

Loft Management

By: Al Hanson -Wausau, WI

Based on past mistakes when trying to raise pigeons, I have learned many lessons. As I have observed my pigeons this year, I have been very pleased with their appearance and health. When any of us write about or talk about our particular breed of pigeon, certain buzzwords come to mind. In my breed, words like PERKY, ALERT, and ACTIVE would describe them well. From the time that I first put my breeders together last February until now, which is August, the behavioral pattern hasn't changed and all of my birds are exhibiting traits that to me mean that they are in excellent health. I have a couple of shelves loaded down with products from Foy's, but most of them I don't use unless I need to. I'm referring to disease related items. So for the most part, whatever I do give my pigeons is basically in the line of vitamins. Here are some of the things that I do and use in my lofts that work well for me.

#1 Space: I provide ample space for all of my pigeons. For my young birds I have provided four separate pens with a total floor space of 160 square feet. For my breeders I have provided a total of two nest boxes for each pair in each of my breeding pens. Most of my pens are a minimum of 6 x 8 x 7 or 48 square feet of floor space for six pairs of pigeons. The value of space for my pigeons has given me the only thing I have wanted and that is a flock of healthy K's. If you stop and think about it, having healthy birds will allow you to breed more youngsters. The survival rate of your young, should be at or close to 100%. The condition of your breeders at the end of the season, will allow them to go into the molt with minimal stress related factors. And finally, because of the general overall health of your birds, they will automatically look better and show better at any of the shows you bring them to during the fall and winter season.

#2 Grit: I don't have any secrets for success, however this is what I give my pigeons. I use Kay tee brand grit, which is already pre-mixed, however I do add extra oyster shells, megamins, and a product from Foy's called Pigeon Grit Concentrate. When I fill the grit containers (I do this often), my birds react to it like it must be desert because they sure go after it!

#3 Feed: I happen to use two different products, Kay tee and Ware Street Market (a local store), but both are geared for flying birds. I realize that a flying mix is more expensive, but if I can avoid stress and diseases, then I believe that the cost effectiveness is justifiable. All year long, as I buy feed, this is what I do to it when I put the feed into my containers. I take five scoops of feed, add one half scoop of safflower seed, one cup of hemp seed, and then sprinkle a mixture of Brewers yeast and garlic powder on it. I then mix it thoroughly and continue with the same process until my feed bin is full. About once a month I mix cod liver oil into the feed. I don't know if I should be doing that more often or not, but so far everything has worked out well. As a friend of mine told me when we were discussing this -"If it ain't broke don't fix it!"

#4 Water: First of all, I wash my water containers, with soap and water, frequently. Fresh water is given every day all year round. During the course of the year I do quite a few different things with my water.

For Worming I use a product called Foy's Liquid Wormer twice a year. Iodine: I add two drops per gallon of fresh water about one a month. Fortifiers: I couldn't think of a better name than fortifier. I use a variety of these and I haven't broken the use down so that I would know exactly how well each one is working, however here is a list of them that I use for my pigeons. Foy's Pigeon Builder: I use this product on the average of twice a week. Vitapreen: This product is used about every three weeks. Soluable Hemoplex: Another product used every two weeks. I always make sure that at least every other container of water for my birds is just Plain Fresh Water!

#5 Ventilation: As Joe Quinn mentioned in one of his series of tapes, "Pigeons don't seem to mind pigeon dust but humans sure do!" My old loft (it has since been razed) was totally void of an adequate ventilating system. I remember some of the violent reactions my body had to the overwhelming amount of dust that I was inhaling. The last three lofts that I built in Wausau, WI, they all had wind turbines on the roof. Each loft has two windows on the South side, with either a window or door on the East and West sides. I would leave the screens on the windows and doors open all year long. In the Wausau, Wisconsin area that means temperatures ranging from 95 degrees F to -40 degrees F. Bernie Lehman, another pigeon breeder from Wausau, came over to see my birds and lofts. His first comment was, " Al, you don't have any dust. " Don't misconstrue this as NONE. Of course my loft has some dust but not very much and you will never see it layered on anything. This is not because I'm out there keeping it dust free, I believe it is because of the openness that has been created for each loft About once a month I would go into loft #3 where my show cages, feed, and storage area were located and use my vacuum to get rid of feathers,

dust, and crushed cobs that might be on the floor. By leaving my lofts open I firmly believe that the health of my pigeons has improved and by the way, so has mine!

#6 Odds and Ends: When I vaccinate my birds for PMV-1 it gives me another opportunity to observe and personally handle each of my pigeons for another time. I always keep a legal pad handy so that if I see something unusual I can quickly jot down the bird's band number and a brief description of what I saw or felt. As far as my young birds are concerned, I also write comments about prospective birds for the upcoming show season. This is just another way that I try to keep myself as well informed as possible about each of my birds. When I complete the job of vaccinating, I'll take whatever notes I have written and transfer them onto my breeding cards. I'd like to leave you with one last message. When I walk into my lofts and observe my "stress free" pigeons, it is, indeed, just that, because after being with my birds I quickly found out that I too became stress free. No wonder that by the end of each work day I'm always looking forward to seeing my pigeons!!