

## Preparing for a Show

### Pigeon Show Preparations

by Doratha Connally

Fall is the traditional time for most pigeon shows and it's never too early to begin preparing your birds to compete. Below are a few simple ideas to help make your birds more competitive.

(Items in red refer to the sidebar at the right for sources or definitions.)

#### Feed and vitamins

It almost goes without saying that show pigeons need good quality food to develop overall condition and beautiful feathering. Ask other breeders in your area what brands they use and then experiment with what works for you. It isn't necessary to feed the most expensive food but you probably won't get great results with the cheapest, either.

Some exhibitors give their birds pigeon vitamins (available from pigeon supply companies) and believe that they add extra condition to the feathers and overall health. If you give the water-soluble type you must clean your waterers every day as bacteria thrive in vitamins.

#### Bathe your birds

At least once a week, take a large shallow pan and fill it with about 4-5 inches of water. Place it in your flypen or loft and watch the pigeons dive in — pigeons love to bathe.

There are various products that you can add to the bath water to help with feather condition. These are sold by the pigeon supply companies. Or you can add a tablespoon of 20 Mule Team Borax which helps clean the feathers and feet and also helps kill feather lice.

Three to four days before a show, let your pigeons bathe. This allows time for the feathers to redevelop their "bloom" before the show.

#### Check your birds for any sign of feather lice

The most typical louse is easily visible - usually inside the birds' wings. They are brown, cigar shaped and about 1/16th to 1/8th inch long. They feed on the feather material and if you don't get rid of them, they can actually chew tiny pinholes through the feather.

Many judges will instantly eliminate a bird from competition that has lice or more than a few of these pinholes.

Treatment: There are various treatments, including powders and sprays. Again, check the pigeon supply houses. One of the easiest treatments is Sevin dust. Place it in an old jar; punch about 8-10 holes in the lid (kids get your parents to help you with this). Screw on the lid. Wear a dust mask.

Holding the pigeon, shake a little onto the bird's back; gently work it into the feathers. Then powder under each wing and on the breast. It isn't necessary to powder the entire bird. Keep the powder out of the bird's face, eyes and mouth. Powder your loft and the perches. This needs to be done at least every 6-8 weeks. According to Wendell Levi, author of THE PIGEON, it is probably impossible to get rid of every single louse. But don't let this deter you from battling these pests. They can ruin your very best bird's chances at the show.

Very Important: When using pesticides, wear a mask. Wash your hands thoroughly and change your clothes after using any pesticides.

### **Trimming**

This is the process of taking out unwanted feathers by plucking (and on some breeds cutting). For example: If your breed standard has specified color markings and your bird has a feather of the wrong color in the wrong place you will want to “trim” or pluck that feather. Some breeds, such as Swallows, need to have broken or misshapen foot feathers removed about 6-8 weeks before the show so they will have time to re-grow.

Getting hold of a single pigeon feather can be tricky – take your time and be careful. You don’t want to end up with a bald spot. Some breed standards allow for the judge to disqualify a bird that has been obviously trimmed.

Always look for instructions about your breed or talk to a breeder before you start. Trimming can make a bird look extremely sharp or can ruin it.

### **MORE INFORMATION**

#### **PIGEON SUPPLIES**

Available from several companies:

Foy’s

Global Pigeon

Jedds

Siegel

New England

PigeonUSA

Search the Internet for more.

Bathing pans: Feed stores have many types of large shallow rubber or plastic pans. The rubber type is best as they give traction for the birds’ feet. Remove the pan from the bird’s area immediately after they finish bathing or they will drink the dirty water.

20 Mule Team Borax is available at many Wal-Mart stores and some grocery stores in the laundry section. \$3-\$4 a box

Sevin dust and dust masks are available at most hardware stores and many garden centers.

### **DEFINITIONS**

\*Station means to stand confidently in the correct posture for your breed. Find your current breed standard\*\* on the Internet and read through it thoroughly until you get a mental picture of your breed.

\*\* Standard – Many pigeon breeds have written “standards.” These are guidelines for the size, shape, colors and appearance of the breed. Judges reward birds that most closely resemble their breed standard. Search the internet for “pigeon standards” or for your breed’s name.

### **SOURCES**

If you want to buy your own show coop, contact your local pigeon club to ask if they have a used one for sale. Or buy from Jedds Pigeon Supply

Indoor/outdoor carpeting is available at Lowe’s, Home Depot, some Wal-Mart’s and many carpet stores.

Wood shavings are available from feed stores and farm supply stores.

Judging sticks are available from Office Depot and Staples (you may have to ask them to order it from their catalog or order online.) Cost \$3 to \$5

Pigeon Magazine - More showing information is available from Purebred Pigeon [www.purebredpigeon.com](http://www.purebredpigeon.com), , a full color magazine devoted to all pigeon activities

## Training

No matter how beautiful your bird is, if it is terrified – flying all around the judging coop or crouching in the corner – it probably won't win. You need to train your bird to understand the judging procedure so that it will be calm and station.\*\*

To train your bird you need either an actual show coop or something very similar.

Standard show coops are 18x18x18 inches for large breeds or 15x15x15 for smaller breeds. They are constructed of vertical wire bars with a vertical sliding door on the front. (See our "Pigeon Show Results" page for examples of show and judging coops)

The floor is usually plywood covered with heavy paper sprinkled with wood shavings or indoor/outdoor carpeting.

Begin by simply placing the bird in the show coop. Do this gently and calmly. Allow it to stay in the coop for 10-20 minutes. Remove it and return it to the loft. This process should be done as calmly as possible so that the bird doesn't associate the coop with fear.

Do this for several days, lengthening the time as you go. If you are involved in one of the more popular breeds your bird may be in the judging coop for long periods of time at the show.

After your bird seems calm in the coop, begin studying it just as a judge would. Slowly extend your hand to the bars of the coop. Walk back and forth in front of the coop.

Open the door slowly and then close it. When your bird accepts this without fear, flatten your hand as if you were going to shake hands with someone and slide your fingers through the bars. You can direct your bird into or out of a corner doing this.

Remove your bird from the coop and inspect it as if you were judging it. Open out each wing and spread the tail feathers. Look closely at its head and eye. Then return it to the coop. Wait a few minutes and then do the whole procedure again.

Many judges use a judging stick. This is usually a metal fold-up pointer used for business or school presentations. An old car antennae or thin dowel rod will work.

Again, you must be very gentle in getting your birds accustomed to the judging stick. The first day just unfold it and slowly wave it in front of the coop and then over it.

The next day, touch the bars of the coop. When the bird shows no fear then you can begin to reach through the bars and very gently touch the bird on the tail or under the breast. The judging stick is used to help encourage the bird to station correctly.

In a breed like Modenas, the judge would use it to encourage the bird to lift its tail; in American Show Racers, the judge might push down on the tail. Again, read your standard and study other birds of your breeds to know how your breed should station.

The tricky part of training is to not overdo it. You can make a bird so relaxed with the whole procedure that it appears bored. So, train to the point where there is no sign of wildness and then just a weekly quick refresher may be all the training your birds need.

## Carrier or Crate - Getting Your Birds to the Show

How do you plan to carry your birds to the show? There are fancy boxes, baskets, metal crates, etc. that you can buy through the supply houses. Some people make their own or use cardboard boxes with lots of holes for ventilation. (Pigeons put off a lot of body heat and can get too warm in a container without good ventilation.) Ideally, each bird should be in its own compartment to minimize pecking. Place some wood shavings in the bottom to give the bird traction and to absorb droppings. Just like the show coop, it is a good idea to get your birds accustomed to traveling in their carriers. Load them up the week before the first show and just drive around the block. This will also give you practice in the process of loading your birds. And give you some idea of how much time you'll need the morning of the show to load up. Again, three or four days before the show, allow your pigeons to bathe. Check for any odd feathers that need removing and trim your bird's toenails (unless your standard calls for sharp toenails). Just the very tip needs to be removed. If you've never done this be careful not to cut into the "quick" – the pink part that has blood supply.

### **The Day of the Show**

Calmly load your birds into your carrier and place them on a level surface in your vehicle in an area that is not too warm or too cold. You want this trip to the show to be as stress free as possible for you and the birds. Give yourself plenty of time to get to the show with at least a few minutes extra so that your birds have a chance to relax and get used to their surroundings.

When you get to the show, find your show coops. These will have your bird's band number on a card attached to the front of the coop (your name may be on this card also). As you place your bird in the coop, check it over – if there are any droppings on the feet or elsewhere, wipe them with a barely damp paper towel or cloth.

Your coop should have a food cup and a water cup. Make certain that the water cup is full of fresh water. Your birds may need a drink, depending on how long they have been in the carrier. Dehydrated birds will not show well.

Pigeon shows are run in different ways so if this is your first event, find the show secretary or show superintendent. Ask if you will be allowed to carry your birds up to the judging area or if the club is using "runners." (A runner is a person who carries birds from the show coop to the judging coop). Then ask which judging area your breed will be judged at and when. Times for judging are usually not set at exact times so you have to be flexible and watch your judge to see when he/she is ready for your breed. Yours may be the very first breed to be judged or it may be later in the day. Don't get upset or stressed – pigeon shows are usually very loosely run. The judge will wait for you – within reason – and the other exhibitors will usually help you in any way they can.

DON'T get discouraged if you lose!! Every judge has a different opinion – your birds may lose one week and win the next. For your first show season, try to learn as much as you can – to develop an eye for your breed. Study the winning birds – how do they look different from your birds?

Are they in perfect feather condition while yours are still molting?

Are they in better weight?

Did they station well every time the judge looked at them?

Is your bird just having a bad day? Did it drop its tail or head when the judge was looking?

Does the winning bird more closely resemble the written standard for the ideal bird? Breeding and exhibiting an excellent bird is an art — if it was easy there would be no reason for competitions. Be honest with yourself about your birds — are they close to the standard?

After judging ask the judge his opinion of your birds, if he/she has time. Try to learn how to help your birds win.

You may be one of the fortunate ones who starts winning in their first season. But for most, it takes work and time. **DON'T GET DISCOURAGED!** Make the commitment to the sport of showing pigeons — work to develop a winning line of birds that are beautifully presented at each show.

You'll have something to be proud of!