



Starting in Giants

Recommendations by Stu Austin

Do not get the idea that any special form of building is necessary to raise Giant Homers.

I'll show you how to put up a structure that will make your work easier and enable you to handle a big flock or a small flock fast and accurately, but pigeons will work in almost any place, if it is free from mice, darkness and dampness. Any building, whether a woodshed, a corn crib, a barn, and outhouse of any description, can be made a successful home for Giant Homers with a little work.

The points to remember are these, first, that the building be on fairly level, sunny ground; second, that it be raised from the ground so that rats or mice cannot breed under it out of sight; third, that it ought to be fairly tight, so to keep out rain and excessive cold. Pigeons should have sunlight and fresh air, and they need protection from the elements.

In practice, most Giant Homer Lofts are found raised a foot or two feet off the ground; and face the south and or the west. If you live in a part of the country where conditions are less severe adapt your loft to those conditions. In cold climates build your loft to withstand the winters, but in the South the building should be more open. Be guided by what you see around you, if buildings or lofts used by your pigeon friends and neighbors are tight and warm, make them the same, if they are wide open with lots of fresh air make them the same way.

Suppose you have a vacant building or shack of any kind in which you wish to raise Giants. I'll take for granted that it has either a flat roof or a ridgepole with a sloping roof, and it is built in rectangular form. Never mind what the dimensions are; the advice will apply to wither the large or small structure. In cold climates raise it off the ground, or build a new floor off the ground, so that any vermin cannot breed out of your sight and get into your loft. If there is an old floor, patch up all the holes. The floor can be wood or wire. You need a door to get in the breeding part of your

building, and you need at least one window through which the birds can fly from the nesting area into the fly pen or outside. You will shut this window on cold nights, or on very cold wintry days. You must make this window so the birds won't fly into it, when closed.

The fly pen which you will build on the window side of the loft may be small or as large as you have room. The idea is not to give the birds an opportunity for long flight, but simply to get them out into the open air and sunlight. For the flying pen you want the ordinary poultry netting, one inch is best, it keeps small birds out. You can get this wire netting in rolls of any width from one foot up to six feet, buy the width that fits the size or height of your pen.

In your breeding loft you can line the three walls with nest boxes. The fourth wall is the window side, or towards the fly pen this is best not to have nest boxes, but perches or roosting area. This is to give the birds room without interfering with one another. The nest boxes, when done, should look like the pigeon holes of an Old Style Desk, and should be about one foot high, one foot wide and one foot deep. A variation either way of an inch or two will not matter.

You should have one pair of nest boxes for each pair of Giants. A pair meaning two nests for a pair of birds a male and a female. A pair of pigeons attend to a pair of squabs in one nest, when the squabs are about two weeks old in one nest, the parents will go to the adjoining nest or to a nest box in a distant part of the loft and begin housekeeping again, laying eggs and dividing their attention between the two families.

Never over fill a loft with Giant Homer pairs for over crowding is almost as bad as mice, darkness and dampness.

Perhaps your start will be made with so small a number of birds that you will not have to cover more than one wall with nest boxes. Have a lot of spare nest boxes, and let the breeding pairs choose where they want. Maybe the extra nests will accommodate the young birds raised for future use as in shows, or breeding. Don't be afraid that if you enter the loft when the housekeeping is going on you will frighten the birds so they never will come back to the eggs or the squabs. They will seem timid at first, but they will get accustomed to you. In the course of a few weeks, only a few will make a great attempt to get away from you. Some or most will continue to sit on the eggs and if you put your hand to them they will not fly off in fear, but will slap you with their wings, telling you in their way not to bother them. Carry some hempseed in with you and you will teach them to eat it out of your hand. You can tame them and teach them to love you as any animal is taught.

No matter how many perches are provided in a loft, there are always some Giants that will not use them but will perch in unused nest boxes. In theory, each pigeon should have a perch to fly to while his or her mate is on the nest. In practice this is found unnecessary. Put up as many perches as you please, about sixteen inches or

two feet apart where room permits, as shown in the illustration. Do not use long polls or flat boards as a bully cock will saunter down the line and push off all others.

The floor in the loft should always be kept clean, I can recommend a layer of sand or saw dust on the floor which is ok, but scraping the floor daily or semi-daily, but not to let it go for more than a week is best. There are floor scrapers sold on the market and can be found at pigeon store houses around the country and feed and grain stores in your area. You can use the pigeon manure for trees or flower gardens, it makes a great fertilizer.

In the fly pen of your loft, you can put down gravel, you can use ABC or granite half minus. You should rake through this at least once or twice a year or more depending on how many birds you have, replace the gravel once every two years. On the end of the fly pen build a porch sixteen to twenty four inches wide to locate the bath pans, so when you dump the old water out of them it will be outside the pen. Giants should bath regular, daily too weekly, they don't need to but they like to, and it helps the eggs to hatch better.

Remember the primary object in raising Giant Homers is to make it as easy as possible on your self to take care of your birds, so that you can enjoy them better.

My loft, the first view shows six partition installed for breeding season, for a total of nine pairs fit this arrangement very well with a lot of room, and you don't have to clean as often. The second view shows a smaller version for four pair in the breeding season, the size would be eight feet deep, four wide and seven feet height. When you remove the two partition each pen will be 8x8x7. Notice every section has a four foot door opening out. The doors are screened, as here in Arizona you need a very open loft. The birds do very well in this arrangement. The third view shows the six dividers removed, this is used for the young birds each year. You sort the young cocks in one pen, the young hens in the next and all of the younger weaned babies in the other. One of the best reminders is never make your loft so you have to walk from one pen into another pen and back through that pen to water, feed, or retrieve birds. This routine disturbs the giants and makes your maintenance that much harder.