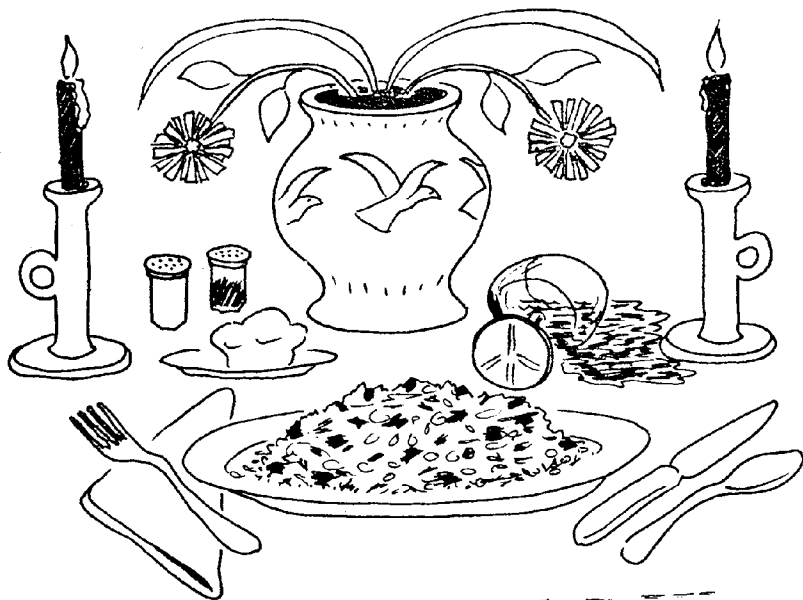


PIGEON SQUIB
H* A* S* H



by W. F. HOLLANDER

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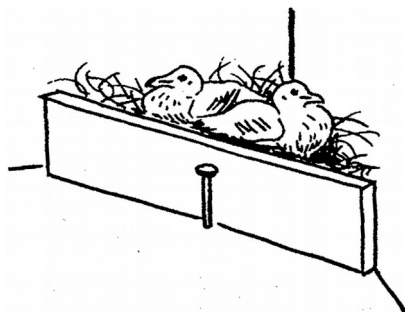
QUOTATIONS

- "Tell me where is fancy bred, or in the heart or in the head?"
Shakespeare (Merchant Of Venice).
- "Fanciers do not and will not admire a medium standard."
J. M. Eaton, 1858 (A treatise on the art of breeding).
- "My wife says that all pigeon fanciers are a little teched."
Carl F. Graefe 7/18/45.
- "Squab raising is a healthy, out-door pursuit."
Wendell M. Levi +(Making Pigeons Pay)
- "If you must get out of bed after you're 46, do it very carefully."
Tanner S. Chrisler, APJ Dec. '76.
- "It's not good to clean the coop too often."
Richard Krupke (Roller sage).
- "Did Adam have a navel? God knows." Joseph W. Quinn
(PGNL July 1970).
- "Roll roll roll a lot, roll dammit roll!" William H. Pensom (Roller sage).
- "Perfection of planning is a symptom of decay."
C. Northcote Parkinson 1957 (Parkinson's Law).
- "Some of the most satisfying shows are local ones where
there are no paid judges." Fred P. Jeffrey, 1974
(Bantam Chickens, page 293).
- "Except one bottle, which I drank." Marian S. Church 1954
(NPA Newsletter).
- "This too shall pass." Ed. M. Blaine (G. H. sage).
- "What - me worry?" Alfred E. Neuman (Mad sage).
- "Don't bet everything on one bird." Racing Homer adage.
- "There is no freedom of thought without doubt."
Bergen Evans 1946 (Natural History of Nonsense).
- "I have made it a rule never to smoke more than one
cigar at a time." Mark Twain (speech on 70th birthday).
- "Poverty never succeeded in degrading our family."
Sam Levenson 1949 (Everything But Money).
- "Behold! It is good!" Satan on sin.



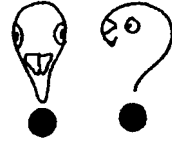
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PREFACE

Prenez-Garde – Achtung



Unlike some periodicals in other countries, American fanciers' journals do not pay for articles and illustrations. As one result, we get an effervescence of undisciplined contributions, which the editors utilize as best they can, depending on page space available after the ads are laid out. These publications are the strength and the weakness of our hobby.

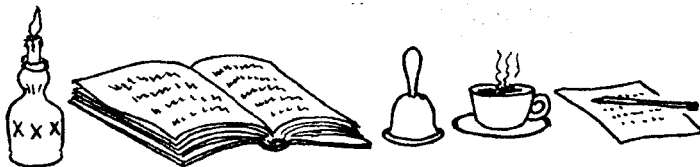
As with other hobbies, we start with an infatuation – the pigeons captivate our fancy. One thing leads to another, and before we know it all sorts of complications enmesh us. Friends, clubs, swaps, sales, buying, competitions, politics, diseases and predators, thieves, neighbors, accidents, honors, you name it. Sometimes we get so discouraged we almost quit.

And we may get interested in deeper things: psychology, genetical puzzles, art, history, medical problems. Wild theories may grab us. We get the urge to tell the world, and off goes a half-baked contribution to some editor. Over the years I have submitted quite a mess of such, and a fair number got served up to the readers. In 1965 a collection under the title "Doo Tell Doc" was issued. as a "bonus booklet" by the National Pigeon Association.

Now another collection of left-overs is dished up under the title "H*A*S*H" (hopefully interpreted as humor, acidity, satire, and hope). Don't consume too rapidly — mental indigestion can develop. The only antidote is communion with the birds.

Resemblance of characters herein to fanciers living or defunct is coincidental. Several misguided friends have actually aided or encouraged this publication: the type-setting was done by Mrs. Ida Morgan, and AGHA (Amer. Giant Homer Assoc.) members are owed special gratitude.

WFH



1980

THREE CHORES FOR US

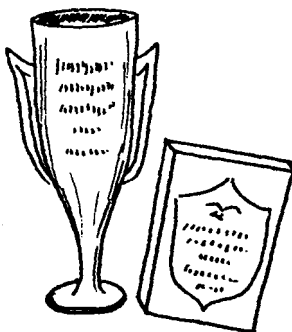
As 1972 disappears from the calendar, and resolutions for the new year are due, I think we should evaluate priorities. Here are some scintillating cerebrations I've selected.

(1) Adding up all the club dues I've paid out in the last ten years, I get a total of \$385. Even with inflation, that seems high for the value received. And there is no great prospect of a change for the better. Furthermore, as I shall probably have to go on Social Security pretty soon, well, I'm going to work for consolidation. For example, why not the American Giant Homer, Runt, Roller, and Indian Fantail Association Unlimited. Just imagine the economies possible, the added stature of being an officer in a bigger club, the greater democracy.

(2) Something has to be done about my poor winnings at shows. I find that over the years my birds have consistently never got a prize. Somebody else is always getting the swag. It has now dawned on me that maybe my stock just isn't quite as good as it oughta be to compete. Well, I have found out that if you get some awful disease in your flock, the govt will have the whole shebang disposed of and indemnify (pay) you a good price. So I think I'll get hold of some Newcastle or something and call them in. Then with the money I can buy some top blood and start winning.

(3) Now that the price of soybeans has gone up higher than the best peas, I find that making a cheap balanced ration is getting almost impossible. But I notice that the pigeons down by the railroad tracks are doing beautifully on waste. Therefore I think the ideal situation is to move across the tracks and take advantage of beneficent largesse with greater freedom. Let's go!

— O.T.R. February 1973



ALL FOR THE BEST

"Only twelve hundred birds in the show this time." he says. "Some years back we hit two thousand."

"That's quite a drop" I says, "too bad."

"Quality is better now, though," he says. "They used to put any old junk in to fill the holes. Now they don't."

"Well," I says, "that's good for sure."

"Harder on the judge now," he says. "They save money by working him more. Really should have two judges for this."

"Only one judge?" I says. "That's bad."

"Of course he's the big cheese here. What he says goes."

"Well that's good," I says.

"Can't ship any birds in these days," he says. "Everybody brings 'em along. Express don't handle 'em inside the state."

"Gee, that's too bad," I says.

"Of course, this way they get handled better. And it makes more guys show up for the show too."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," I says. "Good thing."

"But if they really can't come, then their birds usually can't come either. And then there's this gas shortage."

"Yeah," I agrees, "that's getting bad."

"One thing I'm glad to see these days is more kids and even girls and grown women showing."

"Oh," I says, "well that's good."

"Most of 'em don't stick with it, but I say you got to have fresh blood and new ideas. The old stand-by guys wear out."

"That's very true," I says, "and it's too bad."

"One thing I never did understand," he says, "how we can get more people to take up pigeons."

"They have to see that it is a good hobby," I says.

"Not that we want every Tom Dick and Harry in the game," he goes on. "It's hard to get rid of the poor sports, you know."

"Yeah, they are very bad," I agrees.

"Mighty few of them, though," he says. "It's about the cleanest and fairest class of people there is."

"Yes, very good." I agrees.

"But all them city ordinances are against us."

"It's too bad," I agrees.

"Of course, some guys' lofts is a eyesore, and that's one way to put pressure on 'em to improve or quit."

"Yeah," I says, "a beautiful loft is a good thing,"

"But the birds is the thing. No use having a pretty place just for culls."

"No indeed. That would be bad."

"And I know some master breeders who never did clean out their loft. They concentrated on quality blood."

"That's very good to concentrate on," I says.

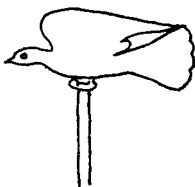
"The main trouble is when the birds get too many. Overcrowding makes for sickness, don't you think so?"

"Yes indeed, it is bad," I says.

"I always butcher 'em. Don't sell sick birds. Always be sure the customer gets his money worth."

"That's good business," I agrees. I stands up, getting ready to leave. "Too bad I got to run on. Good-bye."

— APJ, December 1973, p. 728



GOLDERN SOME OF WHICH PISH & TUSH

The day of miracles is here but it's getting dang near impossible for some people to to talk to each other. Either they's taken or given offense. Nothing makes a good guy maddern to be criticized on something he thought he was doing his best at. Such as judging, or writing a book, or growing face fuzz. And a good guy made mad throws righteous anger like a porcupine does quills. My porcupine pigeons throw 'em every molt.

From my long and extensive experience with many and varied clubs, associations, societies, and other organizations, I have learned that there are several necessary conditions for them to prosper. If you disagree with me I'll be sore as hell. First, all the members and officers must be convinced that they have a mutual enemy, usually some competing organization. For example, nothing strengthens a town club like the threat of an ordinance against pigeons. Second, every member should be either elected to some office or appointed to some committee or awarded some honor, whether he or she deserves it or not. Third, only the secretary-treasurer should have any duties, and he or she should have a stenographer-secretary to do the work, so don't elect a poor man to that office. Fourth, the dues should be high so everybody will realize that the thing isn't open to deadbeats, and the money should be spent on things the appreciate, especially themselves. Fifth, members who step out of line should be given a public honor for something else. Sixth, lemme see, that one slips my mind just now.

Anyhow, you can't hold a club together by holding a club over everybody. Only miraculous cures will work.

— AGHA Bull. March 1970



CLASSY COLUMBA CLUB OF CA PROMOTING PECUNIARY PLENITUDE

ENE MENE TAKUM CATHARSIS, or BABEL REVISITED

We was getting this new club started, see, and the 3 of us was setting around Ed's table, eating potato chips and chewing the fat. This here new club was a breakaway from the old one cause we got fed up with all the damn gobbledegook rules and them old crocodiles running the meetings. Most of our dues dough seemed to be down a rat hole, too. We was going to be different.

"O.K. now", says Johnny, "so I'm secretary. If we don't have no treasurer do I collect the dues?"

"I vote we don't have no dues at all," says Ed. "We all just got assessed. You know, if something has to be bought, like letterhead stationery, you buy it out of your pocket and every so often we settle up, share alike."

"No good." I says. "Things would get in a mess. Better start out with a pot first. Just so he don't lose it."

"Good idea," says Johnny. "Everybody put in five bucks. Now what should I spend it on first?"

"Well," says Ed, "we gotta have a monthly bulletin. It should be a good print job, too."

"I object," says I. "You know as well as I do that a good print job costs a lot. Besides, gettin good articles is like pulling teeth. Look at all the trashy scribble they stuff in all the other bulletins. We couldn't do no better. People just read a little and toss the thing in the waste basket. I vote we don't have no bulletin at all. No articles, no show reports, no ads, no nothing."

"Wait a minute," says Johnny. "Maybe it's a gimmick. We can get our news into the journal free, and it should be a real attraction for guys — a club with no dues, no requirements, no meetings, no shows, and everybody is a vice-president except the secretary and he can quit any time he feels like it and run away with the pot, if any."

"If every club was like that," says Ed, "it would be from deadsville. Gotta have something besides the damn journal."

"Two against one," I says. "This club will only be dead when we feel that way. After all, what's a club really for? Just promotion? We get so much promotion and commotion we got no time for the birds. Should be a hobby, not a racket."

"You mean we is going to just sit quiet while them old bastards hog the limelight? Why, we just as well fold up and not even start this new club."

"Let em have the limelight," says Johnny. "We'll have the real fun, leisure, and simple life. People will just naturly be attracted to us. Why, just think, back a thousand years ago or so, there wasn't any limelight or shows or promotion, but that's when the breeds were being made, and people enjoyed life."

"Yeah," says Ed, "but feed wasn't so damn high-priced then. Well, O.K., let's try it. The Fun Club. But I'm afraid you will have a job answering all the mail."

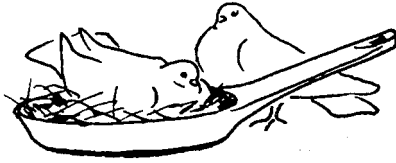
“Simple,” says Johnny. “Probly only a letter a week. I can try phoning back collect if it's a big letter.”

“Better get up a form post-card that'll answer most of the likely questions,” I suggests. “There goes the pot.”

“I'll play it by ear,” says Johnny. He stuffs potato chips In his mouth and gives out with a huge crunch.

So everything is settled and we goes out to Ed's loft to see what his new crop of youngsters look like.

— APJ, April 1975 p 310



BLUE RIBBONS & RED IN THE BLACK

Judging was just over, and Red was practically crying and waving his arms. “Lost again,” he was sobbing. “Never even one trophy. Anybody'd think I was breeding the birds for my health. Look at the price of feed these days,” he goes on. “Yes, just look at this bill I got. Skyrocketing, that's what. How can I sell any birds at good prices if I don't win anything? I 'm going broke.”

“Now, now, Red,” I says, not too sympathetic-like, “you have a decent job and own your own house, don't you? And you got all the kids married off. So things can't be too bad.”

“Not too bad?” he comes back. “You should see my taxes and insurance and all that. Why, I can't even afford a new car.”

Yep, something not quite right in there. Well, tough times demand tough-minded decisions, so I tell Red the obvious solution to his problem is to just get rid of all his birds. But he acts like he thinks I'm crazy. Such gratitude.

Come to think of it, why not cull out about 90% of all the birds in the country? They are certain never to win, even with a drunk judge. Think of the tremendous rise in quality if we use the axe right! And the immense savings in feed, chore labor, loft space, bands, medicines, etc. In fact, it might really get Red's birds out of the red. Is profit a dirty word? Loss sure must be. But how many fanciers ever draw up a balance sheet to figure their income and outgo? Should be an eye-opener.

The ideal budget statement, according to my recollection of economics, gives symmetry — equality of the two sides of the ledger. To achieve this result sometimes takes a little blue sky, or maybe ledger-de-main, but it is a noble idea. Let's try:

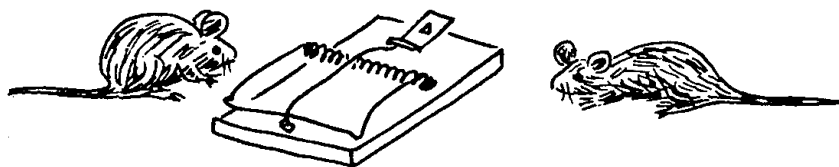
BUDGET STATEMENT 1973

DEBITS		CREDITS	
Feed & Grit	377.42	Cash show prizes	48.00
Bands	6.00	13 birds sold	175.00
Dues to clubs	25.00	Bets won at shows	14.00
Magazines, books	32.50	Loan of stock birds	200.00
Stationery, stamps	13.30	Young birds raised	500.00
Telephone calls	18.71	Squabs for kitchen	50.00
Ads in magazines	62.00	Manure fertilizer	
7 stock birds	140.00	(for lawn & garden)	75.00
Show entries	48.00	Chore labor (mine)	500.00
Air Express	97.10	Ulcer relief	200.00
Plane fare	173.47	Hobby enjoyment	400.00
Gas for other trips	38.66	<u>Educational</u>	<u>100.00</u>
Motels, food, etc.	103.20	Total	1673.14
Loft repairs, paint	113.82		
Water & light	20.00		
Dust mask	2.59	(Note: double check your arithmetic so any errors can be eliminated.)	
Gloves (work)	.84		
Fire insurance, etc.	28.34	(Note: I couldn't figure out the taxes in this mess, but who can?)	
Veterinary, etc.	44.84		
Trophies donated	34.75	(Note: Your debits and credits might not be the same as mine — check on that.)	
Birds given to -	85.00		
Birds died, etc.	100.00		
Depreciation	100.00		
Mouse traps, etc.	4.17		
New lock on loft	3.43		
<u>Total</u>	<u>1673.14</u>		

See how simple it is? Perhaps a bit crude, but if you hire a CPA to do it, that would add on the debit side, and there is no need to split hairs or feathers. With this simple statement it is easy to spot trouble, see where the real leaks are, and find opportunities for improvement and progress. Converting the figures to percentages is a help: divide the item by the total and multiply by 100. For the feed item, you will see it is less than 25%. In other words, percentage-wise feed cost won't change much because inflation boosts all the items.

Yep, the arithmetic shows that feed is a minor item, and winning at the shows is too. Cheer up, Red!

— Round File, September 1974





MINE KINGDOM FOR A CRATE

The telegram said "Ship Monday seventh" with the implication that if I didn't the guillotine would fall or I'd be sued for breach of contract. O.K., I'll ship, just relax, man, only I got to get everything ready in about 15 hours. And last time I shipped, the Air Express agent said no more cartons. Not acceptable, might disintegrate with their gentle handling or if they left it out in the rain.

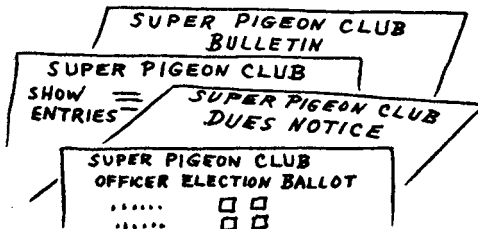
So I start looking for something more substantial. The crates I left out in back are too big for just one pair of birds, and anyway, they are frozen down in several inches of ice. Well, how did I know it was going to flood and turn into Canadian tundra out there? So next I look in the cellar. Ah, a nice wooden box, just the right dimensions. I'll have to paint out that sign on the sides, "AMMUNITION 38 cal." And it will need a top nailed on. That completed, with the aid of the neighbor's power saw, I suddenly had a curiosity about weight. On the scales in the bathroom it's 23 pounds. For two birds? A bit much.

Looking around the house some more, I found an old canary cage in the attic. Just about right, but rather breezy. That round dome shape also, sort of unconventional. . . . In a cupboard there was a nice wire-bound crate, originally for lettuce, I think. Just perfect, except one end was missing. Neighbor has left for the day, so I can't use his saw to make a replacement. Well, his saw blade is pretty dull anyway.

I went to the grocery store and found that all their empty crates had been dumped into the incinerator. I could buy a full one. Decided not to.

My return telegram said "Sorry sale off."

— AGHA Bull. May 1972



WHAT DOES BRÜNNER MEAN?

Beginners in Brünners have wondered about that queer moniker, but it isn't mysterious all — just means “from Brünn.” So what's Brünn? Well, it's Brno. And what's Brno? It's a city in Czechoslovakia, in the Czech or western part of it. Oh, you aren't very familiar with that part of Europe? The map has been rather mixed up; used to be Austria, now and then taken over by the French, the Germans, the Russians. Wars, you know. Those people have been in so many wars you'd think they'd pack up an emigrate to a peaceful place like the U.S.A. A lot of them did.

Anyway, Brünn (Brno) is still there, a big industrial city something like our Cincinnati. It is about 75 miles north of Vienna. It is noted for textile manufactures, chemicals, machinery, and commerce. And like most large cities it also has educational institutions and cultural attractions. Museums, libraries, botanic gardens, old palaces, and other points of interest grace its environs.

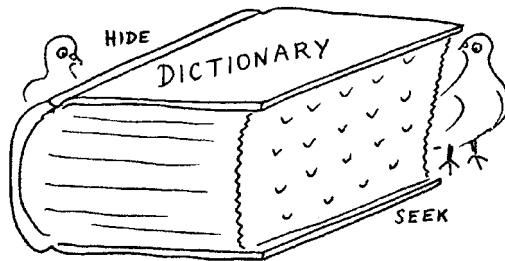
It was at Brünn, back about 1860, that Johann Mendel, a monk in an Augustinian monastery, first figured out basic principles of heredity in garden peas. The climate is good there for peas, and they weren't grown just for pigeon feed. Mendel apparently paid no attention to Brünner pigeons, but his principles have been found to apply to them too.

That part of the world is famous for its fancy and performing pigeons of many breeds, but above all its Pouters. The Stavak or Swing Pouter has been called the Czech national pigeon. This active and adventurous breed with its clapping and swooping is naturally best suited to country life. In the city there would be preference for a cage-show bird, such as Brünner Pouters.

But if you ever visit the old home town over there, don't ask for Pouters—such an outlandish foreign word will only mystify the Czechs. Say the magic words “Brnensky Volac” or “Brünner Kropfer” — when in Brno!

So now you know.

— American Brünner Club Bulletin, January 1971



WHAT ABOUT HOLLANDER PIGEONS?

At the very outset from the first initial beginning it is immediately necessary for me to start primarily and prefatorially with the preliminary introductory conclusion that no "Hollander" variety of pigeons ever had anything to do with the present author, or vice versa. Not guilty!

Natural curiosity prompted me to look into the significance of this name in the fancy. It was obvious that something was in Dutch but less obvious how come.

After considerable blundering around in old pigeon literature, I finally bumped into an article on "The Hollander" by H. P. Macklin in A.P.J. of August 1948, pages 194 and 195. Mac referred to an article of 1905 vintage by Oscar Vorwerk, in the German classic treatise on pigeons edited by Lavallo and Lietze. Mac's German wasn't too fluent, as he noted in a later article on the same subject (A.P.J., Jan 1961) so I checked the original.

Well, it seems that the Tumbler breeders in the German seaport city of Hamburg had been calling certain of their varieties Hollander for a long time, especially the white-tailed variety. Germans elsewhere generally used the obvious name "Hamburg Whitetail". A number of other pigeon varieties still popular in the Netherlands, including some Tumblers, Pouters, Turbits etc., are still called "Holländisch" by Germans generally. But the Hamburg White-tail seems to be somehow special.

In the U.S.A. this variety somehow got a start many years ago, probably brought in by German immigrants. Macklin points a finger at Hamburg, Pennsylvania. Anyway, the name Hollander was mitgebrungen, and the variety didn't die out.

No other articles or books that I have gelesen say anything more informative about these birds, not even the Dutch authority C. A. M. Spruijt. So that should be the end of the investigation. But in the meantime, I bumped into another item. In Levi's *The Pigeon*, 1957 edition, numerous "new" types of pigeons imported recently from Damascus, Syria are described and pictured, and among them is a variety of Tumbler called the "Halabi" (pronounced hollah-bee). It is white-tailed and in other respects also practically a ringer for the Hamburg White-tail.

Amateur detective that I am, guess what, I suspect such resemblance to be more than pure coincidence. Did the German sailors from Hamburg long ago pick up some of these Halabi from ports of call in the Middle East, to bring home to Uncle Fritz, the pigeon nut? Could the name Halabi have been corrupted to Hollander? Or could this all be backwards? But I never read of Tumblers being carried from Germany to the Middle East — that would be a sort of coals-to-Newcastle project, since pigeons have flourished in those hot lands for millennia.

More likely Dutch sailors brought the exotic races home to the North Sea, and relayed them to other port cities. (A good outline of early Tumbler introductions to Germany has been given by Prütz in 1884). But who knows? Anyway, here's a lovely pigeon whodunit. Maybe the mystery will forever be unfathomable, or possibly someone will find more clues, more suspects, more damning evidence. But I repeat once more yet again with superfluous redundant reiteration: not guilty!

— American Pigeon Journal, July 1965, page 199.

ONE MAN'S JUNK IS ANOTHER MAN'S FURNITURE

(or visa versatile)

"Don't tell me I'm wasting money," she says. "You waste five times as much on those pigeons. Just look at the feed bills — seven dollars and a half for a hundred pounds, and how long does it last? And then you pay two dollars for rat poison because you were feeding rats and mice. And don't forget that the electricity you use out there goes on the house, and the water too. And you buy all those magazines and those expensive books and then you lend them to anybody that wanders in and they don't return them. Waste — ha!"

"Well, it's my hobby. And I don't smoke any more."

"It doesn't have to be such an expensive hobby, does it? Why, you spend, spend, at least a hundred dollars every time you go to a show, and what do you get out of it? More birds."

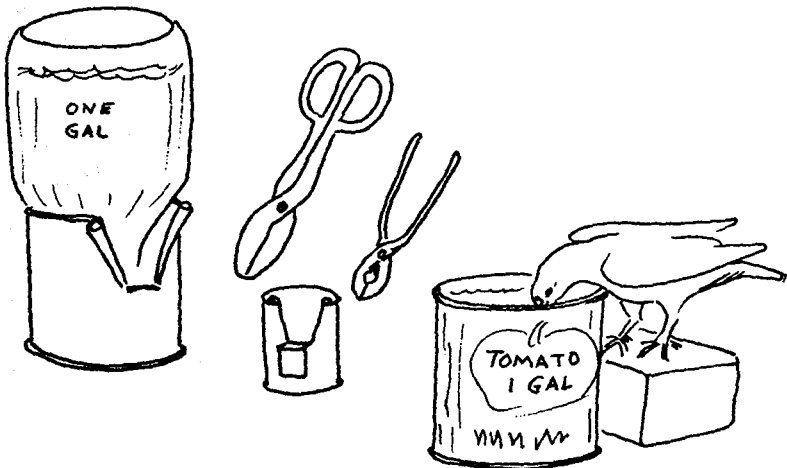
"I sold three at the last show. And you got to remember how many the rats killed. And there are expenses at those shows — entry fees, travel, hotel, meals, banquet, you know."

"And that complimentary ad in the yearbook! Twenty five dollars gone poof. And another thing —"

To make a long story short, I began to realize that we had to start economizing somehow. You'd be amazed how much I've saved this year by thinking twice. Just look at the nice gallon drinking fountain I made from a glass jug and a 3-quart tin can, in ten minutes and for no money. And instead of throwing away tin cans now I make things like feed cups, scrapers, scoops, and even mouse traps out of them.

With all the money I save that way I can go to an extra show every year.

— APJ 1971, p. 247



INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

"Write it down," she says, "or you'll forget it." Why she put the "or" in I don't understand. Anyway, I write it down, on a piece of a torn paper bag, and carefully fold it and put it in the pocket of my shirt. It somehow disappears after that, more likely fell out when I was leaning over to pick up the mail that the wind blue in the ditch, I don't know. All I remember is it was important, like a telephone number or a appointment.

Years ago I remember I didn't forget so bad. Funny thing, I recall sights and sounds and smells and little things from 50 years ago better than what happened two days ago. I guess the old gray matter has got plum choked up so things just don't have no place to get stored. When you get to that stage it would be nice to get a young secretary, but my wife says I'll just have to make do otherwise, like writing things down.

Well, that's OK if you don't lose it. I had a lot of good stuff in a diary but that up and vanished. I don't believe in ghosts, but some things got legs that shouldn't, and I don't mean dogs and cats. So now I don't have the foggiest about what was in that diary. And I wrote a dandy letter to the president, but never even got it to the mail box, it got lost somewhere in the kitchen, and I can't think what I told him in the letter except it was good.

There's one place I don't lose things, it's a big wood crate in the corner by the bed. I throw clippings from magazines and papers in it, and I know they is there because the box is so full the pile is higher than the bed and some slide off under the bed. Why, one of them clippings down under there is about them newfangled computers that got even better memories than a young secretaries out of business school, and the only thing that distracts them is bugs. The article said bugs is the big trouble.

That reminds me, bugs has ruined my collection of fancy feathers. I forgot to put any mothballs in the box with them. Also I forgot to write down what the feathers came from, so I don't even know what I lost. It really is tragic. You know, I started a big picture album some years back, and it got lost for a while. When it got found again, all the people in there was familiar faces, but most of them was a total loss for names or dates or places. It was like looking at somebody else's album. Now I always write on the picture all the facts, but I can't find most of the pictures. Got to get another box.

Sometimes a bad memory is a real advantage, like for not paying on time. I figure if I stall on the taxes and things kind of regular, maybe I'll never have to. But I can just hear St. Peter asking me, "Didn't you forget something? Did you write it down?" Sure enough — must have been the address, went to the wrong place.

— AGHA Bull. May 1974

BAND LIST FOR 1973			
#	HATCH DATE	COLOR ETC.	PARENT PAIR

MACH SCHNELL VIT CHOP-CHOP

It was in one of those uplift magazines my wife gets. I wouldn't read it except I sat on it that evening after dinner. Grasp time by the forefront, the article said. Procrastination is how to shorten your life. Don't be a victim of haphazardry. Use those spare half hours. Budget your spare time, plan ahead. Think — what needs doing? Do it now! Immediately! Up & atom!

Well, by darn that's right, I thought. Why didn't I think of that long ago. After all, if I do nothing, then the something that I could have been doing gets shoved over to some other time, maybe never. If I do it now, then I'll have the other time to do nothing or something else. What should I do? Well, there's about a dozen squabs flying around in the coop that I forgot to band. Top quality birds, but ... I could save some feed.

All fired up, I get a couple of pails and knock off the squabs. Heavy, lots of meat there. With the prices at the meat counter these days they must be worth — I took them in the kitchen and in only about 3 hours and 4 drinks I finished dressing them all out. I felt a warm glow, a proud feeling that at last I was getting on the ball. Another highball celebrated the occasion. I don't sort of remember anything else till next AM, my wife finally got me up, but I must not have seen the late show so I could get up real early.

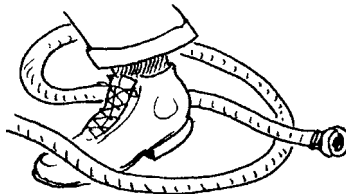
Well I still think I'll make up that lost time now so I goes out to the loft. There's the door wide open, I must have forgot to lock it when I got the squabs out. And half the birds had come out and scattered all over hell. I haven't seen about 20 since — never had been out before so I guess they lost themselves.

Then I remembered there wasn't any feed in the loft, I still hadn't hauled it out of the car. So I went and grabbed both sacks in my angry arms and started for the loft. Never made it — caught my foot on the hose and went sprawling on the lawn. The sacks split and poured feed all over the wet grass. I guess I managed to scoop up about half of it, but I was late to work.

Couple of days later my wife asks me what's in the package in the freezer. Squabs, I says. No it isn't she says, I never put squabs in newspaper. Well, we look, and it was feathers and heads and feet and guts. Never did find the squabs, guess I must have put them in the garbage can.

I found that magazine again and carried it around with the fireplace tongs. My wife sees me and says Now what you doing? I holds it toward the fire and says There's a time and a place for everything. I tears the thing up and tosses it in. I'm doing it now, I says.

— AGHA Bull. December 1973



ONE LAST STRAW IN THE WIND

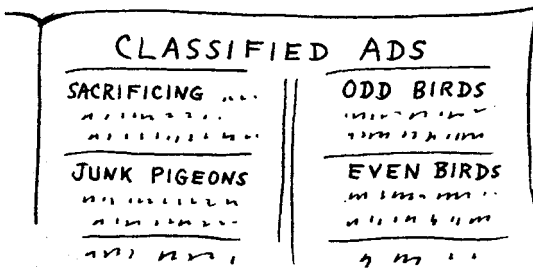
Selling out, the ad said. Some guy who bit off more'n he could chew, so he got to spit out or choke. Or maybe he bought a bunch of over-priced birds and never got to the winning circle. Or maybe he just says he's selling out, you know, going out of business but he'll be back in before he's all out. Or maybe the guy died and somebody is helping the family dispose of the albatross around their neck.

One man I used to know was so jealous of his stock that he had it in his will for all his birds to be killed when he died. Fortunately he was in a coma at the end, so the family and friends practically evacuated his loft in time. I think about a dozen birds finally were killed.

Yep, bloodlines sometimes have to squeeze through mighty small cracks to survive. Even with the support of the Rare Breeds Club, a lot of varieties and breeds can't be popular, and may get down to just a few birds carried by one man. Or if he doesn't pass some on somehow, goodbye. Should we talk about our obligations to the birds or to future fanciers? Or should Big Brother keep an eye on the situation and take steps to whip us back into line? Brother, if bloodlines are in that much trouble, the lifeblood of the fancy is anemic. There have to be self-powered enthusiasts. Just think, if one person in a million really were crazy over Brobdingnagian Pouters, the breed would flourish more than the Dagoon.

To boost a breed there almost has to be a club. Almost? But a club can also be a nightmare of hassling over elections, constitution and by-laws, who gets to spend the treasury money how, etc. A day will come when there will be clubs without all that, just co-ops of real fanciers sticking to fancying. No more selling out.

— APJ, June 1973, p. 337



DOWN IN BLACK & WHITE

I'm not much for cussing, but this time I said "Blank blankety blank blank." You see, in French, blanc is a colorful word. Black you say? Ah, mais non, au contraire! Blanc is white. Oui, monsieur, vraiment! Language is a problem, n'est ce pas?

Well, my profane outburst was occasioned by income tax figuring. I finally went to a special tax expert for help. He asked for my records. "Records?" I says. "What records?" That seemed a fair question, but he rolled his eyes and wiped his brow.

"Everything," he says. "Bring me your salary statement, your bank statements, copies of previous years' returns, receipts, everything."

"Isn't that an invasion of privacy?"

"Well, if you want help from me, that's the way it's got to be." He waved me out of his plush office. I went back home and started looking, but didn't find much. So next time I saw the consultant I explained that I guessed most of the stuff he asked for had been thrown out with the junk mail and magazines.

"Do you mean to tell me," he says, "that you don't keep systematic records of your financial transactions?" I replied that the pigeons kept me too busy to fret over such things. He just shut his eyes and went to work. Well he finally got my returns all ready, and charged me quite a fee. I complained, in vain.

"But I will give you some advice," he added. "In this day and age you'll get into serious trouble if you don't keep all your records in apple-pie order. You better start now."

Well, I decided to do something about that. I went to the stationery store and asked the nice young lady clerk what sort of things you keep records in. By the time she got done with me, I had bought a whole office-supply outfit — a metal desk, a filing cabinet, card catalog, book case, stapling machine, bound record books, rubber stamps, this typewriter, reams of paper, and some more I forget. Takes up so much space that I had to move the bed into the kitchen. I think maybe that will have to be reversed yet.

Everything is so efficient and systematic now, I got to thinking maybe the pigeon records could be improved too. I found a stack of old pedigrees, railroad express receipts, feed bills marked "paid" or "last notice" — mostly several years back, and my band lists. I know I had a list of matings too, somewheres, but it must have got thrown out. So what good was the band list. Anyway, you can see I turned over a new leaf. No longer am I the sloppy carefree fancier of yesteryear. Now I'm a blankety blank automaton, and I'm getting cussed sick of it.

— AGHA Bull. Sept. 1971



FORWARD FANCY TO THE FAR FUTURE

"This is station KRAZY farm and home hour and today we are visiting a pigeon show being held in the armory. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, a pigeon show, and it is sponsored by the Tri-state Pigeon Club. I didn't know that pigeons had clubs – thought they just flocked! But here we are to find out something about this event. To help us we have here Mr. Les Lebensraum, who is one of the judges.

"Les, what do you do here?"

"Well, I check over all the utility breeds and award the places. Have to disqualify some, of course."

"You say utility breeds? What are they?"

"The big ones. Kings, Mondains, Hungarians, Maltese, Runts, Carneaux and Giant Homers They are called utility on account of they make big squabs, you know, to eat."

"Well, I learn something new every day. Who eats them?"

"Rich people. Gourmets. You know, the big shots."

"Well, no wonder I didn't know. So this is an exhibition of wealthy people's pigeons"

"Mostly not. Just ordinary guys. Good guys, naturally."

"Strange. Well, Les, have you been in this er profession very long?"

"Ever since 1939, that's 30 years. Yep, a long time."

"I suppose things were a lot different in the old days, weren't they? A lot of changes since then?"

"Changes? Oh, the standards are a bit different, and railway shipping is out, but that's about all."

"You mean no progress? I thought everything is being improved these days."

"Well sure, quality is better. And you could say air shipping is better than rail, at least for speed. But there's still plenty of culls, and air rates for utility birds get pretty steep, so lots of guys haul their own to the show."

"Has inflation been important?"

"Well, not so much on feed costs. I suppose there just aren't too many middlemen and taxes on it."

"And what kind of feed do pigeons eat? Peanuts?"

"Naw, grain and grit. Some guys use pellets, but I never could see them."

"Very strange. Then pigeons' vision must be better?"

"Not any better than 30 years ago."

"Well tell me now, are the hatcheries automated?"

"Come again?"

"No, this is the only interview we'll have. And I see that our time is about up, so we shall have to say good-bye to the mysteries of pigeons. If you want to know more, go to the armory and see all those hundreds of coo-coo-looking birds for yourself. And now back to our studios —"

SHALOM BEGORRA THE WINNAH — ALOHA

The old verities seem to be making a comeback. People — some of them — are learning ancient arts and skills. They get all prideful about being able to start a fire without matches, to weave baskets, to scrimshaw, to bake bread made from home-made dough including homegrown yeast. Antiques are not merely curiosities but also copied for use. Thousands of new vegetable gardeners are learning that green thumbs mean old-fashioned work. Yep, turning back the clock can turn out great — except with pigeons?

Most fanciers are so preoccupied with shows, sales, and swap-day swindles that they don't realize how far they have left Nature behind. Sure, they cull, they kill off the sick, the unfit, the monstrous, but the desirables that they save and pamper are generally so abnormal that human aid is indispensable. The birds have sold themselves into slavery, and their owners are sort of in bondage too — responsible for the birds' existence. Is that good? Couldn't we go back to enjoying the free birds, with no need to support them?

Insane, you say. The free birds are just commies, and can't compare with the elegant Pouter, the magnificent King, the regal Carrier, the dainty Fantail, and so on. Only a peculiar professor would even think of going back to prehistoric pigeon-watching. No competition there, no prizes, no progress.

No, I don't show. I'm not competitive that way. I don't care to yield my opinion of aesthetic values in favor of one proposed by you or anybody else. If I did show, as a professor of Genetics I might be flayed for winning by means of my professional skills, or I might be ridiculed for losing in spite of them.

Actually, my folly is even more lunatic. Not only do I admire the commie but also I coddle all sorts of culls. Instead of making odious comparisons of beauty and indulging in selective extermination, I try to save their miserable lives and even make a multitude of misfits. My loft has become the dumping ground for your rejects and freaks. Freedom? The old verities? H'mmm.

Well, think back: the prehistoric beginning of the Fancy probably was by guys more like me — nuts who liked pigeons so much that even the peculiar was petted. You know, oddities like feathered feet, or a crest, or clashing colors, or droopy wings. It is true that I go to a bit of an extreme that way, tolerating ataxia, making crazy crosses, and even using a microscope at times. Yep, my tolerance has become a vice. So obviously your intolerance is a virtue?

I don't know. Maybe there is a happy medium, where the old verities are at least recognized again. I hope they can win a place in the show.

— Rare Breeds Pigeon Club Bull., January 1975



SIMON SAYS THUMBS DOWN

Last Sunday Ed drove up to my place and pulls out some crates. “Feast yore eyes on these pinnacles of pigeondom,” he says expansively, “Believe it or not, they are up for sale.”

Must of been a dozen birds in there, near as wide as they was long. “No market here,” I says. “I got all I can handle.”

“You haven’t heard the ridiculous low price yet,” he says, “and anyhow, you really should scrap your whole stock and start over.”

“You would say that. But they satisfy me.”

“Get with it, man — they aint standard. Why, the whole damn Association would call them culls. Get wise and modernize!”

“I never voted for the new standard. I got good old blood lines and I like em. Real dual purpose. Them plaster-cast short-feather birds you got is just for show.”

“You is one man against the Association,” says Ed. “My birds can out-breed and out-live yore long johns. Try em!”

“I did try a pair, remember? They nested on the floor and rats killed em.”

“That warnt no test. And if you claim yores can produce, just tell me how much you made from selling squabs last month.”

“You know perfectly well it isn’t a business with me.”

“Did they even pay for they feed?”

“Well, no, but the family gets to eat lots of culls.”

“Aha! If I had said they was culls, you’d of said no.”

“Just the same, they really produce. I got several pairs what raised 16 last year. Not culls, neither.”

“Why, the whole flock should average that high. How old were them marvels?”

“Not too old, not too young. About three years.”

“Everybody knows that’s the peak age for breeding. If they don’t average high for five years, I wouldn’t call em special.”

“But I’m not pushing em — you know I don’t let em raise from September to January.”

“You can’t baby em like that if you really believe in production. Squab farms don’t take vacations. Why, in that little book on Profitable Squab Breeding by Karl Neather, he says they get best prices between September and January.”

“He aint so smart — that Seamy Squab Ranch he wrote up being so perfect, it went broke.”

“It did? Hmm. Just the same, your birds is too damn long. What did you do — cross Runts in?”

“No, but I think you got Modena in yours.”

"Impossible," says Ed. "Goss never used em."

"Somebody must of. Anyhow, long birds produce best."

"That must be why the squab farms all use Jacobins, Swifts, and Giant Runts. Man, you just don't believe in progress. Feather is all protein, aint it? The more feather the squab got to grow, the more protein you got to feed it. So the short feather bird is got to be more efficient."

"But they always want to nest on the floor. Can't fly good with all that weight on short feathers."

"Well breed em in compartments, man — that ten-foot high pen you got is for regular Homers."

"Too much work. No, I like what I got."

Ed started to put the crates back in his car, meanwhile shaking his head in disbelief. He looked so sad I felt sorry. "C'mon in and have lunch with us," I says. "It's pigeon pie."

— Fanciers Voice, June 1970

— AGHA Bulletin, August 1970



ORIGINAL SIN, COS, & TANGENTS

The good book is deficient in its treatment of technology, and the extent of its science is exemplified by its dictum that figs don't grow on thistles. Much is said about light, but not a word about its speed, wave lengths, or polarization. Pillars of salt are said to have been produced by a transmutation process; salt domes were not even imagined. Squabbles and saviours are the big plot, and sanitation was from superstition.

Blasphemy, but what about blastoderms and asteroids. Yes, and microbes and mistletoe and mushroom clouds. Even economics was scarcely touched on, and the term ethics hadn't been used yet. Yes, the heavens proclaim, but it takes astronomers to witness. And God-fearing men spelled the doom of many of His species.

And now technology and science are at last again being recognized as the villains, the evil forces responsible for the sad state of the civilized world. The irresponsible butterfly-catcher may be pardoned as a minor transgressor, but woe to the atom-splitter and the evolutionist. Probably they are communists in disguise, and therefore abominable atheists.

So what is to become of all the nuclear weapons that these unprincipled agents of Satan have devised? My suggestion is to give them all to Russia. And all the scientists and technologists too. Then we could settle down to the finer things of life, such as football and fashion shows. And on Sundays, maybe a good book.

— Round File, June 1974

SOUND, FURY, & ST. LOUIS

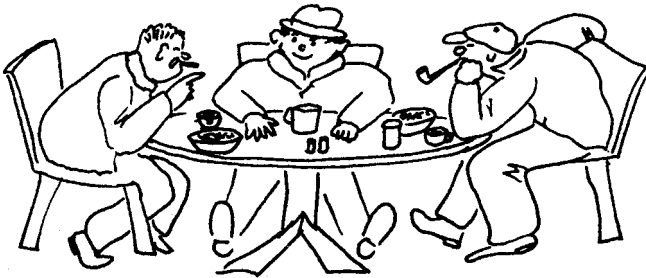
Conventions are for yak, yak, & more yak, day, night, here, thar, & in spite of the somewhat insulated room walls. No use trying to sleep – the yak goes on in your skull. So you just go home to recover, delubricate & delouse (the birds in the bedroom had feathers this time). Well, of course you learn something at these conventions. I learned that I'm too old for this sort of dissipation any more, and next time I should schedule time for at least one swim in the heated pool. Maybe about 2 A.M. like some of the other gorgeous guests who went down like stoned. Anyway, you see I'm not too old to learn, especially with all them indefatigable teachers yakking at me.

Conventions also are for comestibles in conglomeration. Pancakes with chocolate milkshake for me, while my friend has his scrambled eggs with dill pickles and corn flakes. We both grab at the tab but some other big-hearted show-off down the table beat us to it. It is a sure way to make lifelong friends, as well as keeping the cafe management in business. And then there is the bar. Bars are typically kept dark so the customers won't see the swill they are getting to drink; also to save on the electric bill. Once in a while a musical (so-called) act is put on, to the great detriment of one's acoustical sensibilities, which is why I wobbled out. Oh yes, there are also luncheons and banquets in the meeting halls. That's where you discover that your neighbors at the table are quite allergic to your pet subject, not to mention the food.

Well, conventions are also a great time for airing gripes. You wouldn't believe how many there are. They really should be given more space in A.P.J. etc., because they are straws in the wind which could build up quite a storm in time. For instance, I heard no end of complaints about feed prices, club secretaries, show dates, shipping problems, taxes, the weather, diseases and all sorts of varmints, lack of young people to carry on, lack of sympathy by neighbors for pigeons, terrible publicity, etc., etc. But no gripes about high-priced birds, dull speakers, or hard chairs. Interesting. Gripping is revealing, not just reviling.

Yep, it was a blast. Maybe it was an exercise in futility by nonentities, but I don't think so. St. Louis is a sorta incubator for the future, and it even had a Hatcher. Time will tell, maybe. Meanwhile I gotta getta lotta itty bitty data pro rata, so next time I'll be ready to yak.

— Round File, August 1978



RINGS 'N DINGS

It's New Year's day, and the bells have reminded me that I haven't ordered bands yet. Well, some of those early-hatch squabs will just have to get by on last year's bands — I still have a dozen or so left, and it would be a shame to waste all high-priced aluminum. Some guys recycle regular — amazing how young-looking a bird can be with a band that says he's 9 years old, or even more. Wish that youngster with the 3-year-old band would hurry up and molt.

Resolutions: the most important one I made for the New Year is to avoid the unseemly bickering and arguments I got into last year. Just because my bird came in first but Joe Blow got the pool money by jimmying his clock, that's no reason for me to blow my cool and ruin my adrenals. And if the club secretary is a low crook and monkeys with the countermark records, so what — I lose some dough but I keep my self respect and poise. Let the other guys fight over a few lousy bucks. Money isn't everything, and eventually murder will out and bloodlines will tell.

And I'm not going to try to penetrate the ignorance of some character who is spout-ing stupidity. If he wants to believe in fairies and eyesign, let him, and let him pass on his faith to the gullible. The more I have argued with such, the firmer their faith became, so the hell with it. If somebody wants my correct knowledge let 'em beg for it. So there.

And furthermore, I'm not going to raise anybody else's birds anymore. They never believe me when I tell em the dumb youngsters never came back from the first toss. Why should I go to all that bother and have to take all that flak? And if the bird dies, and I return the band, they say I had the bird for dinner. The only way to stop that is to return the whole damn carcass, but then they blame my loft management. Can't win, so they can just keep em.

Yep, this sport should be a clean sport, but it seems most every sport has its spoilsport. Can you imagine a gambling gang without shenanigans? When message-carrying is the big deal, not prizes or trophies, it's a different story. Pigeon messengers apparently originated in the Arab countries — the Carriers really carried something important then. Can't we compete with teletype any more?

And speaking of these ancient Arabs, how did they get along without aluminum bands? Seems to me I've heard they used other kinds of rings, even cut from bones. But I bet they weren't stamped with inscriptions. Those old boys must have had a lot of know-how — and are we smarter? How can we find out?

The big thing that worries me for the coming year is thieves. How do they know which are the best birds? And where do they go? I thought it was just kids doing it before but now am suspicious of out-of-town raiders. Well, I have an idea how to foil em. I'm going to use my odd-balls for stock. My albinos, webfoots. feed-blinds and porcupine-feathered families are never swiped, and wheri I cross them I get perfectly normal racers. So far the swipers seem to have checked bands pretty carefully — I think I've got an idea about how to handle that too.

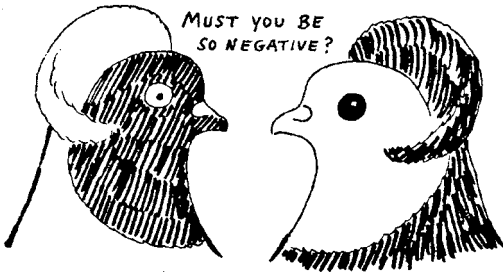
Well, take care. See you around, and have a good year.

— Round File, January 1978

THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS

- 1975: U.S.D.A. regulations ban pigeon shows involving interstate shipments, to prevent spread of new strain of Newcastle.
- 1976: Pigeons linked with Mafia operations; called willing dupes.
- 1978: Peewee pigeons promoted. New breed developed by Iowa breeder is smaller than doves, eats only 1/2 ounce per day.
- 1980: A fifth sex-linked locus discovered, finally permitting accurate mapping of the other four.
- 1982: Express companies ban all shipments of pigeons by air; say let them fly on their own and not pollute planes.
- 1983: Feed companies quit selling pigeon feeds; claim unprofitable.
- 1984: In line with new moral laws, pigeons now illegal frivolity. Penalties for smuggling birds include possible loss of status card for one month. Rewards for informers.
- 1985: Atomic war. Major cities of U.S. and Europe burned out, fall-out radiation severe elsewhere. Overwhelming stench.
- 2001: Pigeons discovered living in California. Extremely small, thought to be effect of radiation.
- 2008: Pigeons promoted as new food source. Thrive in spite of radiation in fields.
- 2009: Pigeon populations decimated by mysterious disease. All people warned not to consume survivors.
- 2015: World population of people estimated now at less than million.
- 2016: Last pigeon dies in captivity. To be mounted in Smithsonian Museum, along with last horse, last cow, last sheep.
- 2070: Chief Sitting Bear returns to Yosemite after 5-year search of North America. Says no white men remain, but found big flocks of wild pigeons in Ohio, called passenger pigeon.

— P.G.N.L. No. 70, page 13 (1970)



PIGEON HOLES vs. ROUND FILE

This nut friend of mine can't bear to throw things away, so he has accumulated a mountain of stuff. I mean mountain — letters, magazines, pictures, clippings out of newspapers, pedigree sheets, you name it. He claims he can find something in there if he wants it, by estimating how deep in the strata it is. Way down underneath is his desk, he says, but I never saw it.

Some fanciers are just the opposite. If something isn't spectacular enough to frame or put on the mantel, zap it goes into the trash. These guys are the Mr. Cleans of the sport, and they take pride in spit & polish. The only trouble is they got nothing underneath. For a gal it might be different.

And then there are the club secretaries. If they have enough business, they may be real business-like, even have an office. Card files, letter-filing cases (metal, with slick-sliding drawers), typewriter, electronic calculator, broad desk top with engagement calendar and African violet plant, Venetian blinds, conference chairs, and coffee-maker (maybe with two legs). These birds are on the ball, Mac, especially when it comes to collecting dues and managing elections. Things get a mite messy though if they have to edit a bulletin.

Me, I'm more ordinary (translate: broken-down tax-payer), but I do like to keep things. Natural-born archivist, treasuring memorabilia. Letters — lotsa loonies leave their lofts long enough to load me with lugubrious language. Here's an example I don't discard:

"Dear Mr Holender, do you no the geanes of piegons for wining prices and are they reccessive? Also what is the best protien? Yours trully, John E. . ." My answer was: Dear John, (1) No. (2) Maybe. (3) Casein. Unfortunately however John had neglected to include his address, so my reply was stymied. Anyway, I enjoy letters and try to keep them accessible. I even reply to most.

Until recently I used to have many a mystery of missing or misplaced missives. Finally a pretty good system has developed, and maybe somebody else would like to try it and improve on it. I got a big supply of 9" X 12" envelopes, which have the flap at one end. I use a felt-marker pen to label the flaps. I flatten all my letters (throw away the small envelopes they were mailed in), and put them in the large envelopes in order. The filing envelopes are kept in cartons of suitable size. The cartons can be stacked on their sides, with the envelope flaps visible at the open ends, so that any one can be yanked out in no time flat or re-inserted. Also unlike metal file cases the cartons ere easy to move or carry. Just have to be sure they are marked SAVE so the wife doesn't act on her delusion that they are waste paper. Of course eventually she is liable to have her way.

Which brings me to the thought that it would be nice, even historically significant, to rescue heaps of correspondence. I wonder, for example, what happened to Leon Whitney's files after he died? Or Wendell Levi's? Or Dr. Burke's? Or E. Lang Miller's? Or Joe Blow? U.S. presidents' papers are carefully preserved instead of being made into bonfires, but a lot of their contents are no more interesting than our own.

— Round File, February 1978

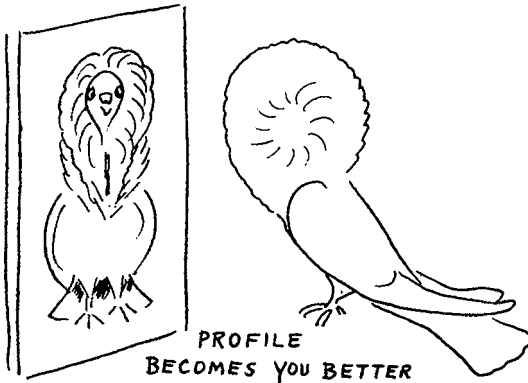
HERE COME DE JUDGE: RUN, RUN, RUN & ALSO RAN

Of course I aint on the inside of this story but I go to some of these smaller shows. This here judge wasnt no specialist on G.H., see, and he didnt know whoms who. And he didnt know he had been picked for that reason. But the boys didnt know the whole story neither. Anyhow, this judge gives top prizes to some birds entered by some Joe nobody knows. They was outstanding all right but there was a lot of crabbin and wonderin who this mystery breeder is.

Turns out he was the judge hisself under a false nom de plumage. Never would have found out if the rascal hadnt drunk a mite too much and blowed his cover. Seems he accidental-like(?) got some squabs out of a Show Antwerp cock on a French Gros hen and damn if they wasnt ringers for G.H. He could of them crosses for fifty bucks easy — big money for poor man's pigeons. But now anybody knows how to make em. That is, if they can find out where to buy Show Antwerps. Somebody seems to have cornered the market.

Which all goes to show that progress sometimes twists around so it meets itself bringing up the rear. Wasnt the G.H. originally built out of crosses like that? So why should we care about the pedigree just so long as the bird fits Hobbs' ideal drawing and the standard? Just because its a Homer dont mean it should be able to fly up to the rafters when it gets loose in the showroom. But some of the boys sure flew off the handle. Well there you is — just be sure to hire the right judge.

— AGHA Bull. May 1969



SACKS OF VIOLETS

I am flattered that you should ask me to contribute a piece de resistance to your honorable publication, and I hasten to comply or reply, as you prefer. You suggest that I give something more technical than is my usual frivolous wont. Well if that's what you want, avast with frivolity and let's get on with the tech.

First comes the problem of what subject I should deal with or out, Since you did not put restraints on me in that regard, I can really extravagate, no? No? Well, how about "A Bird's-eye view of Sex?" Not so good, eh. Maybe "All About the Bones" ? H'mm; too broad; maybe "Vitamins in a Nutshell"? Oh, you prefer the vitamins in a capsule? The hell with that, then. Here's the ticket: "Scientific Judging." Ah, that appeals to you. Here goes.

The principal object of having a judge for the show is to keep him out of the com-petition. Of course we run the risk that he still can recognize his own blood lines in other lofts, but if we are the owners it will probably work out O.K. Now it is imperative to impress on the victim, er, judge, that we want him to use the standard rigidly, watch the adding up of points, be objective, not keep mum about the scores, not tank up on re-freshments before he gets on the job, etc. All this will put him in a suitable frame of mind to do a scientific judging job, especially if his fee threatens to evaporate for any reason.

All this means that there'll come a day probably when we will be asked to be judge. Therefore it behooves us to be prepared when the time comes. It so happens that I have developed a complete procedure to deal with the situation, and herewith present a few of the more titillating tidbits for your delectation. (If you desire the whole treatment, there will be a slight matter of compensation.) Naturally we desire to avoid being the goat at all costs, so the first gambit is to reply that we are delighted to have been honored with the invitation to judge, but unfortunately we have complications which are almost impossible to avoid. If this doesn't deter the guys, and they continue to plead with us, we can reply that the honor is overwhelming, and we are willing to cut through all those complications provided a decent fee will be paid. Decent being about twice the usual. This will usually end the efforts.

If the show committee still wants us, we are hooked. We must then sit down and write out a list of all the possible club members who are likely to be showing. Among them are the sly ringleaders who have some reason to prevent us from showing this time. They must be pretty desperate. They probably have some new young birds that need to get a reputation and they know we could beat em. Well, we can fix that. Phone the most insignificant member and tell him you have to dispose of some surplus young birds and will let him have several at give-away price provided only that he meet a few easy conditions, such as being sure to enter a bunch of birds in the show. When he wins with his culls, you can be ready for beefs of course, but it is too late. We've won.

In the course of the judging, have the Standard handy and consult it occasionally, even if it is a farce. Never smile or let anybody get the idea that we are trying to repress a belch. Give the stewards compliments for their efficient work, even if they did scramble the old and young cocks and hens. Hide the egg that the winning young cock dropped there, quickly. Trip up the best bird (not ours) with the stick, Call out the decisions loud, like barking.

Yep, it pays to be scientific. If we don't get killed.

NP! NON! NEIN! NYET!

There was no question about it. I had swept the boards. Every single first place, every trophy, every variety, and grand champions of both sexes for the entire show. So at the banquet I was called up to the microphone to tell how I did it.

“Ladies, gentlemen, friends, and others!” I warmed to the occasion by taking a drink from the glass on the lectern. It was not water, and its potency pleased the palate.

“Ahem! Your toastmaster has asked me to spill” (another drink) “the secrets of my success. Well, why shouldn’t I be generous and share with the vanquished. After all, the shows must go on, and I won’t live forever.

“First and foremost and” (fine stuff in that glass!) “most American, is the competitive spirit. No matter what the odds, you have to be out there to win. That doesn’t mean being encumbered with ethical etcetera. You have to dispense with sentimentality, and work out the ploys well ahead. You have to know the foibles of the eminent personages evaluating the entries, and if possible help select the parties at unusually high levels of compensation.

“Which leads me to the second secret of success; plenty of fluid” (another swig) “resources. You can’t win with minimal outlay of lucre. You have to keep constantly in mind the accessibility of everything to the flush” (another gargle). “This goes not only for the genetic wherewithal, but also for other impedimenta and instrumentation. Sometimes one has to bid high.

“The third essential” (here I found it necessary to replenish the glass) “is an aman-uensis, which is readily procurable through the application of the foregoing principles. It is vital that this party be submerged from view but submissive and energetic in promulgation of the project. There must be facility of diction and clarity of exposition for the purposes of correspondence, of which there must be overflowing quantities” (glug, glug).

“And that leads me to the fourth dictum of my imprimatur. Always present a cordial” (glug) “facade along with the aura of invincibility and authority. This is a strictly psychological species of gamesmanship. It is fatal to enter acrimonious and negativistic reciprocations. No! a thousand times better to overcome incompatibilities by diplomatic and judicious interpolation of previously unrecognized alternatives, thus reducing friction” (glug).

“And last, in this ostentatious elaboration of agenda for the eclectic entrepreneur, we must recognize the fallibility of simplistic reliance on but one avenue of approach to a fruition. Agility in ersatz must be cultivated. Barriers and cul de sacs cannot always be anticipated, but they can always be surmounted and evaded by the emulation of vulpine deviousness. Like a river” (um . . . ah!) “which may meander but still finds its pelagic portal.

“There you have it, folks, and I’m happy to be of help at any time. It all boils down to having top quality and keeping it in the pink.” I looked in the glass but it was empty again, so I gave the crowd a boxer’s salute and sat down. Unfortunately there wasn’t any chair there. The applause was overwhelming, and just goes to prove my contentions. I had swept the boards again.

MAKE MINE MINI

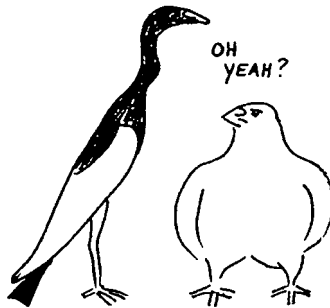
This morning I got an extra hour of shut-eye because we are back on Standard time, so I got more time to think about little things. For instance, I begin to realize that we are surrounded with deceptions. As I stirred artificial cream and cyclamate into my fake coffee, and buttered my so-called bread with margarine, I read my morning paper full of non-news. The radio blares happy messages about great bargains while inflation continues. The President says he's fixing that but we'll still subsidize the SST, which is not the sound it makes.

In case you don't live near a major airport, shipping pigeons is now one of life's little problems. Railway Express is only by truck and air. You figure a reasonable shipping rate, but it's not that simple — double it and you may be close. Or you may be told it is impossible to ship from here to there, so keep your dirty birds and your money. If we just had some way to dehydrate the birds we could send by parcel post, but science doesn't seem to have got beyond artificial hearts yet. Even so, shipping weight is an expensive consideration.

The chicken breeders have the answer — bantams. Perfect little replicas of the great Cochins, Rocks, Cornish, etc. It's a challenge, men. Let's do it with Giant Homers. Might be a bit of a hassle over naming the result; should we call 'em Miniature Giants, or Giant Dwarfs, or Wee Whoppers, or Itty Bitty Biggies? Well, the deception won't be out of line for the times, not any more than calling them Homers.

Well here it is evening, and where did that extra hour go to? Fooled again. Do the little things really count?

— American Pigeon Journal, February 1971, page 104.



THE WRITE PRICE FRIGHTS

Dear Mr. Smith, I seen you're add in the A.P.J. you say various breeds send stamp well do you have anny Giant Homers or White Kings I like them a lot I am bilding a good house to keep some. Please right soon and their is a stamp for you. Sinsereley yourse

Jonathan Edwards

P.S. I am in a hurrray.

Dear Mr. Edwards:

I have two pairs of White Kings left that I will let go for only 50 dollars.

Yours truly,
Jesse J Smith

Dear Mr. Smith, Thats a afful steap cost for onlie 2 pairs I have got another offer for Giant Homers \$15 a pair please tell me more about the White Kings and I posible will by them for \$30.

Yourse trully
Jon Edwards

P.S. How old is they.

Dear Mr. Edwards:

I could not sell the 2 pair White Kings for less than \$40. They are in the prime of life and from excellent blood lines and have been entered in shows. If you wish to correspond further please send stamp.

Yours truly,
J.J.S.

Dear Mr. Smith, Hear is \$35 I wont go no more for them and when will you send them them. Also where because we dont have no air port in this town.

Sinsereley yourse
J.J.S.

Dear Mr. Edwards:

Although it is difficult for me to part with these beautiful birds I have decided to accept your offer of \$35. If you will give me your phone number I'll send them next week to the Des Moines airport. They will telephone you on arrival.

Yours, truly, J.J.S.

Dear Mr. Smith, I dont have no telaphone my next door nayber lets me use his some times his number is 4523. Did you no it is about 125 miles to Des Moines.

Sinsereley yourse, J.E.

Dear Mr. Edwards:

That phone number you sent is incomplete. Anyway I plan to ship the birds Tuesday morning marked HOLD FOR PICKUP. They should get there within 24 hours so you get them Wednesday.

Yours, truly,
JJS

Dear Mr. Smith, I went to Des Moines yesterday like you said and I waited all day at the airport. They got 3 places for freight but the birds wasent at any of them. You are a jip. Send my money back. Sinsereley yourse,

Jonathan Edwards

P.S. Hurray.

Dear Mr. Edwards:

Please accept my apologies for inconveniencing you. An emergency arose with unforeseen difficulties that prevented my getting the birds off to you. I tried to get you by phone but was unsuccessful. Unless I hear from you to the contrary, I will ship next Tuesday without fail, and you can pick them up Wednesday at United Air Freight. Again I apologize.

Yours truly, JJS

Dear Mr. Smith, well the birds arived finely but the air freight people charged me a big bill for the transportion why didnt you tell me you was sending them collect I would not of bougt them. Well the birds is now in there new house it still needs some more fixing. Say they dont fly much does they. Also why dont they eat all there feed they leave a lot of the corn on the floor. Whats the mater are they to fat.

Sinsereley yourse,

Jon Edwards

Dear Mr. Smith, I wonder if your sick I didnt get anny anser to the letter I sent you last month well one of the White Kings died I think she was no good she never went into the nest box I use nale kegs for nest boxes. You beter send me another hen or else \$10 for refund.

Sinsereley yourse,
Jonathan Edwards

Dear Mr. Smith, the White King cock mated with a blew checker Giant Homer hen will that hurt anything she left her other mate and she has got eggs I dont know who is the father. The other pair of White Kings laid only one egg and it got broke. They is making another nest now. Do you have any advise.

Sinsereley yourse, JE

Dear Mr. Smith, I'm getting tired of wating for a anser and a refund. Also I notissed today that the White Kings leg bands is all cut does that get permitted in shows the bands I bougt from the King club is not cut. The Giant Homer hen has a black squab, so the King must not of been the father. Sinsereley yourse,

J.E.

P.S. Hurray.



NOBBY NOTIONS OF NUTRITION

They say one can learn best from one's mistakes. Back in 1936 when I was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, I decided that there were undesirable aspects to the use of a mixed grain ration in experimental studies. The birds just refused to agree with well-planned mixtures – one bird would pick out the corn, and another bird would pick out some other grain. These preferences were so strong that standardization of the food intake was hopeless. So I wrote to the Purina company, explained my observations, and said that a pelleted formula was needed to overcome the problem. To my surprise, I received about 100 lb. each of three different formulas to try out. I put one breeding pair on each, and after about six months reported the results to Purina. One of the formulas had good promise — rapid growth of vigorous squabs. However, I noted that the pellets crumbled considerably, and any dampness ruined them.

What Purina did about pellets is more or less history. Meanwhile, I had second thoughts. Those preferences of the birds were not so much idiosyncrasy as signs of physiological need. In other words, the birds usually had a good reason for their choices, and we should try to understand. I observed that when the birds had growing squabs to feed they usually preferred plenty of peas, while other times peas did not appeal to them. My interpretation was that protein need was demonstrated: peas have much more protein than most other grains. Also, maybe too much protein is bad for birds if they are not in need of it? So, I backed away from pellets and started experimenting with cafeteria (more or less free-choice) feeding. What happened to that is more or less history too.

As usual, things are never as simple as all that. Some old-time breeders and fanciers knew less about nutrition and more about feeding than Purina ever will; and some pigeons really do seem too stupid to choose what they need. Vast stores of new nutritional information have accumulated in the technical libraries – too much for any non-specialist to begin to digest. Even that famous Poultry Nutrition compendium by Ewing is stupefying. But modern reports on nutrition of pigeons are scarce; Purina considers its research results to be trade secrets. Pigeon breeders probably waste millions of bucks just from not knowing what is best to feed, every year, and how.

As I hope I have made plain already, I don't think there is any single "best" feed, at least not for everybody and everywhere. At present I am giving my birds whole yellow corn (about \$2.00 per 100 lbs.); pellets for pigs (swine!) containing 35% protein and all sorts of other goodies (including salt); oyster shell or calcium carbonate limestone chips; and water, all pretty much ad libitum. It is best for my immediate purposes, and the birds in general can breed well on it. But for someone else it might be quite bad, especially if he is not located in the corn belt. And I have some pigeons that absolutely would starve rather than eat those pig pellets, so they need special accommodation. As if that were not bother enough, I find that some other birds eat too much of those high powered pellets and get gout!

Nutritionists have at least two grand concepts that we all vaguely recognize and should probably strive to know a lot more about: (1) balance, and (2) plane. You can have beautiful balance at a low plane, for example, like in rationing; or you can have bad balance (say a vitamin deficiency or an excess of sugar) on a high plane. Or other juggling. The proof of the diet is results, but to some extent we can predict from previous knowledge. I'd say that most of us have little appreciation of the serious or even fatal consequences of imbalances, and how readily they can occur when we aren't expecting them. Just store a beautifully balanced pellet feed for a year and it will be so imbalanced from oxidation that it is actually toxic. So what happens in 6 months? or 3 months?

A few more observations from my expensive experience may help scare the post-prandial pleasure out of you:

Pigeons think hempseed (from Marijuana plants) is super.

Pigeons allowed liberty will scrounge various items, including elmseeds, hackberries, grass, snails, pillbugs, etc. The spring and summer of 1969 I let a flock fly free, and they proceeded to devastate our growing vegetable garden. Sprouting peas, beans, corn, beets, tomatoes, lettuce, etc., were picked to death. Also a lot of young weeds; good way to start a desert.

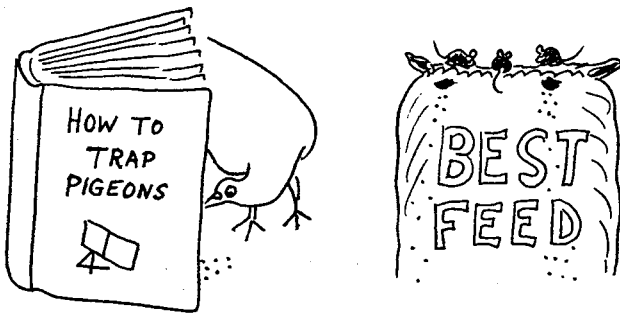
Two different samples of corn or other grain can be very unlike in feed value, depending on care during storage (spoilage from moisture, mold, etc.) and also on variety. We shall probably be hearing more about the virtues of "high lysine" corn soon; one of the imbalances of ordinary field corn is its skimpy content of this component of protein.

Pigeons raised to maturity on pellets exclusively have degenerate gizzards. Shifting them to a grain diet can be fatal. From my limited observations I think the gizzard is permanently ruined as a grinding organ.

Arsenic is added to some kinds of pellets as a tonic. Apparently it takes very little to make pigeons waste away to skin and bones though the plumage may look beautiful.

I've learned a lot from other mistakes too. Have you? How about more confessions before Father Barnhart?

— AGHA Bull., November 1971



DIS WAY TO DYSPEPSIA

A new soft drink? No, just a description of Dad's daily disasters in the dovecote, or why didn't he drop dead.

It all started with the fountain, a big sturdy 5-gallon one that lasts over a week for the birds, so I just regularly tend to it every Sunday. Well, I was kind of busy with other things when this early winter hit, but one morning the birds wouldn't eat — they just milled around looking desperate somehow. Next day one was dead the others looked miserable. I thought some terrible disease had arrived so I got some Socko-strep to put in the water. Imagine my surprise to find the fountain a completely solid ice-cake, sort of swollen out of shape.

To thaw the fountain I took it in the kitchen and set it on the floor. I borrowed a dishpan to take out to the loft for the birds to drink out of. Never carry a dishpan full of water. Just take my word for it, there are better ways. After I changed my clothes and otherwise remedied the situation, and the birds at long last got a drink, I was about ready to dash off to work. But I remembered I hadn't fed the birds yet. Rushing to get some feed I stepped on the edge of the dishpan. Actually I was only about a half hour late to work, not too bad.

When I got home there was water all over the kitchen but the fountain still had a big cake of ice in it. Finally got it out but the fountain was split. I patched it with bubble gum.

Next morning the dishpan was solid ice and bulged out at the bottom. I bought a new one for the wife. This time I was so rattled I completely forgot to feed the birds. Oh well, I made it up to them that evening, along with fresh water. Only trouble was I saw a mouse running around and tried to stomp it. Them mice are mighty fast in spite of the cold weather, and before I got him I stomped the edge of the dishpan. The birds were too scared to eat.

Next morning I put the fountain back with a light under it to keep it from freezing. By evening the whole loft floor was covered with wet ice. Guess the bubble gum failed.

Back to the dishpan. This time I rigged a guard so I wouldn't step on it. Unfortunately next A.M. as I turned to go out of the loft I slipped on the icy floor and wound up sitting in the dishpan. The birds made strange sounds — maybe laughing.

Things looked bad for the weekend and a show was on the calendar. I had to get some birds ready. They acted mighty spooked with all the excitement, and wouldn't you know, somehow the best hen lost all her tail feathers in my hand, every one.

I quick made a dandy new carrying crate to take the birds to the show. It had slots for 8 birds. Got the birds all settled in it the night before, and actually remembered to dump the old dishpan, though it was hard to get it off that icy floor.

Early next morning I was ready to take off for the show. I grabbed the crate and discovered it was stuck to the icy floor. Giving a big heave, I yanked it loose. At least, I got the main part of it loose — the bottom stayed on the floor, and all the birds flapped out.

Finally got to the pavilion for the show, but nobody was there. After some phoning I learned that I was a week early.

Well, such is life for the intelligent, provident, and competent fancier I'm just glad there were no Friday the 13ths or other jinxes, but maybe there was a water witch?

— APJ March 1977 p. 190



PITY YE POOR PLANNER

All that pious garbage about the meek shall inherit the earth was before atomic warfare, but it may still apply. Arrogant people won't want the old globe then. Meanwhile we got to consider planning for the more immediate future, so what we need is a good big calendar, a pencil, and a special time each day to sit down and schedule things. I do this at night, just after writing in my diary and just before I turn in, over and out. In my mind I visualize all the things that I have to do tomorrow and simply write them on a slip of paper with all the hours of the day. Then the next day I bounce out of bed and go down the list, zippity-dip.

Of course some of the agenda are so obvious and unavoidable that one does not need to list them at all. Such as eating breakfast — who would forget that? So today my list said only to leave for work at 7:15, a little earlier than usual, but I couldn't recall why. Next time check was for 8:15, to contact Mr. Mack. However, about 7:45 I discovered that I had forgot to shave. Now this might not bother a women's lib person, but me, I turned around and went back home. That upset all my careful scheduling, and the day was a disaster. Well, at least I could resume when I got back from work in the evening — I figured on banding some squabs, doing some cleaning in the loft, and writing a letter to the club secretary about that coming show.

Fine & dandy only some visitors showed up and wouldn't leave until about 9:30, after coffee & cookies. Then I realized I had to do some income tax stuff, and some bills had to be paid, and a good TV show came on at 10:30, and I'm tired. No diary tonight, and the calendar can wait too.

Move over, all ye meek.

— Round File, May 1973

WILD ROCK & ROLLER

Once I read about chickens doing better with music in the henhouse so I put a radio in my loft and had it playing 24 hours a day. The birds got used to the racket all right but after a few weeks the thing went PHFFT, put out smoke, and quit. I thought all that hot jazz done it but investigation showed that a mouse had shacked up among the tubes and chewed the wiring – short-order fry.

Another good idea I got once was to use a vacyumb cleaner to keep the dust down in the loft. Worked real good after the birds got over the notion that the hose was a snake, but after a few weeks it developed holeyness and choking noises and finally blew a fuse. Same problem — my loft was so clean that the mice figgered the machine was the best place to live, and chew, and die.

With all the difficulties about shipping these days I had a great idea – get half a dozen orders together and take em myself in the car. By charging ten bucks per order I would get my expenses, the buyer would get his birds delivered to his door in good shape, and I would have a bit of vacation. I even got a paying passenger who didn't mind all the crates. Well, the trip was only supposed to last 4 days but it took seven because of several things. The first customer lived out on a country road and I got stuck in his drive — never saw such mud. He wasn't home and I wasted half a day there. The next customer looked at the birds and said he didn't want em after all, but after a couple of hours of yakking he did, at a reduced price. The third customer was real nice and persuaded me to stay over night there so I chopped his price down too.

Well, I got along pretty good till on the way back my car got a terrible noise and I had to get a new water pump. While I was waiting in this town a blizzard hit and we was buried for a couple more days. Things wasn't too good when I got home neither. Well, that's the last deliver trip for me. I'll let the customers come pick up their birds here or maybe use air freight,

In order to save some feed money I heard pig pellets is good so I bought a bag, and the birds liked them real good. After a few weeks some birds couldn't fly. They looked slick but was skinny, and some died, so I got suspicious. Then I found out that it was arsenic poisoning — I don't know how the pigs stand it. Decided to read the tags on feed bags after that.

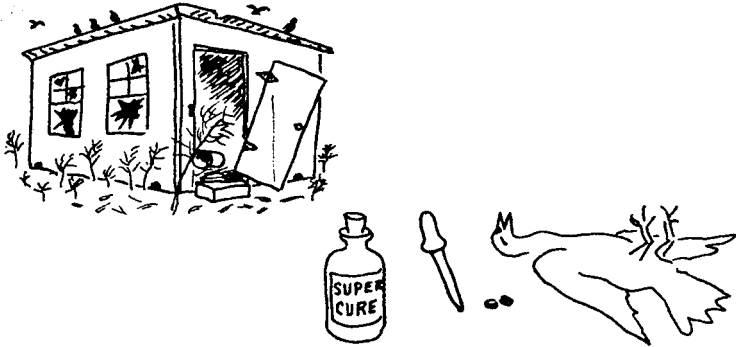
Another thing I heard was good was to worm the birds ever so often, so I bought a batch of worm medicine and put it in the water. I never saw a single worm, so I increased the dose ever day. After a week or so of no worms some birds died, so I got suspicious again. I think the birds died from not drinking anything.

Sick pigeons are rare in my loft, but I used to lose lots of baby squabs, just died in the nest. I finally figgered it out — the parents got off them at night and they chilled. And the reason was mice again. I set traps all over and got dozens. Also got one of my best hens — don't know how she did it but she got her head trapped.

I was going to say something about Rollers, how they didn't originate in Birmingham or even in the town of Pensome. They really came from Greece or Persia. Maybe Noah had a pair on the Ark. I wonder what sort of cages he used, and what he did for windows.

Well, I got to get a new water fountain. The light bulb under it burned out and the thing froze and busted. Next time I'll have two separate lines, two lights. Great idea, no?

— APJ April 1978, p. 210



SOME LIKE IT RARE

Once upon a time there was a little breed. It was very little. People thought very little of it. That was only fair because it also thought very little about people. Finally it got thought of a little too little, and it disappeared. Then people began to think a little more about it. They made little laments about its extinction. But it wasn't really extinct, it was just a little handicapped by not having a club. Well one day somebody found a little stud of it way off in the boondocks, owned by a yokel who liked the birds but little cared about the proper name or a standard. The birds were a little rundown, but with a little care they snapped back. They made quite a little news, like a live dinosaur only littler. Being a rarity it was now considered a little more valuable than diamonds. Lucky owners made a little killing, and sold all their culls little cheaper than the best. It would have been a little strange if this could continue, and it didn't more than a little while. The birds became a little too common, so the prices collapsed. That took more than a little of the popularity away, and people thought very little of the breed again. In fact they thought so little of it that it disappeared all over again. This time there was little worry. After all, only a little while before, it had been rescued from extinction. But little did people realize that this time it was really kaput, because no yokel had been able to afford to buy it. The owners had made the little mistake of wringing the little birds' necks instead of selling cheap. So now it's a little too late. The little breed is really gone. But nobody is worried yet. With a little expense maybe it can be imported from some other country. Some little old country like Germany, maybe. Maybe we got a little too much variety in our shows anyway. Out of sight out of mind. Let's be a little sensible?

— Rare Breeds Pigeon Club Bull., January 1972

RARITY, PARITY, CHARITY, and HILARITY

Back in the good ole days the state fairs (and others) allotted prize money for every breed shown. Consequently, there was an incentive to diversify. Also, there was more incentive for the ignorant public (and others) to come and gawk. Who calls the tune nowadays? And who encourages the public to clutter the aisles?

Looking sideways at the dogs, I notice that in spite of the myriad of breeds and millions of breeders, mongrels are still not rare. In fact, some subversive souls are exploring all sorts of crosses. They are undermining the purebreds with such hybrids as "Peke-a-Poo" and "Cock-a-Poo" which could all become extinct yet be recreated at will. How's that for immortality. And the arithmetic is fantastic — with only 10 breeds, for example, there are at least 45 first-crosses possible.

Here in the U.S., most of the breeds and varieties of pigeons available trace to supposedly pure types imported from the western countries of Europe. The breeders there had in turn brought many of the types from more Eastern lands considerably earlier. It is difficult to ascertain in other cases whether a supposedly indigenous European breed might not have been merely an import under a newer name. And the indigenous types probably were developed from crosses of previous imports. Try to put your finger on a truly ancient pure European type. Anyway, we are often bamboozled by names.

Modern Kings look amazingly like Maltese of a century ago. So while the Maltese has become a rare breed, its genes are mostly flourishing under a new cover. On the other hand, the Squabbing King is less Maltese than Roman (Runt) in type, and it too is becoming rare. Should we bewail such turns in the wheel of fortune?

Is the Indian Fantail a rare breed? There are thousands of them in India, even without a club to boost them. In the U.S., the Indian Fantail is strictly a product of crossbreeding rather than importation — an excellent job of imitation or duplication, but no loss if it became extinct. I can hear some Indian Fantail breeders cussing me out — "No loss?! Why, we'd lose thousands of bucks)" Ah, yes, but that's only money. Well, I'm not really advocating extinction, just sensible perspective.

Is the Egyptian Swift a rare breed? I would guess that it is, even in Egypt. Do you feel upset that it may be actually extinct? Or if it isn't, what contribution would you make to assuring its adequate conservation? Or do you think it could be recreated at will from crosses?

Ah, I'm too busy with my own breeds to fret about such exotic oddities. The whole thing is impossible — let George do it. He can list them all, keep a card catalog and index, and make up a rating of their importance. Then the government can be invited to subsidize endangered varieties.

I just discovered that all the Lebanons I have left are cocks. Some that are mated with each other are doing their best, but I think time is running out. Anybody got good ideas, or hens? Hey, maybe I can cross them cocks with Blondinettes or Satinettes and make a new breed, the Lebanette. Should really sell.

WHY IS A RARE COLOR?

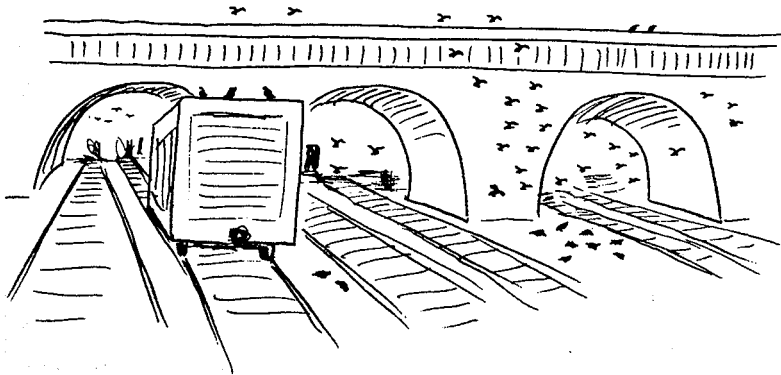
Or maybe the question should be "When is a rare color?" Anyway, Walter Klann asks me to explain why a rare color shouldn't become common. The question is sort of shocking, like when the wife asks "Are all those birds necessary?" There's a very simple explanation, but who listens?

Some people raise an eyebrow or two when I say flatly that Giant Homers are rare. Not merely rare, but practically impossible to find except by experts. The experts, being in the know and not having any difficulty, find my opinion so ridiculous as to be hilarious if not insane. Why, at such and such a show there were 237 G.H. lined up for everybody to see. Just think of it — 237. There were fewer people than that at the show. Well you see it wasn't mentioned in the newspaper, so the townspeople in general didn't know it was being held, much less where. Let's see — it was in the Legion Hall?

So there were 237 G.H. in the coops, and down by the railroad tracks there were at least twice as many commies. Those 237 G.H. came from an area of several states. In that area there are maybe five million commies. So I say G.H. are rare. Now the obvious way to make G.H. common is to trap, shoot, poison, or otherwise exterminate the commies and let the G.H. take their place. No?

Well, the rare color question is quite analogous. Take "Andalusian blue" for example: By fair means or fowl, we could make all G.H. Andalusian blue. But would that make it common? And as soon as we make one rare color common, we automatically keep the others rare. Come let us pray, and rejoice in small blessings!

— AGHA Bull. May 1969



A LUMPER SPEAKS OUT

It is all very nice to have an indexed catalog of the rare breeds with names and addresses of who breeds or has each kind, at least it is nice for the prospective buyer until he tries to buy. Then he discovers that the birds are so rare that they are out of sight in price, or yes, the breeder has a total of 9 birds of which 8 are cocks, so do you want to buy a cock? And so on. Some of the so-called rare ones however turn out to be anything but, when more is known about them.

Well, after studying the situation for quite a while, I have come to the firm conclusion that most of us have been the victims of names. Back in Bohemia somebody called a funny-looking pigeon a “Star” (Starling) and next thing you know here it is in the U.S. by that name and nobody will change it in spite of the fact that it is merely a color variation of the Suabian which is merely a color variation of the Feldtaube which is merely a fancy edition of the street pigeon. Nobody seems to realize that we’ve been had, that types have been split up that never should have been, that we are being spread so thin we are strapped.

The tyranny of names extends to the breeding coop. We are scared to mate an Ice pigeon with a Crescent — Moon pigeon, Mondtaube — but they are just different colors of the same old Feldtaube, and there is no need to keep them separate. Nobody dares mate an English Trumpeter with a German Trumpeter, but they had the same origin and differ so little that it is silly to distinguish them. Even the Bokhara (Buchara, Russian) is just a long-feathered variety and can be crossed okay with the others, but just watch the specialists shudder at the very idea.

And another thing: we fret that some rare “breed” is in danger of extinction, but don’t realize that it could become extinct and easily be recreated — at least, that is true for a lot of them. For example, let’s take the Forelle, a lovely kind for sure. But it is nothing more than a checkered Ice Pigeon that isn’t spangled. We can make it easily from crossing in a bluecheckered Racing Homer or Swallow (did you flinch?). And why go to all the trouble to import more rare types that we can’t handle anyway and could make right here from scratch if we desire?

Maybe a few of you readers agree with me, but what can a few do in the face of massive apathy, ignorance, and stupidity? Probably not much, but at least we can try to get the argument out in the open and keep it going. What better place to start this revolution than in the RBPC?

Some fanciers may argue that lowering the bars to crossing will be fatal to the quality of the breeds, and an invitation to showing and selling cross-breeds. Maybe so in some cases. However, a slight reduction in quality might be well exchanged for weakness from inbreeding in too-small studs. Also, if crossing is “confessed” it can become dignified. For example, the modern Racing Homer was the outcome of a crossing spree, and so was the King, and they can be recreated at will. Not that many fanciers will, but could.

So I call for cohorts: don’t continue to be silent dupes of the purebreeding racket — write in about your experiences in successful crossing, and your suggestions for how to reduce the unnecessary splitting of breeds. You have nothing to lose except a bunch of friends.

ANYBODY WITH ME?

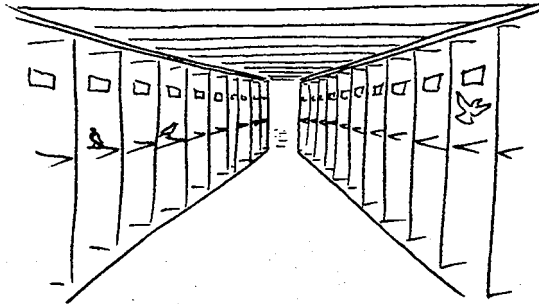
Pigeon shows (and poultry and other shows) are rarely advertised enough to draw in the public. As one friend of mine pithily put it, “what the hell, do we want it to be a zoo?” He didn’t want gawking crowds interfering with the serious business of judging and aisle-gabbing. The ideal show set-up has lots of birds and only those fanciers who show, or buy. The purpose of the show is not educational but to show off the breeders’ expertise, swamp the competition, and exchange views and birds profitably.

Well, I think it is time to consider other possibilities, to organize a different type of show — not just for fanciers, but for the public. Yes, like a zoo. Not just open for a few days but all spring, summer, and fall. Maybe even winter. Not for competition and shop talk, but for education. Maybe then more than one person in a thousand would learn that Carriers are not Homers, that Pigmy Pouters are fun, that Frillbacks have curly feathers, and that the biggest pigeon is a Runt. They might even learn that these are all man-made creatures, dependent on heredity, not feeding magic.

Such a pigeon zoo should be developed for every city. I think it should not be under the whimsical control of the city parks people, but should be self-supporting by an admission fee and possibly by sale of by-products (squabs, fertilizer, feather items, pictures, etc.?). Maybe interested patrons would donate funds, feed, birds, to help support the venture and a favorite breed that can’t be kept in the city residential areas.

Sure it could be a flop. However, I think the chances are better now than winning in the usual shows, and there might be more fun. Who has the nerve to go first?

— APJ, December 1975, p. 892



LIGHT BUSHEL

Every once in a while I try a different feed store. This was a big one, apparently catering to livestock feeders. I wandered around the stacks of sacks for a while. There was one guy stacking, another running a mixer, and a third with a note-pad and pencil, figuring out something, but nobody offered to serve me. After a bit this got kind of old, so I confronted the pencil-pusher.

"Are you the manager?" I says. The man looks up, waves his spectacles on a pinky, and nods his head.

"Is the place open for business?" I asks.

"Yep," he answered raising his eyes to Heaven for help. "What ya want?" The pencil started figuring again.

"Cracked corn," I says, "three bushels."

"We don't sell cracked corn by the bushel," he replies.

"You buy corn by the bushel, don't you?" I asks.

"We buy shell corn," he says, condescendingly. "We crack it ourselves. You see, a bushel of cracked corn don't weight the same as shell corn."

"How come?" I asks. "It's all just corn, isn't it?"

"Just the same, they is different," he replies with a sigh. "So how much do you want?"

"O.K., then," I says, "I want 50 kilos of cracked corn."

"Kilos? You' re kidding. We only sell it by the pound."

"Well, O. K., translate 50 kilos into pounds. I'm waiting."

The pencil wandered around a bit, and he looked at me suspiciously.

"How about 200 pounds?" he says finally.

"No, that's 90 pounds too much." The guy was about to get up to start loading sacks for me when I added, "Oh yes, I also need a pound of ZippoSpray Disinfectant."

"We only got two sizes," he sighs, "a quart or a gallon. It don't sell by the pound."

"A lot of inconsistency here." I says. "All I want is a pound. What would I do with a quart?"

"Do you want me to tell you?" he replies.

"And you don't think the customer is always right?"

"Customers like you can go to hell," says he, turning back to his counter and sitting down. "I don't think you are a customer, anyhow, Mister."

I opened my coat, exposing my AGHA badge briefly, and growled back at him, "Maybe a government inspector?"

"You are?" he blurts, jumping up from his chair. The other two guys by this time had stopped working and had come up to see what was going on.

"No," I says, "just a public-opinion sampler, checking up on the future of the metric system in business. You have told me all I need to know, sir, and you can stuff your cracked corn. Thank you."

Nothing like a badge. Hope I don't need to use it in the next store, though.

— Round File, December 1976



RARIN TO GO

Most fanciers don't know how many rare breeds of pigeons there are, because they don't even know how many non-rare breeds exist. Furthermore, ignorance is anaesthetic. Why try to find out how many people are quietly starving to death in the world if we are holding a good job and still have last month's bills to pay?

Well, let's be conservative and estimate 50 rare breeds, including varieties. I am not anaesthetized, so I want to see all these underprivileged creatures, take their pictures, study their peculiarities, experiment with some crosses. Where can I do it? H'mmmm. One sure place is not the National show. Maybe I should get Stromberg ("Pets Unlimited" — Fort Dodge, Iowa) to help. On second thought, that might not leave any money to pay those regular bills; but that's a perpetual hazard in this venture.

Why can't a pigeon zoo be started? Millions of people enjoy an outing to an ordinary zoo to see a lion, an elephant, a snake, and they already know what those animals look like. Why wouldn't they like to see strange kinds of domestic pigeons? I think it's a great idea that could solve not only my problems but also some of yours. Question is, who will run it? Can somebody revolutionize his life for such an uncertain future? I hope so, and soon.

Where should it be located? Maybe next door to Stromberg's? Certainly not near a regular zoo? Maybe one in every state? Two in some states? Should we charge admission? Have signs reading "Please do feed the animals"? Sell squabs or squab dinners? Wow, looks like a new business. Let's go!

— Rare Breeds Pigeon Club Bull., July 1971.



PALOMINA — OOPS!

When you plan to visit some other country, what do you do? Well, of course there is the passport problem, and the shots, and the money, and packing, but above all you get a dictionary and start to learn the language.

So what is pigeon in Spanish? Aha, I've found it, paloma. La paloma, well, that's a female pigeon. You see, the male is called el palomo. Don't try to abbreviate, because el palo means something totally different, a tree or pole or stick (masculine, of course). The Latins have quite a thing about sex; nearly as weird as the Germans. Now, let's see, oh yes, more Spanish, el palomar, that's a pigeon loft. And la palomera, that's a small dovecote; you see, it's not as masculine as a pigeon loft. Maybe because boys and men usually congregate in the latter? And la palomilla is a young pigeon if it looks female. If you aren't sure, call it la palomita; but if it is male it is el palomino. You would think these people would appreciate auto-sex pigeons, si?

El palomino, then, is a young male pigeon. But if they say you have el palomino on your shirt, they don't mean a pigeon — they mean you have a manure stain on it. And what's more, la palomina means pigeon dung. I guess it is all very logical to these people, and now I think I see why some yellowish-colored horses are called palomino. At least, I don't think the horse people named the beasts after pigeons.

So now you know about all those pal things, pal, and when you go to that Spanish-speaking country, mind that you don't confuse all the pigeons, sex, and off-color words.

— American Pigeon Journal, December 1971 p. 698



ROGER U-TURN OVER AND OUT DO

Every once in a while I hear about some nut who wants to start a squab business. He may even write me or phone me or visit to get my suggestions, especially on what breeds to use, how to get hybrid vigor, or some such problem. When I ask why come to me for help — I certainly have never been a success in the business — he may reply that the books on the subject are all out of date, or the few people who are still in the squab business won't tell their secrets, or he doesn't want them to know that he is about to revolutionize operations. And besides, I don't charge for advice.

Well, few business people think very far ahead — they tend to be optimists by nature. Me, I think the squab business is not going to be attractive for at least 50 years, if ever. Why? Lots of reasons. First, efficiency. Compared with other poultry, pigeons are hopelessly wasteful of feed, space, energy, and caretaker's time. Automation, artificial incubation, production-line dressing, and adjustment of production to market prices are all impossible at present.

Second, a one-man operation will soon wear out the man. There is no relief from work, worry, and Washington. The birds do not understand the notion of vacation, except possibly for themselves. A family operation is likely to be just as demanding and undependable, and an inadequate source of income.

Third, marketing is likely to be governed by competition from other types of poultry and fancy meats. Unless the squab producer can get twice the price of steak, he can't survive. That means that the market must recognize squab as an epicurean specialty, a status-symbol, or a health-food. It used to be so, but now few people have even heard the word.

Even starting a squab farm with the expectation of loss as a tax gimmick is likely to be too much work etc. There are lots easier ways to lose money in farming.

But let's look ahead maybe 50 years. By that time the possibilities of squabs may have changed. Remember that squabs sit in the nest all the time they are growing — they don't run all over or go into mass panics like other young poultry. Development of a grease-gun-type force feeder and suitable mash feed could open up some possible automation, leading to real mass production. And instead of marketing squabs whole, they may be separated into pieces (fillets, legs, wings, giblets, soup) as chickens are now. Pigeon pie — the best meat pie in the world — might come back, at a price.

And a thousand years from now (we should live so long) maybe there will be squabbing pigeons as big as turkeys, as quiet as cabbages, able to lay an egg every other day for half the year, propagated entirely by artificial insemination, fed on fermentation products, flavored with essential-oil additives, and kept in great ecology-recycling buildings.

Yep, got to be a nut to go into the squab business.

— AGHA Bull. April 1975



THE FUTURE OF THE SQUAB BUSINESS

Can you remember when APJ carried regular price quotations on squabs at the big commission-produce companies in such cities as St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, etc.? Well, all of a sudden that was dropped. Not enough squab producers able or willing to sell in quantity to those markets.

Delivering was one of the problems — railway express is no more, and trucking live or iced squabs is expensive. Production dropped to near zero in the mid-U.S. in spite of the local abundance of cheap feeds.

Maybe there is more to the story than that; I have heard it said that the produce companies deliberately helped kill the business — too much bother for the little profit. At any rate, the few squab markets left are in the populous areas of the Atlantic and Pacific seaboard. If you or I desire to start a squab farm in the middle part of the country, we face a stone wall. No bank would seriously consider backing the venture. Sure, we could sink our savings into such a project, but we'd have to peddle the squabs door to door, and that would soon get us into hassles over vending permits even if we could swing it otherwise. Selling by newspaper ad, off the farm might help, but with gas shortages coming up, that outlet could dry up.

I think the seaboard squab farms are on the skids too. The big farms like Palmetto are in the hands of old-timers who know their business but do not have lieutenants coming up to replace them. Some of them are being squeezed by residential developments. The markets are not too reliable, and much of the summer crop has to be put in frozen storage. In California the smaller farms operate with co-op marketing, and much of the crop goes live to the Chinese trade. Inflationary pressures may throttle this any time. How many squab farms dare buy much feed in advance? Can the operator do all the work alone, or must he hire help? Will he have to contend with county or state health bureaucrats who see a menace in manure and never ate squab in their lives? Will the Newcastle disease bugaboo or some other scare bust loose again? How much is proper valuation for fair taxation? Where's a good cheap lawyer?

But let's look at the breeding side. Markets along the seaboard are now trained to take mainly pound- or over squabs, preferably white or at least not too dark. We in the middle part of the country for a long time were sending barn pigeons, Racing Homers, and cull fancies to the produce houses. If we desired to get back into marketing squabs, the natural tendency would be to improve the business by producing Kings and other so-called utility breeds, like the seaboard regions. Is that the best answer? I think not. It takes a big appetite to polish off a pound- or over squab, and people in general are weight-conscious now. My voice in the wilderness says go back to the peewees. Not culls, just commies.

There are advantages to breeding the smaller types. Commies are essentially the wild type and more hardy than the big breeds. They can forage for some of their own feed in many areas, if they are allowed some freedom. With good feed and conditions the squabs are very plump, weighing around 11 ounces, quite a suitable dinner serving. Some are pretty dark-skinned, but they can be labeled affirmative-action Americans. Commies are readily obtainable as compared with so-called utility pigeons; to start a squab farm with Kings etc. would require a big investment of money and time.

So there you go, commies vs. stone wall. Crazier ideas have worked, but don't expect to catch up with the Colonel.

READ LETTER DAY

Having been at the same general address for over 20 years, one begins to realize that the increasing volume of mail does not signify fame and fortune. Rather, you are just on more mailing ad lists, you get more duns, bills, contest blurbs, seed catalogs, sample magazines, political messages, and other goodies which can be used in the energy shortage for starting the fire.

So yesterday I pushed the usual wheel-barrow load from the mailbox to the house, hoping to start the stove soon and get some heat in the house. But to my surprise I found three letters from real people in the pile. This was so remarkable that I had to hunt around for some paper and a pencil to write answers, and forgot all about the stove.

One letter said "Dear mister Holender, my pigeons have bread a new coler and i no you will be intersted becuae you have AOC and such all frekes they tell me you esxpiermint with them and i think that is good for colledge and instutes like Sience. Well my birds is all rollers they realy roll somtimes down in the nehgbors yard and the new coler is realy difernt its uneek so i no you will want to by it. This squab is dun in front and black in the tail i think it will live OK it is realy helthy and it dont roll yet but it will if you dont hurry and by it so let me no what about and dont forgot the winter will soon be hear. Yours truly."

The second letter went "Dear Bill: I am still alive and kicking even though you haven't heard from me in the past year. This will be my season's greetings — a bit late, but that way I avoid the Xmas rush. You will be interested to learn that I got a divorce from my second wife last June. Actually she divorced me, but it was amicable, you know, she never did like the pigeons and all that went with 'em, especially my fancier friends that would come in the house without cleaning off their shoes. Well, I'm now living near a town of about 2000 population so there is no fuss about keeping the Homers. In fact, I let them out most of the time. Main trouble is that no racing club is anywhere near, and there isn't a single fancier in the town or near here. Some kids are getting interested though. Anyway, I hope you will rush down here and visit. The climate is pretty nice, and my new wife has a job so she's away most of the day and the trailer we live in seems quite roomy. We had some trouble about water etc., but get by. Say, did you know pigeons can qualify you as a farmer? I get a good tax deduction from my layout. Well, I need it — income from writing novels and detective stories hasn't been much. Maybe you have another plot I could work up???? As ever, etc."

The third letter was the prize. "Dear Sir or Madam: As research Biologist for the Kalex Corporation, I am in charge of a project concerning use of prolactin. Therefore I am contacting all former associates of Dr. Oscar Riddle for the purpose of establishing a consultantship. I can assure you that compensation will be ample, and work minimal. If you are interested, please let me know promptly by the enclosed return envelope, and I will have the legal forms sent to you for signature. It is important that you list all your degrees, publications, offices in scientific societies, and honors. We plan to set up an experimental colony of doves for the research as soon as possible, but have not located a supplier. Your attention will be appreciated. Sincerely yours."

Well by the time I found pencil and paper my hands were so cold I had to start the stove, and in the confusion I burned up those letters, so thank goodness I didn't have to answer.

— Round File, April 1974

UP A BLIND ALLEY AT THE SHOW

Now that we've got the rare-color mess disposed of, there is absolutely nothing to keep the membership in a bad humor. The legal status of our corporation prevents any nasty damage suits, and the Giant Homer will now and forever become the rich man's pigeon which all pigeons aspire to be, of course. But before the final somnolence one more disturbing kick might be advisable.

With everybody rich now, nobody wants to be show steward. In fact, nobody even wants to think about show chores except awarding prizes. Why should I have to dig up and haul those heavy coops in my own station wagon, and then have to set them up too? And also take them all down and away and clean up the hall? A fine thing for all those other rich guys — they don't need the money so they won't do it for nothing, but me, I need the money and do it free because I'm a host, otherwise known as goat, patsy, or pigeon. With a lame back, too.

We been using the same old style of show coops for 50 years or more. They last and last, but ain't it about time to remodel? Sure, they fold up nice, and that's a good point. But take a look at water, feed, and floors. Most stewards hastily buy a big roll of tar paper for the floors, sprinkle some shavings or sawdust or sugarcane litter on it, then set the coops on it. Then they get a stack of paper cups for water, and put one inside each hole. Sometimes the cup can be fastened to the bars, but some cups don't fit well so they just sit on the floor. After the birds are cooped, free feed courtesy of the local feed store that's on the ball gets shoveled onto the floors, and maybe somebody will think to pour water into the cups. Some water will miss the cup, but that's why the floor is tar paper, ain't it?

So the birds help by being excited. Litter is flapped out into the aisles, water cups knocked down and trampled, feed soiled and soaked and kicked out so people can crunch the peas underfoot. Tail feathers turn green, and feet collect a sticky or slimy padding full of nameless bacteria, viruses, worm eggs, and remains of pep pills, which are later carried to the judging coops and traded for contributions from other birds. That makes for real progress.

It is probably unthinkable that the A.G.H.A. would or could spearhead a revolution in this stewarding business, but I'm suggesting that a page of the Bulletin every issue be reserved for discussion of it, until something happens. Maybe the manufacturers will even start competing to produce better cooping. If they would just include wire floors no litter would be needed and we could see which birds have diarrhea or something (disqualification?). And if proper hooks or loops were provided, the water cups and feed cups could be outside instead of inside the hole. I suppose spillage of feed will be a permanent problem, though, because it's free and we like to heap it to the birds.

And finally — let's consider shows in May and June, when the birds are not moulting and the weather not revolting. Sure, that's breeding season, but we can let the feeders raise the champ's squabs. Us rich hombres can hire a steward to do the chores while we go to the show. But let's not be hosts.

— A.G.H.A. Bull. March 1971

DOWN THE DRAIN

There are two opposing schools of thought about kids. One is that we should give them a boost: help them get a good start, provide advice before they get into trouble doing things the wrong way, donate quality birds (free) so they won't get tangled up with a bunch of culls, and start them showing right away so they will get in the right habits. The other is to ignore the kids: make 'em learn the hard way, sell them culls for a good price, laugh at them if they want to enter birds in the show. Of course there are some fence-straddlers like me too. I don't sell 'em culls, I just give 'em.

The fact is that I have given kids a total of over 700 birds over the years, and not a single one of those kids has become an adult fancier I've asked them how things went. One said the birds flew away (I already knew that because the birds had come back to me). Another said the birds all died, possibly because the water fountain had gone dry from a leak. Several kids had had trouble with cats, dogs, rats, and the like. But most of the kids just out grew the pigeon fever and graduated to hot cars, girls, the army, or some other dignified pastime. So, friends, if you want to make sure that some young punk doesn't turn into a confirmed addict, just follow my lead — he'll eventually realize that donated culls are your way of getting rid of junk, and by that time the fever will be over. I hope you appreciate this free advice, too, because most of such donations have about as much lasting effect as the birds.

Come to think about it, I'd say failure is the typical denouement, not only for me. Only a tiny percentage of pigeons get into the winning circle, and not many fanciers make it; things go pfftt one way or another that you never expected. The best-laid plans are no guarantee of success — if fire, windstorm, and flood don't wipe you out, maybe illness will. Therefore be of good cheer.

Lots of pigeon people get the urge to write. Maybe a letter to the editor, or an article to show off how much they know, or even a book (same object). Scientists are as susceptible to this strange psychology as sillier citizens. Failures are the story again. The letter to the editor goes into the round file next to the editor's desk; the article shows how much the writer knows that is wrong, as well as how much he has to learn; the book is so full of crap that other people have to write more books to provide counter-crap, and finally the whole mess just sits on shelves, mostly in libraries or storerooms and is effectively buried if not lost for good. Most writers soon realize that the odds are against 'em, and you seldom read more than one, two, or three effusions from the same pen, even in the science journals. But a few nuts don't get the message, and continue to waste their efforts, even year after year. Compulsive educators, exhibitionists, confabulators, obfuscators, and argufiers. Failures, in other words.

Maybe it's all for the best, and everything comes out in the wash or the trash. Maybe we should just do and die, and let the kids wonder why. Which reminds me, I have a real nice pair of cull splash birds that some kid will sure want.

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

There's an old saying that experience is the best teacher. BUT the price can be high, so it pays to watch the other guy get the experience. I'm the other guy! Who's watching?

Some years ago I was informed that a chicken house needs insulation, so that the birds will not suffer extremes of temperature fluctuation. Excellent idea, so I got a fiber-glass material for between the walls and under the roof. Aside from the skin irritation, it seemed ideal stuff. After a while I discovered that the mice thought it ideal housing too. They made Swiss cheese of the stuff and chewed holes in the walls. Mice began to chew up the feathers of the birds on the roosts. Mice began to take over.

Well, the ideal way to get rid of mice, I was told, is to put out poison bait. Put out a lot of it. Pretty soon the mouse population crashed, but a hemogeneous sickening odor began to permeate the place from dead carcasses in the walls. Moreover, some mice either refused to eat the poison or were immune, and I finally tore out not only the remaining insulation, but also the inside walls to get back some control. The birds were less protected but at least it was a bird house again.

When styrofoam insulating panels came on the market, I figured that here, at last, was the answer. Well, the mice found that stuff even more delightful. Then to cap the climax, the chickens decided that this totally indigestible stuff was quite tasty, and they proceeded to peck the panels away rapidly. That's pretty expensive as feed, so I had to salvage the best I could.

I don't know what it is about styrofoam that makes it irresistible. A big styrofoam pot for a plant was totally nibbled away by my ducks. Other plastic materials also seem to have some appeal; the birds will peck at and ruin polyethylene sheeting just for the hell of it. Maybe it is the same sort of instinct that makes them eat pieces of glass and metal. Anyway, I have become a lot less enthusiastic about these products of the modern magic. It seems we have to try everything, but the backfiring can be terrific.

Last year I put in a complete electric fence around the place — easy to install and relatively cheap. Also not such a debris-catcher as ordinary fence. Well, the ducks learned how to duck through very cleverly, and the chickens would bumble thru. But me — I had to spend hours chopping weeds to prevent or stop shorting, and then I tripped on the wires and near broke my leg. Moreover, I found that cats and dogs easily jump the fence, and great horned owls don't worry about fences anyway. The problem of predators isn't easily solved.

I suppose we need more education in such things as Parkinson's Law and Murphy's Law, etc. Planning without experience can be disastrous, and we really never get enough experience in one lifetime to anticipate even a majority of the pitfalls and accidents or calamities ahead. Dodging one may even lead us into the path of another. Two heads may be better than one — if they can get along together. Watching the other guy get his experience, or reading about it, can be helpful — but if you spend too much time watching and reading the chores won't get done and you may get soft, if not actually scared to try anything.

Please, somebody else write in about some experience. I'm getting tired of being the other guy.

ACK HIMEL — IT'S AGHAST!

Just about tricker treat time and here come Ed with a crate full of beefy birds. “Greetings and hallucinations,” he says, “Once more behold the acme of the breeder’s art, and all just for improving your loft. American Giant Homers par excellence.”

“Amputated,” says I, “them birds is too wide to get in my nest box holes and too short to fly up to the top. My birds got to produce, not sit around looking like bullfrogs.”

“You are unkind, friend,” he says, “because you are not properly educated in the fine points of this great American creation. And furthermore, you haven’t heard the real low price.”

“Low prices means low quality. Anyway, with feed prices going up and squab prices not, I can’t afford to buy any.”

“Things will change, ol buddy, don’t be such a pessimist. Where would this country be today if the founding fathers had been afraid to build? Fresh blood is what you need, and here it is.”

“This country got troubles aplenty. The squab business is on the skids and you show guys don’t care. I dropped out of the Association cause its no good. I can get bands other places.”

“Oh, now that’s no way to go at things. You got to stay in there and be loyal. This is a democratic Association, man, and you got to push for what you want. Your vote counts, man.”

“Counts for what? The minority always gets shafted. I been pushing for squab production for 20 years, and look where it gets me — they don’t even mention dual purpose any more.”

“Anybody can see that our modern Giant Homer can produce a super squab — it speaks for itself. Solid as a rock.”

“Muscle-bound. That plaster model shows it too.”

“My land, friend,” says Ed. “You are indeed in a bad mental state today. You are really misrepresenting our great American breed. After all, I breed them and I know. Look at how many I sell and how famous my blood-line has become. People wouldn’t buy them if they weren’t great.”

“Then why is the Association complaining about loss of membership? Something must be wrong.”

“Well, it’s just a temporary thing. It’ll bounce back quick. The Fancy has its ups and downs. We got to stay in there.”

“Let the Association slide. The fewer members, the more exclusive it’ll be the way they really want it. Everybody officers.”

“No, no, no! We got to increase the membership or the sales and dues will get so low they won’t be able to put out a Bulletin or put enough specials on at the shows. Got to go up!”

“I think I can get along without the Bulletin. Never won a special at any show yet. It’s a racket, I tell you. Better I stay out and make my color crosses and not fight with the air freight people over sky-high rates.”

“Now you is changing the subject. The AGHA is on your side. Don’t blame it for your problems. You is way off base, and better come back in the good ol crowd. Now you just try these here birds I brung and see if I ain’t right. Why, I’m stalling three other guys that want em, just to give you this chance to really get

back in the swing. Money back in two months if they don't please."

"I can't afford to feed your birds for two months. You go sell em to those other suckers. Pardon me while I shovel out some of my expensive manure."

"Is that what you use to make your pumpkins grow so big?" Witch reminded me to invite him in for some treat — pumpkin pie.

— AGHA Bull., October 1976

BILOGY LESSON 3. THE BIRDS AND HOW THEY REPERDUCT

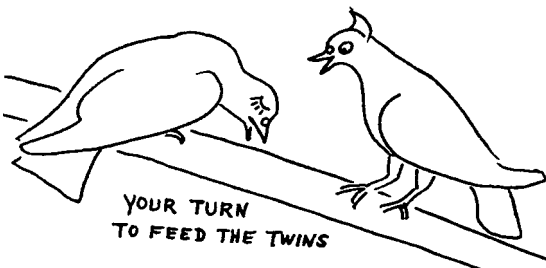
By Sally P.*

Sent in by Ed Blaine

Today we looked at a pare of pidgeons. Jonnie bring them to school in a cadge with some corn. He said they are Kings but one is a female so it must be a queen and they pick up the corn and eat it with there beack they dont chew there food because they dont have annie teeth. Our teacher said they have stones In there grisserd to grind up the corn my mother had stones in hers to also but they was cut out of her by a hospital. The pigeons have red feet like our faces get in winter they must be cold because they are barefoot. They have 3 toes in front and one in back so there foot prints looks like a pease simbol and each toe has a claw on the end but its not sharp like a eegels. Jonnie said the hen pigeon thats the female layes to eggs in her nest. She must know how to count because she dont ever have 3 and she sits on her eggs to keep them warm but the cock pidgeon helps her he sits on the eggs in the middle of the day. The cock was noisy he cood a lot and the teacher said he has 2 testickles but we couldnt see any. Those are what make sperms they are sort of polywags that get in the eggs to make them hatch. I dont see how they could get through the shell. We could hatch the eggs in a incubader but its better not to. The baby pidgeons poke a hole in the egg shell to get out. Then they are very hungry. There mother feeds them milk. Jonnie also says there father feeds them milk. Mabe he uses a bottle like my daddy I mean to feed my baby brother. Pidgeons must be a lot like humans but Jonnie said they grow real fast. At first they have harry fuzz but soon feathers start to sprout. When they are a month old they can fly he said. I think birds are just wonderful but my mother says they are just messy.

(*cadedg by W. F. Hollander)

— Amer. King Club Bull., Fall 1971



MAX NIX

Four of us had left the Show to get a bite and a beer. Ed was grouching about the cold weather, the dumb steward, and no female companionship. Joe was raving about his winnings, and Dave was philosophizing. This is all known as intimate communication.

"Of all the blankety blankety blank places in the blank country to hold a blank show in this blank season, this has got to be the blank worst." (Expletives deleted by yours truly.)

"Absolutely perfect stance and form. Why, she even goes beyond the standard, and that's a great judge we got."

"You have to take the good with the bad, and be thankful things are no worse. Now back in the thirties, when I was just starting to show, I can remember not having money to buy feed."

"Where's the blank waitress? This samwch ain't fit for a blank pig to eat. Just her style, that's for blank sure."

"Linebreeding, that's the absolute only way to get the results, I always say."

"On the other hand, one must consider the merits of random recombination. Why, I recall getting a top bird out of a mating that was strictly accidental."

"This is the last blank time I come to this blank joint. My blank feet are freezing up to my blank hips. Shoulda had coffee instead of beer."

"Get some coffee anyway — they mix ok. Did I ever tell you about my secret conditioner for the showbirds? Well, it's a mixture of coffee, tea, and bourbon."

"What a waste of good liquor. Personally, I prefer to condition myself with that. The birds don't need it, and all you really need is the stimulants. I mean, the birds need caffeine."

"Here she comes. Look at that for blank speed. Maybe she needs the blank caffeine. . . . Garcon! We need coffee!"

"Boy! I just can't get over it. Ten birds in the show and three firsts. You know, I don't think I'd sell that hen for less than three hunnerd."

"Money, money, money, the root of all evil. I can remember when nobody had any, but we were innocent in mind."

"Blank innocence, you got to make it while you blank can. Me, I need more blank money to go to Florida."

"But Ed, they ain't got any good birds down there. The climate is bad for birds, you know, tropical diseases and so on. You are doing OK here — just need a good stove."

"Yes, just remember that Spring is nearly here, and the birds will be breeding nicely again, and...."

"Three blank months out of the whole blank year, yeh, you shell out a blank fortune for furnace fuel, then another sack of blank sheckels for air-conditioning."

"Solar energy will save the day, some day."

"My house has a heat pump. Real economical. You ought to try it, Ed."

"OK, I'll trade houses with you. Where's that blank waitress gone? Still no coffee. No tip for her."

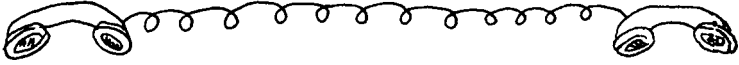
"Did I ever tell you how I started my winning line? Well, believe it or not, it was at a dealer. The old jock didn't realize how good the bird was, but I did."

"Relativity is important, isn't it. Everything is relative. The whole question of value is relativity."

"Hic! Burp." (That was me.)

"You ain't said a blank word yet. Goin to sleep?"

"Not on your blankety blankety blank life," I said.



ITS A FISHAL, LIKE BUSINESS-LIKE?

Surprised, you is so right, man, I perty near dropped my G-string in the can. When the Stablisthment comes threw like this, you know, like man, its stupendipous, or incredilous. Time to realy celibate, V for victery, and all that jazz man. It just goes to prove that years of struggle will finely pay off. We dident even rig the election, man. We just won, period period.

Well this gives us a hole year to consolidate and get things really under control. As secretary-Tresurer I can fix it so the bread goes to the right plases, man. Them audits of the books we was yelling to get and they wouldent even discuss, now we got no problem. Ha, man, bread to burn.

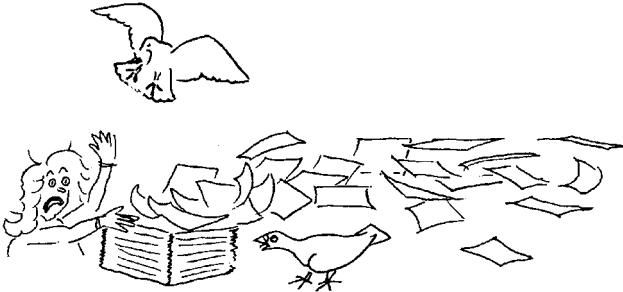
First thing I will get all new letterhead stationary. We got to snow the members right, man. Feed so much crap to them they dont bother to read the meat in it. Easy, man. Show reports is what they want, so filler up good in the buletin.

Theres one guy we got to watch close, man, you know, lets call him Smith. He was Sec-Tres so long hes wize to things. Got to treat him exter-special and keep him distracted. I think a long-distant telepone call about ever week will help. You know, pertend we got problems and need his advise. Thatll make him feel good for long enough. He might even help us cover up when the feathers hit the fan, if we play dumb.

We got to work like hell to swing that merger with that other club and still keep controll, man. May have to realy rig that deal, but I can twist there Sec-Tres good first. Hes the key man.

Hold it, phone call, man. Yeah? No! What you mean, we lost? Your kidding. Your not? Realy? (Expletive deleted.) That election musta been rigged. Can we get a recount? Why not? Ah, sheesh.

— Round File, October 1974



WHEN IN ROME?

To promote his acquisition of examples for the "Origin of Species," Darwin became a member of the Columbarian Society and constructed an aviary in which experimental miscegenation was facilitated.

Columba livia provides a splendid example of variation under domestication. Its subdivisions are recognized by hundreds; per contra, the enumeration of subspecies in Nature totals only a fraction of that number. Darwin erected two basic ideas to explain the situation: novel influences of civilization on the internal functioning of heredity, and artificial selection of the subsequent deviations, by *Homo sapiens*.

In re the primary process, it is necessary to assume in advance that a tendency to aggregate in the vicinity of human habitation existed. The dual fundamental vital requirements of sustenance and sites for nidification were satisfied in regions of urban - agrarian complexes. Here surplus provender was available around granaries and in the adjacent cultivated areas, while nocturnal protection and reproduction in major edifices favored multiplication. The maximized contact with man over protracted periods evolved into a form of commensalism. Religion utilized edible sacrifices and induced veneration of the ubiquitous inhabitants of the temples.

Speculation concerning the initiation of genuine subjugation is incapable of verification but may be of value. Indubitably a significant factor was the deliberate provision of nutriment. A divergence between innate docility or stupidity and intractability would have become evident. Voracious juvenile specimens tend to be totally dependent on their captors, and these plumed petitioners would make more intimate contact. "Imprinting" conceivably fixed the tenuous adherence.

At this juncture a plenitude of potent factors confronted the birds: incarceration, injury, occasional inanition and dehydration, toxicity of inappropriate foods, unsanitary conditions, and parasitic predation predisposing to contagious afflictions. Disturbed glandular functions from ruined constitution could alter reproductive processes. Spontaneous aberrations, fortuitous mutations might be manifested by their progeny. Such innovations, especially albinistic coloration, would excite attention, and the revolution is complete. Selective propagation would maintain the abnormal types.

Limitation of ancestry at long intervals would be interrupted by admixtures. These could produce additional recombination effects. However, progress might be negated frequently by the gravitation of the crosses to reunite with the parental lines.

With a multitude of breeding centers located in disparate parts of the terrestrial globe, inevitably the accumulated divagations permit reconsiderations of desirability. Visitors or migrants from one locality to another would transport the native creations, causing sensations and competitive population alterations of palpable magnitude. In summary, evolutionary acceleration develops.

If the reader has detected a diverting redundancy of luxuriant verbiage manifest in the preceding discussion, or a superfluous and distracting sententiousness in expression, it is a credit to his sagacity. The simulated erudition via the medium of anglicized Latin, or its derivations, is conspicuous only to the educated minority. Translation into modern lingo is abhorrent to a supercilious savant, but a commendable exercise for mental flexibility. Darwin was right.

PIGEONS AND MICE

Mice like pigeons. Mice must have been an important part of the ecology of pigeons at least ever since domestication, some thousands of years back in the old world. Pigeons and house mice both came to the western hemisphere with the white man and in spite of another immigrant, the house cat.

Holey night is the mouse's motto. Mice cooperate in the fenestration of almost any solid material that isn't as hard as concrete, and feathers or other light stuff, such as so-called "rodent-proof" insulating material (fiber-glass wool) are irresistible attractions. Accumulations of pigeon guano in nests or on the floor invite tunneling, and if these are not available, the mice will gladly tunnel under the floor. And if there isn't plenty of straw, paper, cloth, or such, the mice will chew off tail and wing feathers of peacefully roosting birds for nest material.

Mice are of course attracted by the pigeons' feed, but there doesn't have to be feed — they will come anyway. They eat almost anything from insects in the pigeon nests to dead birds. And if things get bad, the mice will even attack squabs and gnaw eggs. By that time we better help the birds.

Mice have beady little eyes which are not really needed. Blinded mice unlike blinded pigeons get along very well. They just follow their noses. Mice dribble musky urine as they travel, thus making a trail they can easily recognize. Such trails build up to thick sticky accumulations with continued use, and the mousy odor especially on metal may endure for years. Any dampness however will induce rapid corrosion of iron or steel. Tin cans are soon reduced to collapsing hulks of rust.

Although wild mice ordinarily are extremely vigorous and healthy, they have been accused of carrying a whole array of diseases and parasites (pigeons likewise). And sometimes it is true that overcrowding, starvation, too much wetness, or old age result in frank illness, which makes it easier for cats to catch them. *Salmonella typhimurium* literally means mouse typhoid. Whether the mice get it from pigeons or give it to them is an interesting question. Either way the results are unpleasant.

To eliminate the mice we can let rats come in. Rats are related to mice, but they like them only as food. Snakes also do a fine job on mice. Or would you prefer a cat? Most of us would rather use traps. Some are better than others, but some skill also is needed for outwitting the critters. Many fanciers don't buy any traps but prepare inviting nest boxes for the mice. Then every week or two the box is emptied into a garbage can containing water. This method is far more effective than poison, and safer too.

Most fanciers learn such information the hard way instead of by reading. I have had an unusual advantage — I work in a lab where thousands of mice are bred. No, not the wild ones (any more than most fanciers would breed street pigeons). And not just white ones. Almost any color and pattern you can imagine. Some really beautiful, for example gold satin angoras and Siamese. And some really ugly, with naked skin or kinky tails. There are almost as many varieties of tame mice as breeds of pigeons. And there are even some mouse fanciers. Crazy people?

GOING CRITICAL

Ed Blaine got me 3 pairs of wild-type common barn pigeons this Fall and I put them in a big loft (about 12 by 20 feet) with plenty of nests and no other pigeons to bother them. Well, it was too small. One cock kept the other 2 pairs continually on the run. They couldn't settle down to breed.

Maybe a lot of domestic breeds (G.H.?) aren't so vicious, but I wouldn't bet on the success of cutting the flock size drastically (maybe to save feed money). Ah, them doves of peace! If you don't use individual-pair breeding coops, you'll have battles. And even the individual coops may not be idyllic.

At the other extreme, I have seen dealer's lofts or barns or shipping crates so jammed with birds that even with no fighting (unlikely) the birds were killing each other. The constant jostling, manure soiling, overheating, dust, and other stresses tend to bring on death. Sure, a veterinarian might say this bird died of lung infection, or that one from apparent starvation.

What is optimum? Can your neighbor decide for you? Will a thief or a pack of rats or a mink take things in hand? But pigeons do like to flock, sometimes in enormous harmonious numbers. The extinct Passenger Pigeon lived typically not in flocks of dozens or hundreds but millions. Until man butchered the birds, they got along fine and dandy.

Lots of fastidious people think pigeon manure (and of course other kinds too) some sort of curse of Nature and that it should be shipped off to the Moon or flushed down the drain (just anywhere, maybe Lake Erie). They realize with mathematical ease that the more birds — well, there does seem to be a correlation with the number of bags of feed used in a given period. There is no use trying to tell such people that manure is food. Not only plant food, either. For example, mealworms thrive in uncleaned lofts. Where do they come from? Well, the "worms" are really the larvae of good-sized black beetles which can fly long distances. And mealworms command good prices in pet shops to feed chameleons, canaries, and other caged critters. Even pigeons get to like them. And believe it or not, the manure can have a rich supply of some needed vitamins, that the original feed was poor in — such as riboflavin and B₁₂ — from microorganisms growing in it.

Oh well, obviously the only answer is to get back to the farm. There you got plenty of space, the manure is useful, and you might even grow your own feed. So I put my money where my mouth is, as they say, and learned that some other things should have been obvious too. Sometimes it's too hot, or too cold, too wet, too dry, too many varmints, stray dogs and cats, hawks, gun-happy hunters, flat tires, windstorms to tip over your lofts, always something else to repair or spend your savings on. The only answer is that there ain't any best answer?

It has been well said that life is just one damned thing after another; or, more dignifiedly, life is a succession of crises. And what makes a critical point may be quite unexpected, sometimes only a tiny thing, a last straw. Even doing nothing may be decisive, like fatal. To do or not to do — that's the critical question.

I wonder what would have happened if instead of 3 pairs of commies in that big loft suppose there were 5 hens and the boss cock. Would he have become a Polygamist? Is there a critical balance of numbers for morality too?

RELATIVELY SPEAKING

Hello, cousin! (maybe 15th?) It's a lovely day to do something different. We could sit under the apple tree and consider gravity with levity, maybe. Oh, you don't have the time? Ah yes, time is of the essence of the universe. And to think you ain't got it. Sad, cousin. What can be more worthwhile, relatively speaking, than dilatory digression into the mysteries of the universe? Banding squabs? Surely you jest.

Decision at a dichotomy can be a dreadful dilemma. If discussion under the apple tree is out, shall I go window shopping or go browsing in the big library? For aid in such a difficult choice, I employ a standard device: a coin. Ah, it's tails; the library wins. I'm off — for some mental fodder. So long, cousin.

H'mmm, all this reading matter — more decisions. Shall I delve into ancient tomes of high repute, such as Descartes or Dumas? Or should I riffle the leaves of the latest journals? Tails again. It's journals.

Well, let's see. Here's "Today's Woman"; no. "Sports and Racing Review"; no. "Blue Etude"; no. "Zodiac" — ah, mysteries of the universe? No, just horoscopes. "Weaving"; no. "Art & Architecture"; no, "Popular Endocrinology"; no. "Proceedings of the Society for the Study of Birth Defects" — Yeech. "Cosmetics Analyst"; no. "World Military Magazine" — no. "Golf Greens Monthly"; no. "Cereal Chemist"; no. "Teenager"; too late. "Machismo"; too late. "Bird Watching Around the World"; no. "Modern Microscopy"; no. "Radio and CB Digest"; no. "Fur Farmer"; no. "Journal of Scatology"; no. "Computer Science Quarterly"; no. "Soporific Science Fiction"; no. "Fashions and Futures"; no. Wow.

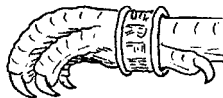
Only 250 more magazines to go, looks like. Well, I still have some time. H'mm, "Far East Traders' Report"; no. "Numismatics and Engraving"; no. "North American Hunter"; no. . . . Hey, cousin, how about this: "Feather Fancier" — Would you believe — pigeons! Pictures galore, and lots in color too. H'mmm . . . the editor says "Minimum price for accepted photos \$5.00." Top price . . . Wow — a hundred bucks! Man, that really draws some good shots, like this one of a Satinette on a red tile roof. Say, man, I got to get in on this.

Back to the old den, and where's my camera. Oh, now I remember, it needs a new shutter job, and the flash is on the blink. That means about fifty bucks minimum, or else buy a new camera. Plus films. H'mmm, and gotta buy more pigeon feed pronto too

What happened to the lovely day? Now it's starting to rain. No apple tree, no levity, no cousin. Relatively speaking, the picture is dim.

Well, next decision is philosophical folderol versus food. . . . Tails again; did I hear you say the hamburgers are ready? Coming, cousin.

— Round File, August 1978



KICKING YE OLDE OAKEN BUCKET

Well, he hadn't expected to do it so soon. Most of his life he had been late for appointments and deadlines. The irony of fate, and all that sort of comeuppance — down he went. Alas, even before he was six feet under, all hell was bustin loose. You see, he had forgot to make a will, but he had a wife. She wanted to get rid of all those birds, but was it legal? In desperation, she got on the phone and tried to get help from his good old buddies. She finally located one who (as a great favor) came over and gave the birds feed and water. He also said he would be back, but neglected to say when. It was three days, and he didn't make it to the funeral either. But the lawyer did.

Red tape takes time. When it was ultimately decided that the Mrs. could dispose of the birds, she had already had to shell out about eighty bucks for feed, and there were maybe 50 unbanded squabs flying. What to do next? She asked good old buddy if he knew anybody who would want to buy the whole shebang. He was dubious, but said he'd look around. Meanwhile her fond and loving memory of the old man was tarnishing by the minute. As a matter of fact, it had been far from shiny for years.

A couple of days later a guy calls and says he might take the birds off her hands for a sum of two hundred dollars. She was real pleased until she realized that he meant for her to pay him. Then she got huffy and called the deal off. Good old buddy came back and told her the feed barrel was empty again. Also he couldn't keep up the charity work much longer.

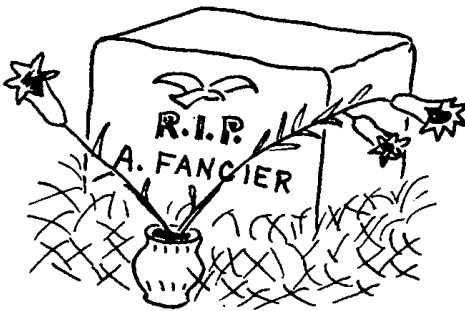
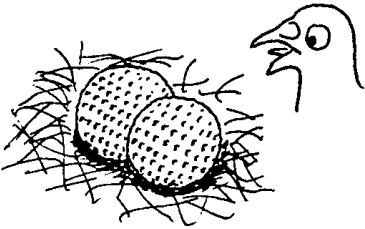
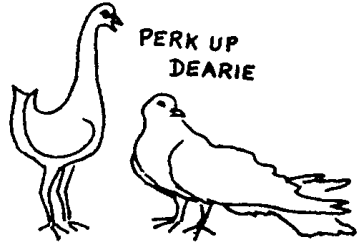
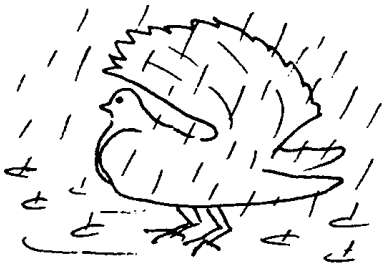
She spent a whole evening rummaging through the old man's pile of pigeon things, and found a bunch of letters involving sales out of the state. It seems several letterhead personages had laid out up to fifty bucks for a single bird. She nearly fainted — even at a sawbuck a bird, the flock would be worth a couple of grand. The next day she phoned all those personages. None of them had even heard of the old man's going to the great loft in the sky. Well, she told each one that there had been a bunch of guys trying to buy the best birds, but she would let him have his pick if he came that weekend, and at only twenty bucks a bird.

Sure enough, that weekend three of them came, separately, and they were delighted. She was too — she took in over 700 bucks and the flock looked definitely thinner. Moreover, some letters arrived from other fanciers who wanted to come and buy some. After another week only about 30 birds were left, that nobody wanted to buy. Good old buddy was amazed. He offered to take them off her hands for having been so helpful all those weeks, so she agreed.

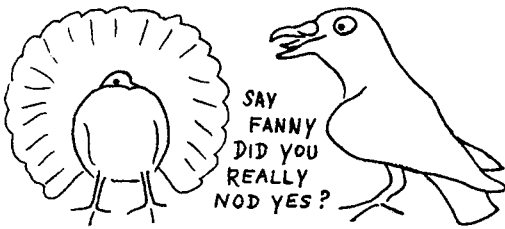
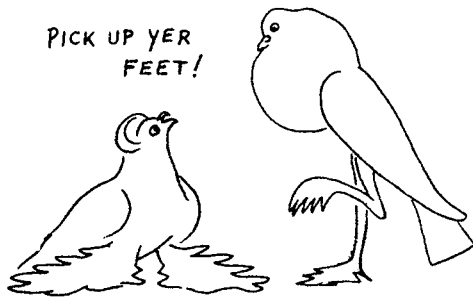
When the loft had been cleared of birds, good old buddy suggested that she wouldn't want an empty loft cluttering up the back yard. He knew somebody who would be willing to remove it, even including all that manure, for nothing. And lo, it came to pass.

Finally good old buddy came to say good-bye to the Mrs., and after a cheerful cup of coffee and some cookies he shook her hand. As he was about to leave, he had one more thought — maybe she would like him to take all the old man's pigeon junk off her hands? Oh yes, she said, she'd be happy for him to do that. So he loaded up his car with it all.

So they all lived happily ever after, especially good old buddy, who now could show off his shelf of trophies and sell top stock, pedigreed even. He really hadn't expected to do it so soon.



NOTES





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