

The Old German Owl--Getting Less Rare all the Time

by John Verburg and Helen Bresler: July 1998

At the NPA Grand National in Portland, Oregon, we saw our first Old German Owls. They were the shield-marked variety, and all belonged to Sieglinde Tate, of Duarte, California. What attracted us about them were their distinct markings, their large bull eyes, and their friendly nature. We bought a black cock and a dun hen from Sieglinde on the spot, and have been Old German Owl enthusiasts ever since.

Sieglinde imported her first Old German Owls from Germany in 1989. Her first imports were blacks, but by 1993, she had imported two more groups and had almost every color. John Nelson, of St. Joseph, Michigan, has also imported birds from Germany in December of 1993. One of these was the best Old German Owl at the Ulm show, a blue bar, and was bred by Neinz Schlapp. Jessica Nelson fell in love with these birds, and by 1994 her father John had imported barred birds for her in blue, and many other colors including red, and cream and self whites. In fairly short order, birds bred by Sieglinde and John found their way into the lofts of other pigeon fanciers who had been charmed by the Old German Owl. Our first pair settled right in to their new home and started making babies. By summer, we had several young birds, and had met two other breeders of Old German Owls in our area. One of these had gotten his birds from Sieglinde, and the other had gotten his from someone in Minnesota in the spring of 1993. No one knows the origin of these birds, but some believe that they originated from Canada.

About this time, we read about a tail-marked variety of the Old German Owl, and began a correspondence with Bill Jacox, of Rhinebeck, New York, who had bred these birds for many years. This tail-marked variety has been in the United States for some time, being reported in the Pageant of Pigeons Show in 1951. We traded some of our shield-marked birds for some of his tail-marked ones, and now keep both varieties in a wide range of colors.

Old German Owls find friends wherever they're shown. The Evergreen Old German Owl Club, which started in Washington State, now has members in New York, Michigan, and California. John Nelson reports that there are new breeders in Iowa and Kansas. This shouldn't be surprising, considering that birds very much like the Old German Owl have been popular in northern and eastern Europe for more than a hundred years. A similar breed in Belgium is the Gent Frill, a bird very similar to the Old German Owl, shield-marked, with a peak-crest. A Dutch bird that is nearly identical to the Old German Owl, being the same size with shield marking and shell crest, is referred to as the Farmer's Owl because they were so commonly kept on farms or in garden dovecotes. We saw these birds all over the Netherlands. In Norway, there is another bird, identical to the Old German Owl, called the Norsk Petent. In Greece, we saw birds that were also identical in form, with plain heads, but being both shield and tail-marked concurrently. This marking is often referred to as Anotolian.

So what makes these birds so attractive? Is it their elegant markings, their graceful crests and dainty frills, their friendly faces, or their tame nature? We think it's all these and more. They are fun to keep because they are tame and friendly. They are easy to keep because their beaks are long enough to feed their own young perfectly well, and they are very good parents. They are a smallish bird, so fit easily in the hand. They're also terrific flyers. We let ours fly most days, and while they don't fly for a long time, they are very acrobatic, doing lots of dips and 360 degree twirls just for the fun of it. Ours have outflown Cooper's Hawks many times by the use of speed, dives, and quick turns. They are pretty flyers, and their markings are still visible when they're in the air, although the colored tail is more distinctive than the colored shield when viewed from the ground. Several of our neighbors have told us how much they enjoy seeing our birds fly.

The Old German Owl is also interesting and challenging to breed. In the shield-marked variety, we continue to work on eliminating colored feathers in the vent area and on the thighs while maintaining the good owl body type and stance. In the tail-marked variety, our challenge has been to work on getting a more rounded head while maintaining the markings, which generally breed true. Both marked varieties come in a wide array of colors, and self-colored birds come in red or white. The color possibilities make each baby bird's feather development quite exciting, as we try to guess what color it will be.

So, if you're looking for a pigeon that's pretty, tame, and easy to breed, give the Old German Owl a try. For more information, you can contact the Evergreen Old German Owl Club by e-mail to duiven@aol.com or by regular mail to Verle and Elaine Kirk, 8790 Van Belle R., Sunnyside, WA 98944, and don't forget to check the web page at: <http://members.aol.com/duiven/eogoa.htm>. Who knows, if this breed's popularity continues to grow, there may be some in your neighborhood soon.