

# Fancy Feathers

Official mouthpiece of the National Fancy Pigeon Association  
Volume 3. Issue 1.



**5th Annual NFPA National Show Issue**



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## Editorial

This issue focuses on the fifth annual national championship fancy pigeon show of the NFPA that was held in the heart of the Cape Flats, Athlone.

I have also included a letter of thanks, albeit in Afrikaans, that was sent to Cassie Carstens for one of the shows that was held in his area. In keeping with the theme of shows, there are two articles exploring the issues when judging pigeons at shows from an international viewpoint and a South African viewpoint.

In this issue, the "Junior Corner" is bit empty due to pressures of school exams, etc. during this period that affect our junior members but I will have some interesting articles in the next issue.

Happy reading!!

Yours in pigeons  
Anthony Thebus

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## 2012 National Championship Show of the NFPA



By Yassiem Khan

What an SA's we had! I am convinced that of all our strivings, only those that are good and worthwhile will contribute to the success of the NFPA. It will be under our watch that things may seek shelter or sway in the wind. We, however, will leave an indelible mark to all humanity of our sincere efforts to promote our sport. So it came to bear that despite all of the negativity, challenges, pain and disappointments, the NFPA emerged with a sense that it delivers great events and will always have men, women and children who serve the NFPA with passion and real commitment. Our 'Guardian Angel'- Otto Steinhöfel, had prior engagements and was unable to participate this year. His support and presence was sorely missed.



The support of the City of Cape Town and the Department of Culture & Sport once again set

the stage for a phenomenal Championship Show. With the full support of the Department of Sport, Recreation and Amenities under the watch of **Noore Nacerodien**, supported by **Miranda Lakay** we were once again able to stage a show that was even better than the one staged in 2011.

The show commenced on Wednesday 20 June with the setting up of show pens and the decor in the hall.



Once again the city was able to provide us with the **Athlone Civic Centre** as our Show venue. Many senior and junior members participated in the show. We had members coming from as far as Port Elizabeth to support the show.



**Donald and Cassie in discussion observed by Faried Rajal (EC)**



**The Show in full swing**



**Umar Jacobs surveys the show hall**



**Yassiem Kahn penning his winners**

On Thursday 21 June, we started the day with members penning their birds and by 14h00 we commenced with judging. Judges selected the champion Birds in each breed.

At 19h00 we staged our Opening Ceremony which saw the official opening of the show.



The Buffet Meal provided by the CoCT was as scrumptious as they come. Not a single attendee went home hungry. This function was attended by members, councillors, sponsors and other dignitaries. Our main speaker was Councillor Antonio VD Rheede - Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee for Community Services which includes Sport. Also present was Donny Jurgens - Manager Sport & Recreation, Councillor Suzette Little and Sharon Siljeur from the Sports Council.

Friday 22 June saw the culmination of Judging.



Judging in progress

Of concern was the presence of several excellent pigeons that could not be placed in the top 3 positions due to them having lice and pin holes. Exhibitors of these birds were cautioned about the condition of their birds and all results were accepted. By 14h00 the

Show Hall was opened to the public. Attendance was free and it was well attended. Members of the public were in awe of the pigeons on display asking a 'million' questions. 12 new members committed to join the WPPPF on this day.



Fadiel taking photos of the breed winners while a curious young visitor observes

Saturday 23 June commenced with our AGM which lasted till 12h00. Whilst this was on, our junior members manned the Show Hall and played host to the many visitors from the public. Many juniors showed a keen interest to join the WPPPF. Reggie Fester, our Development Officer, will engage these youngsters and get them affiliated.



Table décor at the Awards Ceremony

The highlight of the Show was the Awards Ceremony. This was staged at the Lansdowne Civic, courtesy of the City of Cape Town.



Attendees were treated to an evening of food and dance, once again courtesy of the CoCT. The 3 course meal was most appetising. All prizes presented to winning members were provided by the **City of Cape Town** and additional prizes were presented by Cllr Suzette Little for the Outstanding Junior.



**Gaathiq Davids – Receives the Outstanding Junior award**

Fadiel Hendricks, NFPA President, presented Special Presidential Awards to outstanding members and dignitaries.

In attendance were Tandeka Gqada - representing the Mayor's Office, Thabo Tutu - Director of Sport & Promotions, Cllr Suzette Little - Ward Cllr for Athlone, Faunty Gillmer - President of SANPO and Dave Roberts - Chairman of the WP Sports Council who all presented speeches.

Sunday 24 June saw the culmination of events. The public viewed till 12h00 and then

members removed their pigeons and cleaned up the hall.



**Young and old members hard at work packing up**



**Aaliyah helping to get the birds home**

I realize that no romantic conflict or tragic dualism is inherent in all of the above, but rather a fruitful and engaging partnership which culminates in a destiny that is awesome. The NFPA extends its heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to the CoCT, and especially to the individuals who made our Championship Show the phenomenal success it was. As we look back, we will not linger on the trials and tribulations of a time gone, but ask only for the supreme gift of members who want the NFPA to be the success it deserves to be. Let a sense of fellowship prevail in our sport that will give to life happiness, beyond the power of sorrow that so destroys. The fact that human society and human nature are so imperfect is what makes our life so exciting. It's a fact that the world is both a good and a

bad world, and man is both a noble and a wicked creature. Life is often so happy and often so sad and human society is often so cruel. Despite this the NFPA and its EXCO proceeds with tolerance and indulgence. Great wisdom consists of not demanding too much of members. One must try one's best, and at the same time, one must, when rewarded by partial success or confronted by partial failure, ask oneself: "Have I done my best?"

## SHOW RESULTS - BREED WINNERS

Exhibitor	Breed Winner
Anthony Thebus	King
	Runt
	Vienna LF Tumbler
	Cauchois
	Maltese
Nic Hanekom	Gros Mondain
Reggie Fester	Carrier
	Dragoon
	Polish Helmet
	Old German Owl
	Muffed Ice Pigeon
	Scandaroon
Majiet Rawoot	Norwich Cropper
	Brunner Pouter
	Dutch Cropper
	Pygmy Pouter
	Reverse-wing Cropper
Umar Jacobs	SA Toy
Zaahid Abrahams	Gazzi Modena
	Schietti Modena
C Janse van Vuuren	Fantail
	Old Dutch Capuchine
	Indian Fantail
Mariza Venter	SA Botternek Tumbler
Nico Venter	Parlour Tumbler x2
	Archangel
	Gimpel
Marlene Carstens	Parlour Tumbler x1
Carstens Sierduiwe	Frillbacks
	Arabian Trumpeter
PJ Gericke	Working Homer
	Lahore
Donald Bland	Blondinette
Faried & Ridwaan Rajaal	SA Birmingham Show Roller
	SA Distance Roller

N. Esterhuizen	American Show Racer	
AN Rohland	Damascene	
	Egyptian Swift	
	Polish lynx	
Q. Woodbridge	Birmingham Roller	
Fadiel Hendricks	English Trumpeter	
	Oriental Roller	
	West of England Tumbler	
	Italian Owl	
	Chinese Owl	
	Field Pigeon	
	Portuguese Tumbler	
	Bernburg Trumpeter	
Yassiem Khan	Jacobin	
	Nun	
	Old German Magpie T	
	Rostower Tumbler	
	Atipain	
	English CL LF Tumbler	
	English LF Muffed T	
	Fairy Swallow	
	Silician Swallow	
		Brunner Pouter
		Dutch Cropper
	Pygmy Pouter	
	Voorburg shield Cropper	
	Hana Pouter	
	SA Toy	
	Schietti Modena	
	Vienna LF Tumbler	
	Vienna LF Muffed T	
	Felegyhauser Tumbler	
	Old German Magpie T	
	Chinese Owl	
	Frillbacks	
	Old Dutch Capuchine	
	Muffed Ice Pigeon	
	Scandaroon	
	Egyptian Swift	
	Polish Lynx	
	German Beauty Homer	
A Laubscher - Jnr	Mookiee	
	Komorner Tumbler	
R. Tulleken - Jnr	Gros Mondain	
M Gameeldien - Jnr	Old German Owl	
	Birmingham Roller	
A Daniels - Jnr	Chinese Owl	
	Thuringian Gold Beetle	
J. Derby Lewis - Jnr	Working Homer	
C Boetcher - Jnr	Damascene	

Here are some of the breed winners:



Atipain – Owned by Y Khan



Damascene – Owned by A Rohland



English Trumpeter – Owned by F Hendricks



Mookie – Owned by A Laubscher



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**The**  
**NFPA 2012 National Championship**  
**Show in Perspective**  
By Anthony Thebus

For me the annual NFPA Championship Show is always a supreme measurement indicator of the progress of the NFPA and their contribution to the sport of breeding and the competitive exhibition of fancy pigeons. The 2012 National Championship Show is no exception. I thought that the two speeches delivered by Fadiel at the AGM and the Award Ceremony encapsulated the progress, the current status and the way forward of our sport and our organisation. Of particular interest to me was the focus on our juniors, which I think is of paramount importance if

we want to ensure sustainability in our sport.



Faunty awards Judd Derby-Lewis with his prize

One of the VIP guests, Mr Faunty Gilmer - President of the South African National Pigeon Organisation, SANPO, devoted much of his speech at the Award Giving Ceremony to the development of the youth. I particularly liked the way in which he explained how to start with pigeons in a very "down to earth" kind of way, i.e., build a small little loft that is comfortable for a few pigeons; keep it clean; keep the grass and its surroundings neat and tidy and then develop from there onwards. This simple, but powerful explanation clearly indicates the very essence of our objectives providing the youth of South Africa with an alternative outlet for their enquiring minds and, sometimes, their "mischievous" hands. The simplicity of his explanation made it perfect for a young child to convince a "skeptical" parent or caregiver that keeping pigeons is so not "so complicated". This so relevant because often, there are parents who don't have experience in keeping pigeons, yet their children are very interested, especially after visiting out shows that are always open to the general public. The other significant development at the AGM was the formal acceptance for the establishment of a Junior NFPA Committee under the guidance of the senior members. This committee will give our youngsters a definitive perch from which to spread their wings! I have no doubt in my mind, that Reggie

Fester will have his hands full as the Development Officer! The activities of this committee, along with the support of the senior members, will add value to our efforts in the transformation of sport, which is in keeping with being a registered sports federation of the Western Province Council of Sport.

But, as I have said in the beginning of this article, the status of the sport of exhibiting fancy pigeons and the NFPA are perfectly encapsulated in Fadiel's speeches - Well, here are the speeches:

### Edited version of the NFPA President's speech delivered at the AGM

*When we look upon the events of our life, in their rise and fall, their ripening and withering, their success and failure, we cannot but feel ourselves encompassed by a circle of circumstance which neither we nor our rivals can break through. From such realization we are consciously aware of our unseen destiny. And so it will come to bear that the NFPA is a sports body that is destined to make its mark on the face of, not only South Africa, but of Africa and the whole international world.*

*The NFPA has steered a course that has shown, that despite historical, personal & malignant conditions, it has been able to reach its aims and objectives. Much of the misconceptions in our sport spring from bad digestion and inadequate understandings by a few which is the result of oppression of ideas and the thwarting of our youth. The NFPA holds its youth in high esteem and provides ample opportunity for them to develop and mature in an environment that is less malevolent, more stable and individually enriching. After all our youth is our future. We need only look at the School's Program run by Reggie and our current Team of Juniors.*

*Firstly, let me take this opportunity to thank the committee of the NFPA and also the committee of the W.P.F.P.F. for your total commitment to uplift the fancy pigeon sport in SA, viz. our secretary Yassiem Khan thank you for always being there like the guardian angel in the NFPA; Cassie our Ring Distributor, thank you for doing a great service sometimes under trying*



circumstances; Anthony Thebus our newsletter Editor, thank you for using your time and effort in compiling also under difficult circumstances, a great newsletter; Reggie Fester, thank you very much for your total commitment in uplifting the youth in our communities, you doing a great service to the fancy pigeon sport and finally, Otto Steinhofel, well what can I say - thank you.

Secondly, thank you to our show committee: firstly, Majiet Rawoot our show manager what a tower of strength we have in Majiet no task too big to handle (they say dynamite comes in small packages) you and your team have done us all very proud with a Magnificent 2012 national championship show - thank you very much; to our adhoc show secretary Nico Venter - you doing a great job thus far, keep going it, just gets easier - Thank You.

To Cassie and Marlene Carstens thank you for a great Y/B show in Malmesbury you truly mirror the goals set by the NFPA.

### **In Conclusion**

What a National Championship Show we have had thus far! I am convinced that of all our strivings, only those are good and worthwhile which contribute to the success of the NFPA, and under our watch, will shelter and sway and will live for all humanity. So it comes to bear that despite all of the negativity, challenges, pain and disappointments, I emerge, so far, with the sense that I have lived near great events and known men and women who have served the NFPA greatly. As I look back, I will not linger on the trials and tribulations of a time gone, but ask only for the supreme gift of members who want the NFPA to be the success it deserves to be. Let a sense of fellowship prevail in our hobby that has given to life happiness, beyond the power of sorrow that so destroys.

I thank you.

### **Edited version of the NFPA President's Speech - Prize giving function 2012.**

The most splendid future will always depend upon the necessity to release the past, you cannot move forward in life unless you learn from your past mistakes and move on. Now that ladies and gentleman is just what we in the W.P NFPA have done, we have moved on.

To our guests of Honour Councillor Tandeka Gqada - Mayoral Committee member for Sport, Recreation and Amenities; Mr Thabo Tutu - Director of Sport Promotions, Western Cape

Government; Mr Faunty Gillmer - President South African National Pigeon Organisation, (SANPO); Mr Dave Roberts - Chairman of the Western Province Sports Council; Athlone Ward Councillor - Suzette Little and Mr Noore Nacerodien - Project Manager Sport and Recreation; my Executive Committee, Executive members of SANPO, members of the NFPA, ladies and gentlemen - Good evening and welcome to the fifth national fancy pigeon show and prize giving function.

I was warned by my secretary not to write a long speech, but when it comes to this type of event, I tend to get carried away. But let me say a few words by thanking firstly, the City of Cape Town Represented by Councillor Gqada for their most generous contribution which made this event possible and I hope that this partnership will just grow from strength to strength. Secondly to the Department of Culture and sport Western Cape Government represent by Mr Thabo Tutu thank you too for your most generous contribution without your help events like this cannot be achieved. As my hard working committee will bear witness, the biggest hurdle is always the financial one. I was asked by fancy pigeon organisations from Canada and Australia, "how do we do it?" (to receive help from our local government and municipalities.) My answer is always; "you don't live in Cape Town, this is the Mother of all cities, this is where things are born!" Also, thank you to the Western Province Sports Council, represented by the Chairman Mr Dave Roberts for your continued support. To all our sponsors namely; Pigeon World, Oakdale Feed Store, Panorama Pet shop, as well as all the sponsors that didn't want to be named including those that dig deep into their pockets thank you too; and to all those who have worked so hard towards this successful event - Miranda Lakay of the City; my executive committee Yassiem Khan, Majiet Rawoot, Reggie Fester, Nico Venter, Donald Bland and others too numerous to mention.

And finally a big thank you; to all of you here tonight and to all of you who have participated in this year's event. Do enjoy the evening.

So there you have it - the two speeches that basically say that the NFPA is reaching its next level of maturity.

Another highlight of this show was the coverage by the local Community Newspapers

with fantastic articles leading up and including the show by journalist, Karen Watkins.



The article that was published in the Athlone News Here are some more of Karen's pictures.



Nico Venter conducting a Ground Roller demonstration



Chloe with her Old German Owl



Donald with his Frillback



**Demonstrating the correct way to hold a pigeon**

And finally, I must mention the involvement of the dancers that provided the entertainment at the prize giving function. It was such a welcome sight to see graceful young people from previously disadvantaged backgrounds waltz their way into our sport. And as an act of acknowledgement to their contribution to community, in which we and they exist, the NFPA donated R1000.00 to their club to help them improve their facilities to practise their sport code. Here are some pictures of the dancers and the fun they brought to our function.



## **Pigeon Shows and related articles**

### **Controversy in Judging**

**An online conversation thread on Modena Talk**

Hi all, since Scott mentioned this, and Bobby seconded it I figured I'd try and stir up some posts!!

Since the standard changes have been approved by a majority vote, how does everyone feel about it???????

> I myself think it's fine. As I do think it reflects what the majority is

> raising at present. But am not in favour of changing the standard every time

> we breed something different. And as long as judges go by it when judging.

>

> Lets hear it everyone!!

> Thanks, Jim , AZ

On Tue, Jul 31, 2012 at 1:45 PM, raxsom85929 wrote:

“The standard changes are ok, but I myself do not care for real long legged birds. I think it distracts from the overall appearance.

As far as judging, WOW!! I have seen judges pick birds with major faults as best Modena. Soft ragged feather, white in the fluff, split wing, ETC. Especially ones that pull their heads down and crouch. I have seen whole line ups where all the birds look like this. The standard says head held high. Not all sucked down. LOL.

Judges will pick what they like and it happens all the time. Anyone have any suggestions?

The only thing I can think of is to only use judges that give good reasoning behind there picks and adhere to the standard.”

Ron Axsom

I agree with both Bobby and Ron. I have witnessed a wide variation in the judging. This remains to be our biggest problem, consistent judging. Face it, we will usually never agree with which bird "should have won", but it should be one of the best birds, not something that makes you say, "WOW".

I have thought about judging seminars, training, apprentice systems etc, etc. but it would be very difficult to get something like this off the ground.

How would we choose who is to do the training? How would we choose who is qualified to judge at present? How do we tell someone that has judged before that he / she is not qualified anymore?

Not an easy thing to do. I have thought a lot about it. And have come up with no real answers - Some ideas, but again, hard to implement.

With that said, Ron touched on it earlier. If a judge cannot explain himself, then one should consider weather this person is qualified to judge or not. As for myself, when judging, I look at the birds broken down by the standard and it's point system. And try to explain myself after most classes. Many have said they like this, and others don't seem to care. But when I turn around, there is usually a group trying to listen in on what is said. And here again, some may not agree with what I say, but at least it is a little explanation. And everyone knows how you feel.

Also, with that said, I don't profess to be an authority on judging, but have done quite a bit. And enjoy doing it. And hope to do some more. And will be glad to participate with any realistic "judging programs" that can be arranged.

Another problem we run into are the lack of breeders willing to judge. And the shows are most all in a few weeks time and it can be difficult to obtain a judge. Then of course the costs involved can alter who we bring in to judge. A local breeder is often chosen, and sometimes a breeder that does not show that much is chosen, so that a major exhibitors` entry is not removed from the show.

Just some things to consider.

Jim

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"A group of like-minded hobbyists that breed and show the "bird of curves" -- the very beautiful Modena pigeon."

## Some thoughts on judging

Zaahid Abrahams

(Certified racing pigeon judge)

In response to a request by the editor of this newsletter to submit an article, I thought that I should write a short article on my impressions on the judging of pigeons at shows. I am not much of a writer so please bear with me. I don't have all the answers and I still learn new things everyday so what I write here is only my opinion. Firstly, I don't believe that there should be something like an "all breeds judge". Before anyone can judge any breed that person must have bred and shown that breed for at least two to three years - in other words, the person must have a working knowledge of the breed. I do understand that it's not always possible due to some breeds being rare and also the amount of breeds we have on shows. In a situation like that, we should appoint a judge that has experience with a similar breed, for example a Modena breeder would have the knowledge and understanding to judge a King, etc.

It would also be advisable to group similar breeds. We can have two or three specialist judges for each group. A special award can be

given to each group winner, for example best blower breed or best wattle breed. Some might argue and say that the less popular breeds might be disadvantaged, which is understandable, but on the other hand there is also the case where a fancier might be the only one showing a rare breed, and it might seem like his bird only won because he had no competition, but if it is an exceptional bird then it stands a chance of being best in its group and the breeder will feel like he has achieved something. The final judging for best bird in a specific group should be done by a panel of at least two senior judges to prevent any disputes.

The other problem we have is finding a judge for a specific breed that does not show that breed. What we need to do here is contact experienced breeders and find out if they have experience with breeds that they do not show anymore. We should encourage these fanciers to pass out as judges. It will obviously take time, but at the end of the day every fancier will benefit. Certain breeds should be judged in walking pens and others not. It is very important that the judge knows whether or not to put the bird in the walking pen, because it could be a great disadvantage to the breed if he does not.

Now comes the part that many fanciers try to ignore - Condition and parasites... Are we being strict enough? Where do we draw the line? Birds that are not in show condition should be left in the loft. Personally, I think if a bird has more than three lice or pin holes it should be disqualified. Some fanciers might argue and say "it's only pin holes", but what many breeders don't know is that pin holes are not caused by lice - it is caused by the pigeon fly which may be lurking somewhere on the bird without being visible. What happens is that the fly bites a hole in the shaft of a new developing feather and sucks blood from the

shaft of the feather, when the feather is fully developed it shows a pin hole. Pigeon flies can also carry disease from one bird to another; therefore we should be very strict on birds with pin holes. Sick birds should also not be tolerated and must be disqualified.

It's unfair to fanciers that put so much time and effort into preparing their birds for show to have their birds infected by sick birds that should not be on show.

There you go - that's my five cents worth.

There is obviously much more that can be said, but I'll leave that to the more experienced fanciers.

#### **The Fine Print of the Readers Forum**

1. All submissions will be printed and moderated at the discretion of the Executive Committee of the NFPA.
2. Advertisements in the "Classifieds" section will be free to paid-up members of the NFPA.
3. Submissions can be emailed to



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## **Readers Forum**

### **New Members**

The NFPA welcomes all new members.

### **Birthdays**

The NFPA extends its warmest wishes to those that have celebrated their birthdays during this issue's period:

### **Lost**

## Letters

22 Sept. 2012

Mnr. Cassie Carstens  
Malmesbury

Beste Cassie

*Namens Swartlandskoubestuur wil ek graag vir jou hartlik bedank vir al jou insette by die sierduiwe-afdeling. Hierdie afdeling is werklik besig om uit sy nate te bars en die belangstelling en besoekers getal is 'n groot verrassing.*

*Ek ontvang werklik baie komplimente oor die afdeling en waardeer dit regtig baie dat jy tenspyte van al jou ander verpligtinge nog kans sien om te help sorg dat alles by die pluimveesaal ook reg verloop.*

*Nogmaals baie dankie vir jou vriendelike manier waarop jy jou samewerking gee wees verseker dit word opreg waardeer.*

Vriendelike groete  
Ian Koch  
Skoubestuurder

## The Junior Corner

### Some "did you know?" things about pigeons

**Did you know** - that pigeons can survive for more than 30 years if proper care and attention are provided for them.

**Did you know** - that a female pigeon requires another pigeon around to lay eggs and that some breeders use a mirror in order to make them feel accompanied.

**Did you know** - that an adult pigeon has about 10,000 feathers.

**Did you know** - that pigeons, unlike other birds, don't have to lift their head to swallow water.

**Did you know** - that pigeons start breeding at the age of 5 to 6 months and can breed up to as old as 10 years of age.



## The Doctor's Corner

### "Young Bird Disease"

#### What is it and what to do about it?

By Dr. Colin Walker B.Sc. B.V.Sc. M.A.C.V.S (avian health)

The term 'Young Bird Disease' refers to a condition where young pigeons, usually in the first few weeks after weaning become quiet, fluffed, lose weight, develop a green mucoid diarrhoea and die. The cause is a virus called Circo virus.

The term 'Young Bird Disease' is in my mind a poor one and one that I think should be abandoned. The problem is that it groups a whole lot of diseases that cause similar symptoms into a single category, as the way these diseases are caught, transmitted and indeed treated are different they need to be differentiated. Fanciers run the risk of seeing any young pigeon with these symptoms and simply putting them down to 'Young Bird Disease' when in fact all he is acknowledging is that the young pigeon is sick with wasting and diarrhoea. Coccidiosis, Adeno-coli syndrome, Chlamydia, Salmonella, E.coli, Herpes virus, thrush, hair worm infection, internal canker, Aspergillus and many other diseases can all cause similar symptoms. A much better term which actually states the true nature of the infection would be Pigeon Circo Virus Disease, so that instead of a fancier saying his pigeon had 'Young Bird Disease', the fancier would

say, after an accurate diagnosis that his pigeons had Pigeon Circo Virus Disease.

Circo virus is an infectious transmittable virus that spreads from one bird to another. The virus is shed in droppings, tears, saliva and possibly also feather debris.

Once in the loft it can be assumed that every pigeon will be exposed to the virus and that the vast majority will actually become infected. Typically however only about 5% actually show symptoms, while the other 95% although infected with the virus do not develop clinical symptoms i.e. do not become sick. If tested at this time, they will return a positive result and are infected, but look completely normal sitting on the perch.

Birds that do become sick develop the typical symptoms of weight loss, lethargy, diarrhoea and some will develop yellow scum in the mouth. These birds almost invariably die. The ones that do not become sick after a period of time clear the virus from their system. We do not currently know how long this takes but it is thought that the majority will clear the virus from their system in about 4 to 6 months. There is the possibility however, that some birds will fail to clear the virus and remain as persistent carriers.

The significance of Circo virus infection is that while the virus is active in the bird it interferes with the functioning of the immune system. Specifically it targets a particular type of white blood cell called the T lymphocyte. This means that the pigeon's ability to resist other infections is compromised while the virus is active. For this reason in some parts of the world Pigeon Circo Virus is called pigeon AIDS.

Often what alerts us to a Circo virus infection is an increased incidence of these secondary diseases. If your birds are experiencing a higher level of canker or eye colds than normal or if the problem quickly comes back after treatment it may be that Circo virus is

the underlying cause. When disease proves difficult to control or behaves in an unpredictable manner it's always worthwhile asking your vet to check for a concurrent Circo virus infection.

### **Two Waves of Loss**

Typically when Circo virus gets into a loft there are two waves of loss. The first of these occurs when the virus first enters and works its way through the loft. As mentioned earlier, about 5% of the birds will be lost. As the weeks role by after the last death it is easy for the fancier, who has not been to a vet, to think that the problem is now past. In fact all of the surviving birds in his loft, which may look completely normal are now infected with the virus and until they throw the virus off in a couple of months, have an impaired immune system and increased vulnerability to secondary disease. Typically these secondary diseases are wet canker and Chlamydia (respiratory infection) although they can be any disease. Pigeons rely on exposure to a whole range of potential disease causing organisms during growth including these two to develop a good natural immunity. If Circo virus is active this immunity comes, but takes much longer. This is where the second wave of loss occurs. Fanciers who fail to identify and manage these problems tend to loose a lot of pigeons tossing and in the early races. Its not that the pigeons are not any good, its just that too much is being asked of them. If they were 'nursed' along until a bit older and any secondary diseases monitored and treated as required many of these lost young birds would go on a make good race birds.

### **How Does the Disease Get Into the Loft?**

Often the virus enters with a young bird deliberately entered from another loft where Circo virus is active. Remember that 95% of young birds in an infected loft do not show any symptoms, and so this introduced youngster does not have to look sick or in fact

ever get sick. It will however shed the virus and infect other birds for several months until it, like the majority of birds, clears the virus from its system.

### **How is the Disease Diagnosed?**

It is very easy. The disease can be diagnosed from a single drop of blood. In Australia test kits are mailed to fanciers. All the fancier does is to prick the birds toe, just above the claw. When a drop of blood oozes onto the skin it is wiped off with a thin strip of supplied blotting-type paper and placed into a small cliplock plastic test tube. This is then mailed to the vet for testing. Once collected the sample is good for weeks, and so there is no problem if it takes a couple of days for the sample to reach its destination. The test is called a PCR and checks for Circo virus DNA in the birds' blood. It is very accurate and in Australia costs the equivalent of 25 pounds or US\$50. Of interest, Chlamydia infection can also be checked from the same sample. The disease can also be diagnosed through microscopic examination of tissues collected during an autopsy. Here, the tissues are stained so that the virus can actually be seen. In other birds including parrots a HI/HA blood test is also available that tests for viral protein and also the amount of immunity already formed by that bird.

### **What to do if Your Birds have 'Young Bird Disease' i.e. Circo virus infection?**

The first thing to do is accurately establish the diagnosis. This means contacting the vet. If you have several young birds become sick, don't assume a diagnosis. The problem may be Circo virus or it may be one of the other problems mentioned earlier. Don't rely on the old guy down at the club or your neighbour who also races pigeons. They don't have the diagnostic testing available and this simply wastes time. Similarly don't go to the local dog and cat vet. If he doesn't do a lot of bird work, he can't be expected to know and it is

therefore unfair to be critical of him. Go to a qualified avian vet or a vet with a lot of bird experience. It's worth mentioning here that avian birds can be thin on the ground, but you don't have to be near one. Phone to have a test kit mailed out to you or organize to send a live bird to them via courier. 50% of the thousands of fanciers who use my clinic as their veterinary provider live more than 50 miles from the clinic.

Do bear in mind that antibiotics kill bacteria but **not** viruses. There is no medication that can be routinely prescribed that directly kills viruses. This means the infection needs to be brought under control by other means. In some areas of the world a vaccine for pigeon Circo virus is available. Where possible; routine vaccination of 6 week old youngsters is recommended.

### **What to do if the problem is diagnosed in your loft**

In the face of an outbreak, where available, all youngsters should be vaccinated. After this the following 4 point plan is adopted:

1. Separate sick birds; treat them with a broad spectrum antibiotic e.g. Baytril 2.5% four drops once daily orally and an anti-canker drug e.g. Spartix 1 tablet daily. And place an electrolyte/glucose preparation e.g. Electrolyte P180 in the water. If the birds fail to respond in a few days, they are often best eliminated.
2. To minimize viral build up in the loft ensure the loft is regularly cleaned and kept clean and dry.
3. Care for the birds as well as you possibly can so that the majority can mount a good immune response to the virus i.e. 'fight' the disease. This means, no over crowding, a good diet, good parasite control and treating any secondary diseases identified through testing.



4. Give probiotics, giving probiotics e.g. 'Probac' will decrease the impact of the disease. This is not a treatment for sick birds but if a bird is exposed to Circo virus while it is on probiotics it is that much harder for the virus, or at least an overwhelming dose of the virus, to infect that bird. I usually recommend 'Probac' be placed in the food or water for 2 weeks initially and then for 2 to 3 days each week until the virus has worked its way through the birds i.e. it has been several weeks since a bird has got sick.

After this do nothing except provide good care until the start of tossing. Then have the birds checked i.e. crop flush, fecal smear and Chlamydia test by a bird vet. Any disease that the bird has not developed a good immunity against i.e. still detectable should be treated and controlled so that the second wave of loss is avoided.

Do note that killing sick birds is not a way of eliminating the disease from the loft because the majority of infected birds show no symptoms.

Although it can be frustrating to lose 5% of the youngsters, the important thing to remember is that 90% of the birds in a typical outbreak do not die - The team is therefore essentially intact and with correct management can still go on and win if the birds are good enough.

A good thing is that it appears that recovered birds do develop a good immunity to the disease. This has been shown to occur with Circo virus (a different but related virus) in parrots. It also appears that this immunity can be passed through the crop milk and indeed the egg (the yolk which is sucked into the abdomen during development, contains lots of antibodies and hatching chicks also gulp and swallow some of the egg white (which also contains immunoglobins) which coats the

lining of the bowel). Because of these and other factors the effect of the virus dramatically reduces each year.

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