

STIR CRAZY?

by

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In my greenhouse I have a circular cage 3' high x 24" diameter. Minimum size for ringneck doves cages should be 18" cube. Of course, the larger the better. A rosy male and a peach pied silky female, both in excellent health (diet - mostly Pigeon Chow Checkers), were raising their second brood and setting on their 3rd clutch. The youngsters were a peach and a peach pied. At about two weeks of age the squabs tails were about 1½" long when the male (father) started persecuting the peach pied squab!

I had never seen this against so young a squab. That squab got out of the nest fast, followed later by its nest mate which was not bothered by the male. The father continued to feed both, as did the mother until three days after she laid the new eggs. However, the peach pied squab by now was badly cowed by the father's persecution, and had to hide in a "corner" formed by another nest. It was most peculiar to see the father fight the squab, then feed it, then fight it again! The squab did manage to adapt to the schedule until it learned to eat on its own. Could the male somehow have mistaken it for the female? It seems doubtful, since pied does not look the same in squabs as in adults. This pair continued to produce many squabs without recurrence of such unusual behavior.

Fourteen years ago Dr. Hollander described a type of psychopathy in the domestic pigeon in which there was fighting between mates¹. At that time he attributed such perverted fighting to the small size of the cage. Pigeon pairs should have 24 cubic feet to avoid such trouble in prolonged mating. The pigeons were healthy--indeed almost too vigorous and "over-flowing with pent-up energy". Domestic ringnecks were said not to exhibit this behavior no matter how small the cage. More recently Dr. Hollander has modified his opinion. He now thinks that insufficient fats (oils) in the diet may be an important contributing factor.

Has anyone else made such an observation?

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¹ Jour. Comp. Psych. 38: 287-289