

# NATURAL HERITAGE of TUNISIA

## ~the representative pigeon breeds~

With our thanks to Mohamed Naceur Mahjoub

A few years back, on a French exhibition, I saw a poster with the above title, showing four original Tunisian pigeon breeds, which were so very interesting to me that I lost myself in exploring their history and I willingly share the gained information with you.



The poster was designed by Mohamed Naceur Mahjoub, who also proved to be the author of a beautifully illustrated and well argued book of 247 pages on this subject, titled *La Colombiculture en Tunisie – Histoire et Réalité* (Pigeon keeping in Tunisia - History and Reality).

Thanks to the author, who granted permission to Aviculture Europe to publish some of the photographs, one of each breed, as pictured on the poster in all their colour varieties and to quote from the book.

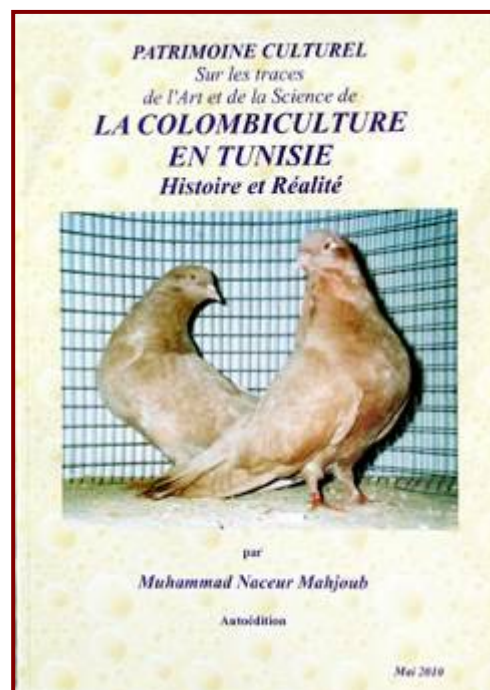
On the back of the poster the standard descriptions were included in a way like we use to in Europe, according to the rules of the Entente Européenne, with which the author showed to have the necessary broad knowledge. The famous French pigeon judge & photographer Robert Ripaldi undoubtedly helped him with this.

Right: The front cover of the book, in paperback binding, 247 pages and illustrated with about 400 colour photos. The book is in the French language, printed and published in Tunisia, in May 2010 and can be ordered at:

Mr. Robert Ripaldi, 315 Avenue de Montolivet, F-13012 MARSEILLE, France. Tel.: 00 33 – (0) 4 91661171. Send him a check in the amount of 25 Euros together with your order. Upon receipt of the check, the author will send you the book from Tunisia.

### The Author: Mohamed Naceur Mahjoub

Mahjoub Mohamed Naceur was born in 1941, in a family with a great passion for nature and the world we live in. As if his father wanted to instill this value from childhood, he offered him a white pigeon at three years of age, and another white pigeon of the Sanhâji breed when he was eleven. Since then he is engaged in breeding these birds. It was especially in France, first in Alsace, Strasbourg, then in the Paris area, where he pursued his studies, later in the Marseille area and finally in the region Pau, that he had the opportunity for deepening his learning by visiting pigeon fanciers and their lofts, as well as several pigeon exhibitions. Also, in his other travels that led him to Taiwan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Belgium he was able to enrich his knowledge by contacting fanciers, pigeon markets and shops that sell pigeons. His interest went beyond the "recognized" pigeon



breeds, so he also studied the fancy pigeon breeds that were not described in the extensive documentation available to him, and the many Collared Dove species.

This book is a work product of a 25-year ornithological work in the field of colombiculture in Tunisia; a book that is above all an open window on a biological heritage.

### ***'La Colombiculture en Tunisie'***

Due to its structure and a more scientific approach this book has an entirely different character from the known pigeon literature. It comes in two main parts. The first part concerns the description of the history and evolution of the pigeon breeds in the Arab-Islamic world since the Carthaginian Empire (from the 3rd century BC. to the fall in 146 BC.), to the present. The second part is more scientific and concerns the rebirth of the four still existing Tunisian pigeon breeds.

Finally, the way of keeping pigeons in Tunisia is described, with beautiful photographs of the local pigeon towers.

## **Cravaté Tunisien (Masri zouala) – Tunisian Owl**



The Tunisian Owl is described in the book in two different types, viz. the old type and the modern type.

The old type bird weighs 150 to 170 grams and has a short and rather thick beak, as you can see in the picture to the left. It is commonly thought this breed is closely related to the African Owl and the Valencian Frill.

The modern type of Tunisian Owl was created more recently, between 1880 and 1930, by the Tunisian fanciers. These birds are heavier, weighing 200 to 250 grams and have a longer and thinner beak. Both the old type and the modern type are bred in Tunisia.



**Right: A white Valencian Frill.**

**According to the book of Mahjoub, the Valencian Frill descended from the Tunisian Owl. This bird was a Winner at the 2004 Avicultura Show in Leiden (NL).**

**Photo taken by A.N.C. van Benten, breeder of the bird.**



**Left: African Owl, white; another breed that is closely related to the Tunisian Owl. Winner at the 2008 Avicorni Show in Leiden (NL). Owner: M.B. Treffers.**

**Photo: D.J. Hamer.**

# Tambour Sanhâji, Mekki et Kerkéni

## – Sanhâji, Mekki and Kerkéni Trumpeter



A relatively small Trumpeter breed, weight is 300 grams for the hen and 350 grams for the cock bird. In the 'Western World' this breed is known under the name Arabian Trumpeter. The Trumpeter breeds are so named because of their unique vocalizations. In this breed, the trumpeting sounds - which the Tunisians call 'laughter' - follow one after another very quick. The pigeons of this breed will not miss an opportunity to coo and perform, even in the middle of the night.

In Tunisia, the Arabian Trumpeter is called the Sanhâji or Mekki, and another sub variety called Kerkéni is also known, whose 'laughter' succeed each other even more rapidly. The Mekki also comes with groused legs, a crest or even a beak crest.

**Right:**  
To compare: a winning bird in Europe; an ash barred Arabian Trumpeter, owned by Roy Arbeider.  
Photo: Aviculture Europe.



**Left:** To compare, another Arabian Trumpeter in red pied.  
Owner: J. Raaijman.  
Photo: D.J. Hamer.



## Tambour Thraya ou Jridi - Thraya or Jridi Trumpeter



A middle-sized Trumpeter with feathered legs, from groused to muffed, and often with beak crest or even double beak crested. These pigeons are famous for their many colour varieties. Pairs are often marked in opposite colours.

This breed is thought to have originated from crossings with the imported Bokhara Trumpeter.

However, as distinct from its progenitor the Bokhara, the Thraya Trumpeter has no loose feathering but a tight plumage. Moreover the flying style of the Thraya resembles more the flying of the Steller

Cropper; the cock bird rises with powerful wing clapping and is several seconds motionless in the air at the highest point, and then it dives down.

The Thraya Trumpeter is kept and bred since ancient time in the region of Tozeur, a city with 33.000 inhabitants, located in central Tunisia in the southern Sahara desert. With hundreds of thousands of palm trees, Tozeur is a large oasis.

**Right: The Bokhara Trumpeter is mentioned by the author as possible progenitor of the Thraya Trumpeter. This is a Bokhara Trumpeter by Claus Jensen from Denmark. Photo: D.J. Hamer**



**Left:  
A young Bokhara Trumpeter hen, at the 1997 Oneto Show in the Netherlands. Owner: J. Speek. Photo: D.J. Hamer**

## Pigeon Qoffi ou Beldi de Kairouan

### – Qoffi pigeon or Beldi of Kairouan



A large heavy bird that can weigh up to 1 kg, coming in red and chamois / isabella colour; the latter presumably with dilute and faded. In the 30s of last century, according to the literature, also a white variety of this breed existed. This may explain the phenomenon of spontaneously occurring white flights.

The origin is unknown, but this breed has been present since hundreds of years in the city of Kairouan - a Tunisian city with about 150,000 inhabitants, also known as Kirwan and Al Qayrawan. It's not really a flying pigeon. The maximum flight of the Qoffi pigeon is at most a few meters. It

usually remains on the ground. Breeding and rearing of young is problematic. The young will often be trampled by the clumsy parents within a few hours after hatching. Therefore there is often only one young in the nest pan. Today the top breeders of this breed are happy if they have been able to raise two youngsters per couple during the breeding season.

**Right: Another giant pigeon breed, the Runt. This white Runt was entered at the 2005 Erfurt Show in Germany. Photo: Mick Bassett.**



According to Fontaine (1925) who described these pigeons for the first time, the breed was exhibited in Paris for the first time in 1907. They were said to have been a red and a white pair. The French fanciers are thought to have used this breed to improve the red colour of the Carneau pigeons.

In his book 'The Pigeon' Levy describes a giant pigeon breed that was known about 200 years ago and called 'Runt'.



By all means we can classify the Qoffi pigeon as a within the group of the giant pigeons, same as the Hungarian Giant, the Runt, the Montauban and several other large pigeon breeds.

**Left: Mallorca Giant pigeons, photographed at Juan Rossello's, who is from Mallorca and now living in Meyzieu, close to Lyon in France. According to him this is an original Mallorca breed and in this colour it has a remarkable resemblance to the Qoffi pigeon.**