview with this young Gelderse Slenke breeder.

**Right:
Gelderse slenken in
various colours, ready
to start flying.
Photo: Pieter Jansma.**



Who is Pieter Jansma?

As his name indicates, he was born in Friesland. His father was a cattle rancher, so he grew up amongst the cows, Friesian horses and Texel sheep. When he was 6 years old he already possessed his first pigeons; they were 10 homing pigeons, which were a present from a family friend residing in Putten. His father was not really a pigeon man, but he was sympathetic enough to allow the garage to be the loft even though the car was parked outside. Only 3 birds remained after their first free fly and the others returned to Putten.

After the homing pigeon adventure he became more interested in fancy pigeons. A friend built him a dove cote, which was soon inhabited by all sorts of breeds. Some of which were Jacobins, Tumblers, Owls and Fantails. Some disappeared, but the Jacobins and Fantails stayed. Apart from the pigeons, Pieter also kept chickens. His beautiful Lakenfelders were real eye catchers on the farm.



Left:
Pieter Jansma in front of one of his Slenke lofts. Photo: Jan Bosch.

When he was twenty years old he went to college and the life on the farm was exchanged for a student's life in the big city. This meant the end of the hobby, but not for a long time. Soon enough a part of his student's room was refitted as an aviary where he kept and bred Diamond doves, Green-winged doves and Tambourine doves.

After his studies he had to give up keeping the doves due to too many activities out of doors. In 2007 he changed his job and residence and having pigeons was again an option. At the top most balcony of his apartment in Nijmegen city centre soon his first loft was built. It was attached to a wall and soon housed two pairs of Hyacinth pigeons.

Partiality to Flying Pigeons

Although the Hyacinth pigeons were very attractive, his interest grew more and more towards the Flying Pigeon breeds. What could be more beautiful than watching the performing birds from his balcony, flying over the city centre, the Waal river and the Tower of the St. Stephen's Church? His search brought him to the Gelderse Slenke breed. It

could not be better. It is a flying pigeon which was mainly kept and bred in Nijmegen and Arnhem. For a long time it was presumed to be extinct. Old time authors such as Van Gink and Spruijt (1930) stated in their books that the Gelderse Slenke was very rare and probably extinct. 50 years later Clason (1980) wrote in his book *Zeldzame huisdierrassen* (The Rare breeds of Livestock): *"The Gelderse Slenke are already extinct."* However, at the turn of the century a few breeders of this unique breed were traced! Thanks to good PR of the Gelderland Trust (*an independent organization, carrying out preservation and management work to save many natural and cultural gems in the province of Gelderland*) the breed was prominently put in the spotlight.

Pieter contacted the Gelderland Trust and soon the first pairs could be purchased through Johan Ruys, who is the manager of Doorwerth castle and breeder of the Gelderse Slenk on behalf of the Gelderland Trust. Soon a lack of enough space problem arose. However, the concept of a new loft had already started to form in Pieters mind and shortly after the Slenkes could be housed in their new loft.

Right: A red cock bird with a perfect 'bib' marking, preparing to land. Photo: Jan Bosch.





Above: Young Gelderse Slenke skimming along the St. Stephen's Church. Young birds don't raise their head high enough. Photo: Jan Bosch.

From that moment the Gelderse Slenke were flying the sky of the ancient city centre with loud wing clapping, exactly as they had been doing in the old times. This definitely settled his love for the Gelderse Slenke. Still he had many questions about the breed.

Historical knowledge was only sparsely available. A few known writers of pigeon books mention the breed, but no substantial breed description was available. Pieter wanted to



make up for this deficiency and started an extensive historical search on the Gelderse Slenke. City archives and private libraries were visited. Old newspapers and many pigeon magazines and books were dug out. Pieter contacted pigeon specialists from Holland and abroad as were (grand)children of breeders of the Slenke pigeon were traced and interviewed.

It was not easy, but the results present a fairly accurate and complete view of this rare, ancient pigeon breed from Gelderland.

The Gelderse Slenk

When writing the Standard of the Gelderse Slenk the Flying Type was used as a basic description. According the historical data the bird is described as follows: A medium size bird (somewhat larger than the Field Pigeon), the breast carried high, head back, with sometimes tremulous head and neck

movement. It is an elegant pigeon with a proud stance. The tail is carried in a straight line sloping from the back. The legs are of medium length without feathering. The skull is somewhat flat. The small eye pupil is surrounded by a light coloured circle which is flowing out to orange-red. The beak is of medium length.

The breed is bred principally in red and yellow, with or without bars and grizzle and speckle marking. It is listed in the following nine colour varieties:

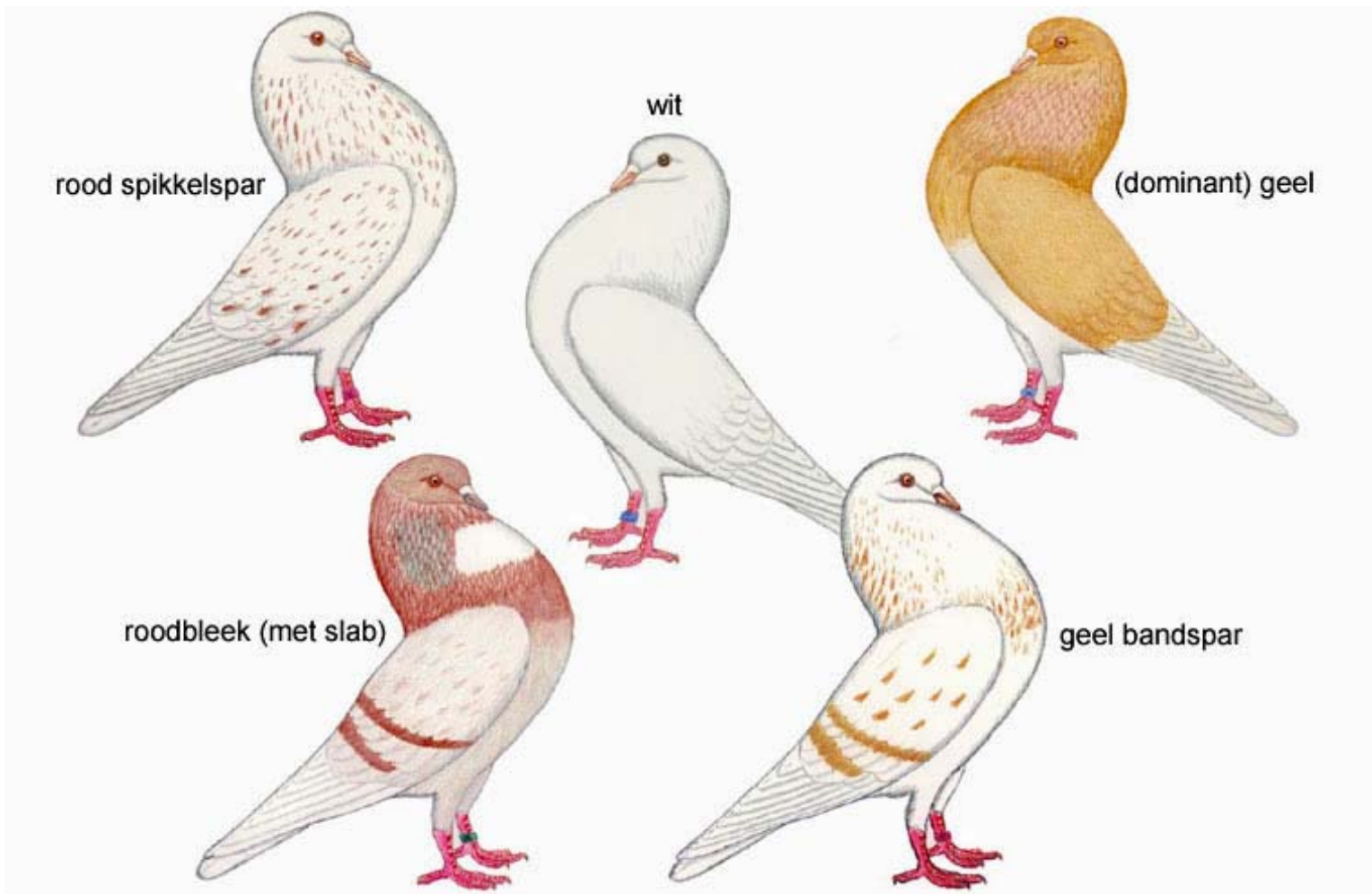
- White: Self white.
- (Dominant) Red: Head, neck, wing shields and shoulders red; towards the chest the colour is paler.
- (Dominant) Yellow: Head, neck, wing shields and shoulders yellow; towards the chest the colour is paler.
- Ash red barred: (In Dutch: *Roodbleek*). Head and neck red; 2 red wing bars. The wing shields are pale with some rose nuances.
- Ash yellow barred: (In Dutch: *Geelbleek*). Head and neck yellow; 2 yellow wing bars. The wing shields are pale with some crème nuances.
- Ash red grizzle: (In Dutch: *Rood bandspar*). Mainly white with some red feathers in breast, neck and wing shields.
Two pale red wing bars.
- Ash yellow grizzle: (In Dutch: *Geel bandspar*). Mainly white with some yellow feathers in breast, neck and wing shields.
Two pale yellow wing bars.

Below right: Old ash red grizzle cock with a very good marking and a nice rounded chest. The neck should bend more smoothly. Photo: Pieter Jansma.

- Ash red speckle: (In Dutch: *Rood spikkelspar*).
White with some or many red feathers in breast, neck and wing shields.
No wing bars.
- Ash yellow speckle: (In Dutch: *Geel spikkelspar*).
White with some or many yellow feathers in breast, neck and wing shields.
No wing bars.

Of course the true Slenke breeder knows that Form, Colour and Markings should not be the primary aim in breeding. The old inherited special Flying Feature come first and must be preserved by correct selective Breeding.





Drawing of Gelderse Slenke in their typical colours and markings: ash red speckle (*rood spikkelspar*), white (*wit*), dominant yellow (*geel*), ash red barred, (*roodbleek*) with bib and ash yellow grizzle (*geel bandspar*). Drawing by J. de Jong in 2009.

Below, left: Young red Gelderse Slenke with excellent type and very smooth neck-chest outline. Photo: Nico van Benten.

Below, right: Young ash yellow hen with very good grizzle marking. Photo Pieter Jansma.



Left: 'Swimming' Gelderse Slenke with the desired wide tail..

Photo: Jan Bosch.

Below, right: 'Swimming' Gelderse Slenke with perfect tail and raised head. Photo: Jan Bosch



Courting

The typical Courting behaviour for this Breed is for the cock bird to approach the hen bird coo-ing and on tip toes, the head thrown back beyond the vertical line of the legs in an exaggerated 'S' shape, crop well inflated, wings dropped, tail well spread and dragging on the ground. The Approach is performed in a series of jumps or leaps in the air. The hen may show similar but less exaggerated behaviour to the cock bird.

Below: Seen from below: A flying Slenke with the desired wide and hollow tail carriage.

Photo: Jan Bosch.

Performance in the Air

When we arrived, we went up the staircase up to the balcony on the roof of Peter's apartment, where he has his Pigeon Loft.

The birds are kept in the loft and they are released every day in the afternoon for exercise and to keep them well trained. Before Peter opened the loft hatch he gave a brief description of the Flight of the Slenke Breed.

The Flight display consists of three parts:



- The Launch: rising rapidly into the Air with a few strong Wing beats
- The Swimming: Flying with a powerful Rocking motion and then rising suddenly
- The Sailing: to Float or Descent with raised wings

Right: Young Gelderse Slenke with fine stance and good neck.

Photo: Pieter Jansma.

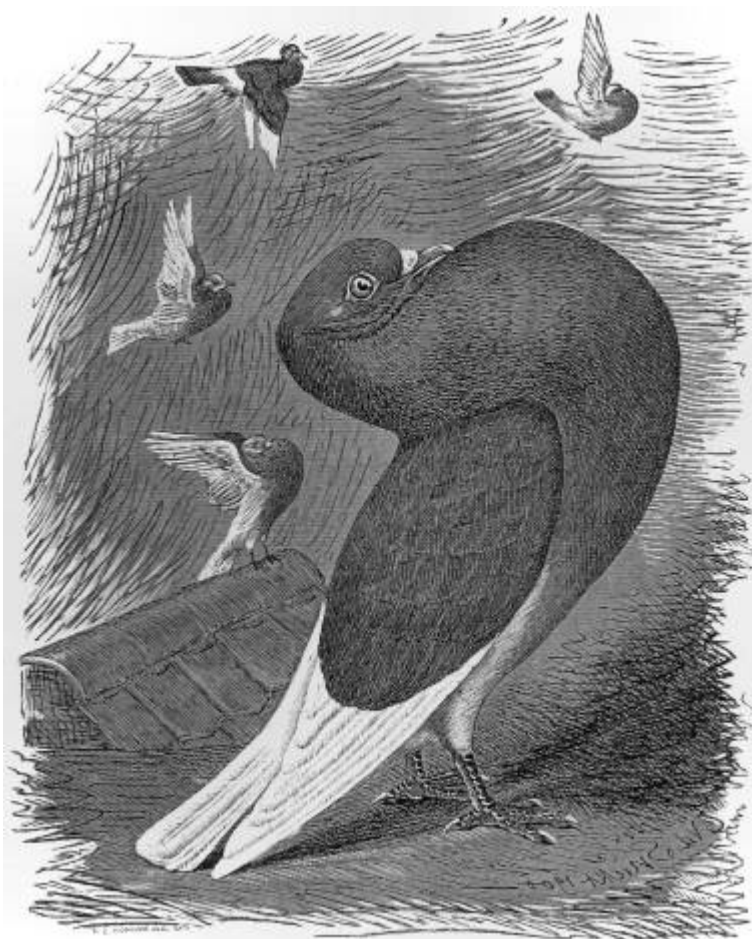


During the Flight the wings are beaten together producing a series of loud claps, tail and wings form a hollow fan shape. The steeper the

Rise, with minimal Wing Beats, the better. When sufficient height is reached the bird performs a powerful forward swimming motion. After each 10-15 meters of forward flight, the bird rises rapidly and vertically about 1 meter, the Wings are held high and together and spread in a fan shape, the head held horizontal, the tail is held spread like a hollow fan, the body takes the form of an ancient Roman Ship. For a few seconds the wings from the front, take on a 'V' shape and the bird rocks and floats in the air while descending; this action may be repeated. The steeper the rise and the longer 'swimming' and rocking motion with the correct head position, the fanned tail, 'the V' shape of the wings and rocking motion, the more value the Bird has in flight.

Below, left: As far as we know this is the oldest drawing of a Slenke. From this type of pigeon, two separate breeding lines were developed: The Groninger Slenke and the Gelderse Slenke.

In the background you can see the typical flying performance. Drawing by L. vander Snickt, in: 'Chasse et Pêche' (14 January 1900).



The motivation for writing a standard

Why should we want a Standard for a Flying Pigeon? As we learned in the past, the flying capacities of pigeon breeds were often lost because of breeding and selecting of Standard demands. Just think of the Holle Cropper, the Old Dutch Tumbler or the Dutch High Flyer. Pieter states that this happened to these breeds, mainly due to the immediate presentation of a 'new ideal bird'. The original 'flying type' of the breed was abandoned and substituted with an ideal image to the liking of the fanciers. Except for the Holle Cropper, these breeds were wanted larger and with more horizontal stance. It may be clear that this led to the demise of the true flying bird.

Fortunately today many breeders focus themselves to re-breed the original flying types.

**Left: Young, white Gelderse Slenke; well fed with filled crop.
Photo: Pieter Jansma.**

Breeding, Caring and Flying

The Gelderse Slenke is a very sturdy and hardy bird with a vigorous and temperamental character, easily satisfied, not requiring special or expensive feed. They are easily kept in a basic loft. They are very social pigeons thus it is no problem at all to keep several pairs together in the loft. It is important though that the Gelderse Slenke is regularly allowed to fly free. They are absolute not suited to be kept in an aviary.

To train and stimulate their specific style of flying, it is recommended to let the Slenke fly free each day in the late afternoon or early in the evening. A bird that often and loudly claps its wings while flying, is often said to be a good flyer. However, the typical

performances during flight are also very important. Every now and then we see Slenke that show a too flat, wide tail during the flight. Also a (more) raised head during flying is something that deserves more attention.

Should you consider to purchase the real 'Flying Gelderse Slenke' it is wise to start with several pairs. The breed prefers to fly in a group and will then stimulate each others' typical and true flying performance.



Above: Young red cock with perfect hollow tail. Photo: Jan Bosch.



Left: Old ash red speckle hen with a very good upright stance.



Right: Old yellow hen, the bib marking could be better and the chest more rounded.
Photos: Pieter Jansma.

To end with

The Gelderse Slenke and the Groninger Slenke are joined together in the Specialty Club GGSC (The Groninger & Gelderse Slenken Club). These are the 3 most important aims of the Club:

- conservation and promotion of the cultural and historical living heritage;
- keeping proper breeding records;
- stimulating the typical flying characteristics.

The GGSC has its own website: www.groningerengelderseslenkenclub.nl. For more information you are always welcome to contact and the club members who are always willing to get you started with the breed.

We would like to end this article with a call from Pieter: *"If any of you could reveal more historical facts on the breed, it would be highly appreciated if you would let me know!"* (You can contact Pieter via the website.)

Groninger en Gelderse Slenken Club

Oeroude Nederlandse huisduiven met een ongeëvenaarde vlucht

