



THE HYACINTH PIGEON

THE ONLY DUTCH COLOUR PIGEON

Edited by Frank Povah.

Above: Hyacinth pigeons on the roof, together with their young.

THE HYACINTH PIGEON

Text and photos: Seerp Broersma (NL)

The Hyacinth Pigeon is one of the most beautiful and graceful pigeon breeds and an excellent choice for the fancier who wants a simple pigeon without too much finery in his loft. It is a hardy breed that places few demands on its environment and is a very good flyer. Moreover, it is a good breeder and parent. The Hyacinth pigeon is the only Dutch colour pigeon, but unfortunately it is still among the rare breeds in the Netherlands. Lately, however, there has been growing interest.

Origin and history

The only colour pigeon that we can call a Dutch breed is the Hyacinth pigeon, although its origin was not in the Netherlands. The most colour pigeon breeds by far originated and have their homelands in Germany and Switzerland, and descriptions of pigeons that match our Hyacinth pigeon are known from old English and French books.

One would think that our eastern neighbours [*the Germans, Ed.*] and the Swiss, given their reputation in the colour pigeon field, would have had some descriptions of the Hyacinth pigeon in their literature, but generally speaking you do not find much. Writing in one account of the Hyacinth pigeon's history, Hans Schipper (NL) states it seems likely that the Hyacinth may have functioned in France as an ancestor of the Cauchois, which he describes as referring to a

pigeon from the Caux region in Normandy. In the historiography of that breed it is stated that the spangled variety of the Cauchois first appeared in Paris. In Caux, the barred varieties of Cauchois appeared first, and later the spangleds. The Cauchois is known in a marking of spangles on a white ground colour, as it occurs in the Hyacinths, and this colour was also called 'hyacinth in the Cauchois. Hans Schipper states that on the basis of this information we can safely assume that the Cauchois and the Hyacinth pigeon in its present form are closely related in its and that both varieties have their native soil in France. Later, the Hyacinth pigeon went to England, where it was improved, and then ended up in our country. Our well-known pigeon breeder of the pre-and post-war years, Mr. Spruijt, has worked on this breed and has drawn up and published a Standard. No other country has a Standard for the Hyacinth, and partly because of that we have declared it to be a Dutch breed.

Right: An outstanding Hyacinth pigeon.

For years the Hyacinth pigeon has had a very modest presence in our country. At the beginning of the 20th century, father and son Moning, of Leeuwarden, were two among the few fanciers who had kept this breed alive. Together with Spruijt and a few highly motivated pigeon fanciers they had ensured the survival of the breed during WWII. Now we can look forward to a reasonable number of breeders who show good results and are giving the Hyacinth pigeon a broader and more solid foundation.



It mainly comes down to maintaining standards, because you do not immediately get the highest predicates; which will become apparent from the further description. Many breeders who do not have the staying power to achieve good results often withdraw too early, but it is more than worth it to get there. Let's face it, does not the end result of a difficult task yield far more satisfaction than winning the prize every time?

Left: An outstanding young cock.

Breed description

A rather concise description of the standard gives the following characteristics and requirements: the Hyacinth pigeon has the shape of a sturdy urban pigeon and has a smooth, tight

feathering. The tail should be carried as an extension of the back, at an angle of about 30°, so not "flat". Its under-colour is slate blue with a dark tail bar. The head, neck and chest are a dark blue-gray colour, with the necessary sheen; at the bottom of the belly the colour becomes slightly lighter.

The shield feathering is white with a spangled marking, which is regularly distributed over almost the entire shield. At the end of the large flight feathers the so-called 'finch-marking' should be present; also known as 'pearls', these are white round dots which give a particularly nice appearance to the whole.

The type is called the "colour pigeon type" or "field pigeon type", so in build the type of pigeon we also encounter in the wild. A firm, not too heavy pigeon, the posture and stance as in the above-mentioned angle; a horizontal position is out of the question and detracts from the Hyacinth pigeon.

The head should be longish and rounded, not angled or flat. The eyes are deep orange-red, not too bright, which often occurs. The eye ceres are narrow, not too coarse, and dark to blue-black. The beak is medium size and dark in colour.



Left: A youngster 1 or 2 days old.

Beginning with one or two pairs of Hyacinth pigeons that start breeding well in the spring, many novice fanciers are startled by the results they find in the nest bowl – the young have a colour completely different from that of the parent birds.

Right: A few weeks old.

I have had reactions from breeders who had received birds through me, with the reproach: "What kind of pigeons did you give me?" Of course, I can soon allay their fears. The youngsters are different in colour from their parents – especially in the first moult – often a brown-grey colour without any sheen. But as soon as the mature moulting is complete, they get their Hyacinth colour. Sheen and marking are then at their best, ready for the show season. In the second year after the moult they are often even better.



Right: A youngster with developing marking. The finch marking is not yet visible.

I think this is one of the most beautiful periods in the breeding of Hyacinths; the fine shield marking will gradually become visible and then the finch or pearl marking on the flights.



Left: Hyacinth pigeon in 2012. This bird only developed its outstanding finch marking at 2 years old.



Colour

Genetically, the Hyacinth pigeon is a blue, dark-spangled bird, but we never use that colour name, due to the external colour characteristics. First in importance

is the ground colour, also called "under-colour". This must be a slate blue and should be quite dark as long as it is blue; black would make it look too much like the Starling. This blue colour runs from head, neck and chest to the end of the tail, which has a beautiful dark barring across. On the belly, the colour should not be too light. An obvious green/purple-blue sheen on the neck is wanted; together with the white shield this gives the image we know as the Hyacinth pigeon.

Left: This Hyacinth pigeon is quite nice, but the spangling is too coarse and too dark blue.

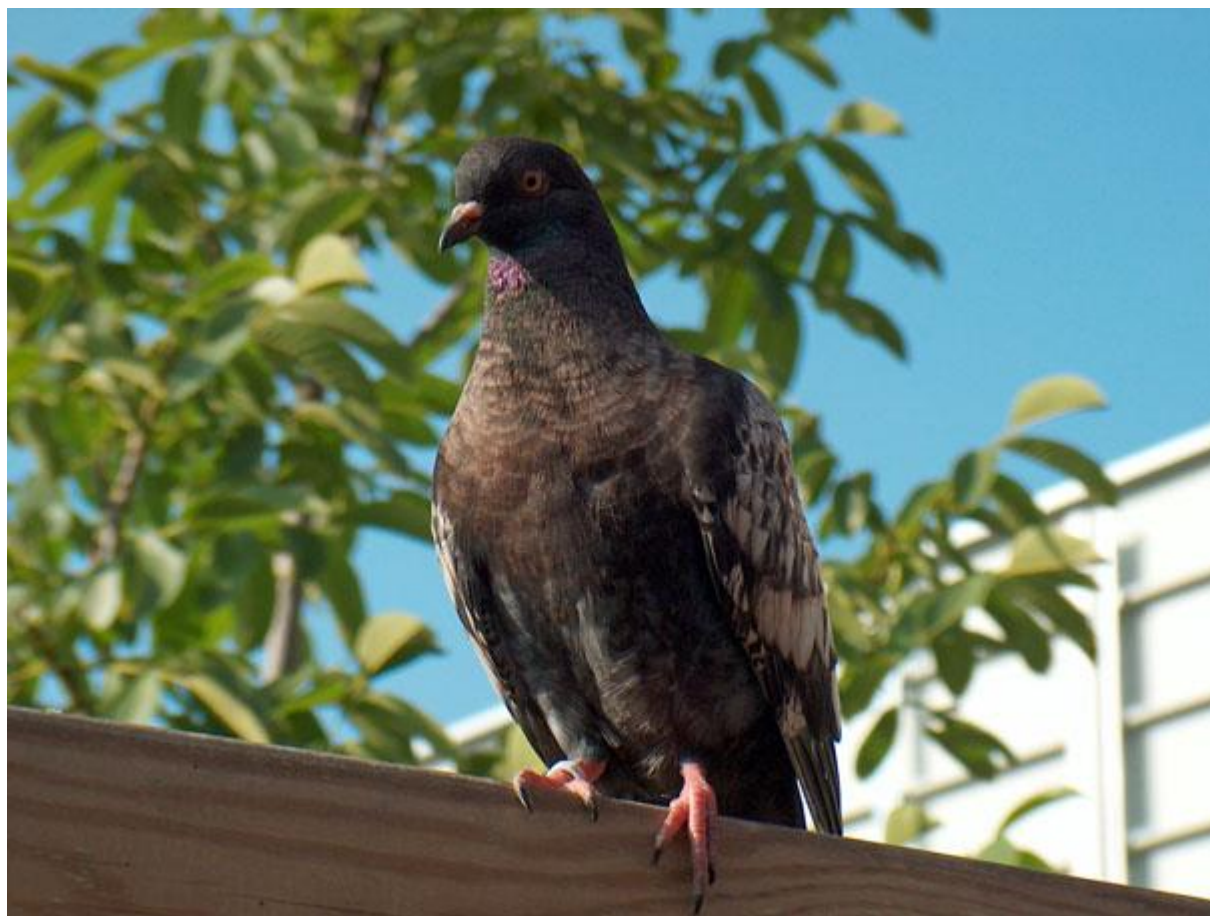


But there is more: this white shield must be clean, without "pepper and rust", which if present often goes together with a dull top colour that lacks lustre.

So a clean white shield with the so-called spangle marking, which is visible as a small blue triangle at the end of the shield feathers from which the beautiful marking derives its name. Ideally each feather on the wing shield is finely edged with a blue-black colour continuing to the feather tip as very small triangular (arrow shape) marking in the same colour; these markings delicate and evenly spaced. Faults in this marking are, among others, a too indistinct marking, as a result of which the spangling becomes lacing and that is something that is not wanted. Nor is a too coarse marking, which often leads to uneven 'finching'.

Right: This hen has an incorrect finch marking.

Without finching or pearls, the bird will look incomplete. The finch marking is the white dot on the ends of the flight feathers, which is often at its best in one- or two-year-old birds. If young birds do not have a finch marking on the outer flight feathers, they might get them in their second year of life. So, never cull birds such as those mentioned here with further good qualities, because, when older, they often remain useful for a long time, as both show and breeding material.



Above: This youngster will probably be too light in belly colour.

A common fault in finch marking is an undefined or elongated pearl. And the complete absence of this marking is obviously to be regarded as a fault.



Left: Too much bronze in the wing shield. This can be quite heritable.

Keeping Hyacinth pigeons

Keeping the Hyacinth pigeon is a pleasure for every breeder or fancier. They are very loyal as foster parents and take great care of their young. Whereas my Owl pigeons start drifting again after two or three weeks, the Hyacinth pigeon takes care of its youngsters and in many cases does not start a new nest before the young can completely care for themselves. It is also never necessary to help so-called stragglers.



Right: A bit too much finching, but a very valuable bird.

I do not free fly my Hyacinths, although this is the best way to keep them, because they can look after themselves very well. They also know how to avoid birds of prey; if they observe them, they will fly so high that they stay above and therefore out of sight of these hunters. Do not expect a Hyacinth pigeon to sit on your shoulder when you are in the loft, they are shyer than many other breeds, but my experience is that they are not really wild; you can handle them fairly confidently when they are in the loft.

If you dare - and why shouldn't you - start with a number of couples, then it is important to mate birds that complement each other in colour and marking. If a pigeon has a too-coarse pearl marking (and these are often too white in the wing feathers), it is advisable to pair it with a pigeon that is somewhat darker and with smaller pearls. A must is: let yourself be informed by an experienced breeder, in order to avoid disappointment. This way you will not only breed good pigeons, but also build a good relationship.

Right: Peace and quiet in the loft.

And once you have built up your own strain, you are also expected to regularly hand over surplus birds with which a 'new' breeder can start. You do want to promote your own breed among other breeders, don't you? The Hyacinth pigeon is still a fairly rare breed whose characteristics are not yet known by every breeder. For that reason, you are more or less obliged to inform the new breeder, in the nicest way, about the breed characteristics. That is a prerequisite if you donate birds, so that the breeder will be able to lay a foundation for good breeding stock. I have had very positive experience with this, resulting in a number of passionate breeders. And it is also very pleasant to do.



But even if you do your best to give someone as much information about the breed as possible – since you are the connoisseur of this breed – then you can get surprising reactions from breeders who enthusiastically took some pairs.



Once, in spring, I received a phone call from an angry gentleman with the message, "What have you done to me? The youngsters are very wrongly coloured." The man was really angry. Luckily I could reassure him quickly.

As mentioned above, the young of the Hyacinth pigeon have a colour completely different from a full-grown pigeon. The man was so shocked by this that he thought he had received wrong breeding pigeons. This experience led me to dedicate an article to this subject. Fortunately, the person mentioned later became a leading breeder of the Hyacinth pigeon.

Right: These youngsters are still very red, but the colour will improve over time.

Left: A good way to observe the marking.



Wrong colour?

Coming back to the ground colour: it should not be too light on the belly; this is a major shortcoming that you can see even in young birds. When the feathering on the stomach and chest is mixed with brownish coloured feathers, the required green-purple-blue sheen in neck will usually be missing after moulting. This makes them unsuitable for breeding, because the result is that they become brown in the chest which is a serious fault.

In the past, all Hyacinth pigeons in the Netherlands were closely related to. Nowadays, the breeding base has become a bit wider due to a slight increase in the number of breeders. Now it is more possible to mate less related birds, although it still holds that you sometimes have to introduce new blood (e.g. from other breeds) to prevent too much inbreeding.

Right: Beautiful hen, but the eye ceres could be better and the breast colour is too brown.





Above: Young Hyacinth pigeons in their juvenile feathering.

To end with

Because the Hyacinth pigeon stole my heart years ago, I still regret that the breed retains its status as a "rare breed". Together with the other Dutch breeds, this pigeon is worthy of a more prominent place in the whole range of the fancy.



Fortunately, breeders have found each other more and more in recent years and decided to work on it together. And I am happy to say, the first results have already begun to show.

Left:
This is how we like to see them; only wish, better rounded eye ceres.

For more information you can contact the secretary of the Nederlandse Kleurduivenliefhebbers Vereniging, M. Apperlo, e-mail: m.apperlo@versatel.nl

See also

<https://www.facebook.com/nederlandsekleurduivenliefhebbersvereniging/>
and <https://kleurduiven.sierduif.nl/kj3/>

Below: Hyacinth pigeons in aviary. Photo B. Kocken.



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