

# *For all tastes: the rise of the South German Colour Pigeons*

Text and photos: Remco de Koster  
Edited by: Frank Povah

There are many, almost unbelievable pigeon breeds; breeds that thirty years ago - in my case - you knew only from books and that you might encounter just once in your life; in my experience at least. In Europe the diversity of varieties and colours is already huge. The Netherlands has also seen an increase in the number of breeds and there has never been as many as in the new millennium. I sometimes wonder who breeds all these varieties. When you browse a show catalogue it seems as if everyone is creating their own breed! But as long as we gain pleasure from breeding all these forms and colours, that is just fine – it's part of the times we live in.

*Right:  
The hall of the Club show  
in Steinenbronn,  
Baden-Württemberg.*

Most breeds that come to the Netherlands – especially since the borders were opened - are definitely of German origin. Contacts with eastern neighbours are frequent and our breeders take quite a few pigeons home to “try them out”.

Though many different pigeon breeds have their origins in Germany, most

German creations are Colour Pigeons. They come in a great many varieties and originated in Saxony, Thuringia, and South Germany, in particular the south-western region Baden-Württemberg, but also in Franconia and its capital Nuremberg. The deep regional roots of these breeds is evidenced by the fact that they are the most common pigeons and club shows dedicated to the breeds are held here.

Colour Pigeons from Saxony can thus be found in large numbers at the big show in Leipzig and at the Colour Pigeon Show in Zwönitz (this year rated as a “World Show”). Similarly, breeds from Franconia are usually seen in large numbers at the Nuremberg exhibitions. Knowing this, Dutch breeders visit these shows; after all, a Colour Pigeon tradition exists in the Netherlands, with the Dutch Colour Pigeon Fanciers Association founded in The Hague in 1963.

It is also probable that these exhibitions spread the popularity of these breeds further from home. However, this is less true for the breeds of Baden and Württemberg - a very large and varied region of plains and heights, through which the Rhine flows, located close to the Alps as well as the famous





Black Forest, where the Dutch like to spend their holidays. But the Colour Pigeons of this region never really came to the Netherlands, which is surprising, because there are no less than 13 breeds in a huge range of variety and colour.

*Left: The president of the German Specialty Club, Wilhelm Bauer, is not only a successful breeder, but also a club judge of this "Sonderverein der Züchter süddeutscher Farbentauben" (South German Colour Pigeon Specialty Club).*

In the region of Swabia, breeders had established a club to promote the indigenous breeds as early as 1899. The current

Sonderverein der Züchter Süddeutscher Farbentauben was re-established shortly after the end of WWII, in 1946, and is now very active under the leadership of its skilled President Wilhelm Bauer. At the last club show, 1540 pigeons were entered - an excellent turn-out! While a number of specialty clubs worry about a stagnation or even decline in membership, the numbers breeding South German Colour Pigeons are increasing. This is in part because the rest of pigeon-breeding Germany has got to know these breeds better in recent years, and in part because more publicity was given to them outside their areas of origin. And of course, these days it is easier to buy these pigeons.

While most varieties are catered for in the aforementioned club, another "Sonderverein" (specialty club) for Starling Pigeons was founded in 1937. They are indeed beautiful, these gems from South Germany, and are now real show pigeons with beautiful patterns, colours, caps and crests, as well as short but dense foot feathers. While most enthusiasts admire the large muffs of the "Saxons", many are reluctant to breed them because of the care required, so a number of breeds from South Germany offer a great alternative. Most are now kept in aviaries, but originally they were all farm pigeons that lived off the land and sought their food in the fields. However, these birds had to be quick and wary, and the Starlings were known for their fast and low flight over the country. They are still speedy guys today, these Starlings – it's in their nature – and showing them isn't always easy, especially when you're trying to catch pigeons for the transport box. Many breeders prefer to grab them in the evening when they are on their perches, to prevent damage to the fine white wing bars. Most of the other varieties are also fast, but to a lesser extent. All these breeds are robust, requiring minimal care and reproducing well.

*Right: South German Shield pigeon in red.*

The **South German Shield pigeon** is arguably the most popular breed, its breeders having concentrated enormously on properly marked wing shields in intensive colours.



They have even eliminated the coloured “pants” (behind the legs), which are often tolerated in many other shield pigeons. When you see a black South German Shield with its gloss and lustre, then you quickly agree that it’s not for nothing they are the most popular colour within the breed. But the other colour varieties can be beautiful, too! These shield pigeons from South Germany have a very rich, dense and high-set crest and often they just look perfect.

The requirements are very strict, and even a small deviation in the rosette (height and shape) will lead to a few points less on the assessment card. You should also keep in mind that despite the large crest the neck should not be too thick and the feathering has to remain smooth, without a tendency to roughness. They also must have a clean-cut throat. The pretty crest and noble head

are enhanced by fine, narrow, red eye ceres (in the black, red and yellow varieties intensive red, in the others a little lighter), dark, lively eyes, and a fine beak with smooth wattles; often, the beak has a slight red tint at the base.



*Left and below right:  
South German Moorhead.*

The **The South German Moorhead** and **South German Breast** are very much alike, which caused problems with the standards up to the 1970s! But those who are very familiar with the breeds can see those small differences anyway. The most obvious difference of course is that the Moorhead has a coloured tail and the Breast has not. When these

breeds were first described (which was not so easy), the authors still saw them as a single variety. (One had to learn otherwise from the breeders).

The true Moorheads were - as the name implies - black, and this is still the predominant colour. Breasts are also commonly seen in black. Note: There are brown Breast pigeons (dominant red with bronze) and red Moorheads, both easily recognized by the differently coloured beaks and also by the feather colour. Both breeds also occur in yellow. In the blue Moorheads there must be a distinct separation between the blue tail feathers and the black tail bar. All colours must be pure and intense, of course.

In the Breast pigeons the “bib” is noticeably larger, especially in width. In Germany the breed is called “Latztaube”, *Latz* referring to the bib. All other German Breast pigeons are fully coloured in head and neck, differing in this respect from the South German Breast pigeon.





***Left: South German Breast Pigeon.***

Like the Moorheads, the South German Breast pigeons, too, have nice heads and beautiful crests with rosettes, and intense, deep feather colouring. Because the breed carries the “pencilled” factor, the feathering of the young birds is often somewhat laced, which disappears with the moult. In the blacks and blues, it is okay to have some lacing on the back or tail. As the pigeons age, this slight lacing may reduce, but it is not marked as a fault. The Breast pigeon offers an extra peculiarity, they come in clean-leg and muffed, with short, thick and full foot-feathering, although the latter variety is rare.

***Below: Two young South German Breast pigeons; note the difference in the size of the bib (Latz).***



The **Wurtemberg Moorhead** was always a bit of an outsider. Up until the 1970s it was considered to be a common or garden Moorhead, but then got its own standard, easing the confusion. Because it is difficult to breed to the ideal, the breed is still rarely seen outside the area around Stuttgart, where it originated.

**Right:**  
*Wurtemberg Moorhead with "spot" (snip).*

A characteristic of this breed is a large coloured marking from the head and neck to the wing butt and reaching the sternum. The tail is also coloured. The preferred pattern also includes a white snip (large or small) at the forehead, giving the breed a special touch. In addition, the upper mandible is light coloured. These so-called "Sniped Moors" are the goal of the breeder, although their rarity makes a strict assessment difficult. Blacks are the most common, other colours being very much in the minority. Another feature must be mentioned: the Wurtemberg Moorhead always has longer foot feathers. It also has a crest, but a blind eye is still turned when the rosette is not entirely ideal – you just have breed too many to set aside a few good show pigeons.



The **South German Monk** has two standard descriptions; one without and one with foot feathering, which in this breed is about medium-long and full. The clean-legged Monks were named "Ulmer Schecken", after their place of origin, and the muffed birds "Biberacher Schecken". This shows that in former times the pigeons were bred to local tastes in different places and only much later did they spread to other regions. The varieties are no longer much alike, except of course for the well-known monk marking.



**Left: South German Monk pigeon muffed, head study.**

Personally, I think the muffed Monk pigeons are very beautiful birds. They are bred in many colour varieties, including whitebars and white spangleds (in black and blue). I once had free-flying yellow Monk pigeons, a feast for the eyes. I have noticed that these muffed birds are sturdily built while the clean-legged Monks are rather slender.

The breed is the only one in the Colour Pigeon class with a clean-legged variety, and also the only one with a pointed crest. They come in the blue only: in barless, with

white bars (most common) and also white spangled.

**Right: South-German Monk pigeon clean-legged, blue barless.**

Nowadays, more are being bred because people are conscious of its cultural heritage. Some years ago, a painting of the Ulmer Schecken was handed to the then Mayor of Ulm, and today it hangs in the Town Hall! Breeding Monk pigeons is not always easy because of the refined colour separation desired in the head marking, the number of white feathers and, in the muffed specimens, the beautiful white muffs without a coloured feather. Also one coloured tail feather may occur. Both Monk breeds are popular, available in good quality, and like the other breeds mentioned, require uncomplicated housing and care.



One of the most beautiful of the South German breeds - also bred in two varieties (clean-legged and muffed) but with only one Standard description is the **South German Blasse** (Süddeutsche Blasse). "*Blasse*" refers to the head marking, a white blaze. In this head marking, the cap line follows an almost straight line from the beak, passing the eye, to the base of crest. A peculiarity of this marking is the presence of the so-called "*Mücke*", a small coloured fleck between the beak corner and the eye. The head marking means there is a pigment difference between the upper and lower beak, the upper pale, the lower pigmented, the intensity depending on the bird's actual colour, from pale horn to black.



**Left: South German Blasse pigeon silver chequer.**

Whether clean-legged or medium- long muffs is a matter of personal taste. But invariably a feather rich shell crest with well-formed rosettes, not placed too high, but clearly reaching above the skull line. Dark eyes with fine, light-red eye ceres are a must.

**Right: South German Blasse pigeon, blue barless.**

The increasing popularity of the Blasse pigeon is largely due to them being named Germany's 2004 "Breed of the Year", and the fact that they occur in more colours (18) than the other Colour Pigeons. Blasse pigeons are bred in Black, Red and Yellow, all with an intense sheen. (with the best seen in the clean-legged birds!), but also in Ash red and Ash yellow, really amazing pastels.

**Below left: South German Blasse pigeon muffed, ash yellow chequer.**



One striking colour is 'Reiflicht', literally "pale hoar-frost". The male bird has a ground colour of palest silver ice blue overall, with or without black bars and black tail feathers or tail bar. Any sheen on this colour, even on the neck is a fault. Another special colour is 'Mehllicht', with a beautiful ochre breast colour. They are not very common but you sometimes see small groups of these pigeons.



**Right: A pair of South German Blasse pigeons in ash yellow bar, at Club president Wilhelm Bauer's – splendid birds!**



*Above: Aviary with South German Colour pigeons at Wilhelm Bauer's.*

**South German Spot pigeons** have the most known markings among the Colour Pigeons. The quality is very good, with elegant heads and fine eye ceres, especially in the Blacks. In the Blacks and Blues the upper mandible is coloured (as in the other breeds). Their crests are also rich and well formed. When breeding and showing South German colour pigeons, a bit of grooming is usually inevitable. In this case it is the spot, which can be optimized with a pair of scissors. Definitely a decorative breed, coming into its own outside its home region

**South German White Tail pigeons** are less common, because the gene for the white tail sometimes throws a coloured tail feather. Other breeds also suffer with this problem, so in general the Whitetails are less commonly bred variety among the Colour Pigeons.

The marking probably arose when the pigeons were free-flying and had their nesting places in the barns. When flying the white tails are displayed much better than in a show cage.

The breed has a beautiful crest that does not fully compare with, for example, Shield and Spot Pigeons, because the feathering of the White Tails is tighter; but the beautiful colours contrast really well with the white tail.

They come in several colour varieties and also with white wing bars or white spangled, but breeding these is much more difficult. In addition, they have a white spot on the forehead. The blue rose spangled variety is a fairly recent addition.

The most unusual colour variety is the copper: dark with maroon-red wing shields marked with small black triangles, which in Germany are likened to arrow heads. In a closed wing the flights are black, with - when everything is right - a maroon-red point (finch marking) on each one - wonderful to see in combination with the white tail and a white spot on the forehead. And speaking of colour, I almost forgot to mention that the White Tails always have orange coloured eyes.



**Left:**  
**South German  
Charcoal Larks.**

Finally, I would like to comment on the following three races, but only briefly, because within the context of this comprehensive contribution it is not possible to discuss in detail all the features of the standard descriptions.

The **South German Charcoal Lark** is an outsider. The name doesn't reveal much, but basically they are very dark grey pigeons of a medium-size, Colour Pigeon type (the term "field pigeon" has since long been out of date), quite plain and without the ornaments of the previous breeds. For a long time the Charcoal Larks seemed unpopular, but they are back and are primarily bred for colour and pattern, because the type is almost always right.

So here and there we need to pay attention to the orange eye colour and the head profile that should not be too flat in the skull. The dark 'charcoal' ground colour has a lighter grey, arrowhead-shaped marking on each wing shield feather. The front of the neck and upper breast are a beautiful ochre.

**Right:**  
**South German Charcoal Lark.**



The next breed resembles the Lark in body type, but is intense black with tiny white feathers on the head, the so called **South German Tigerhead**, "Tigermohr" in German. "Moor" refers to the black colour (the only variety) and "tiger" to the white spots on the head. A [mostly indistinct] black spot on the forehead is valued. The tiger marking extends to about two centimetres below the eyes and is finely divided, but one should keep in mind that the head will become whiter with age. In judging old birds, this should not lead to a points deduction. The Tiger Head was mentioned in literature as early as the late 18th century, but have always been rare. Again, it is the breeders of the region who are making their preservation a priority.

The third breed, the **Echterding Colour Pigeon**, seems an odd man out, as you hardly ever see a colour pigeon with a magpie pattern. This creation of three breeders from the town of Echterdingen and surrounding area was recognized in 1983 in black. It is a medium-sized Colour Pigeon with a

well-shaped crest with the familiar South German rosettes. The magpie drawing shows a white head and white, fairly deep and wide bib. For many years, the breed was seen in only a few lofts and has not come much further today, even though the colours blue, red and yellow have been recognized in recent years. The colours should be intense and pure, and red eye ceres are a must. A compromise in the assessment is to allow some white under the tail which is needed to achieve the large bib. They need a bit of grooming for the show, and that is not to every breeders' liking.

I have already mentioned that not all breed characteristics can be discussed within the framework of this contribution, and that certainly applies to the **Starling** in all its variations. This gorgeous Colour Pigeon is worth its own article because it is a very special breed whose base colour is black. The predominant variety is the white-barred black with the neck slightly marked with black mottled moon patterns ("*Starhals*" in German). Their home range has always been the Black Forest, where they had several names for these birds, according to appearance or area, so that the same breed was described under different names in the literature. Blue white-barreds also exist, but they arose entirely independently in Thuringia using the Field Pigeons, and they are always a bit more robust in type than the elegant black variety. The blacks also come in combination with a white cap, monk marked and white tail. Crested Starlings are a rarity. In these three marking varieties there is also a marking with extensive white, the white spangled variety. Expertise is really needed here, for the latter colour varieties have, among other things, [Elly?]white mirrors in the flights.



If you want to know more, just search the archives and read about the Starlings of Robert Hoornstra. See:

[www.aviculture-europe.nl/nummers/09N05A02.pdf](http://www.aviculture-europe.nl/nummers/09N05A02.pdf)  
[www.aviculture-europe.nl/nummers/14N03A16.pdf](http://www.aviculture-europe.nl/nummers/14N03A16.pdf)

*Left: To end with, a photo South German Monk pigeons clean legged, in German, "Ulmer Schecken".*

For more information you can visit the website of the Nederlandse Kleurduivenliefhebbers Vereniging <http://kleurduiven.sierduif.nl> Or the website of the German [Sonderverein der Züchter Süddeutscher Farbentauben](http://www.sonderverein.de)

*Copyright ©2016*

*All rights reserved by the Aviculture-Europe Foundation.*

*This is a publication by the online magazine [www.aviculture-europe.nl](http://www.aviculture-europe.nl)*

*English edition ISSN: 2352-2445*

*You are not allowed to copy, distribute, send or publish these texts or photos without our prior permission in writing.*

*Aviculture Europe is also made possible by the support of:*

