

Mixing of two young bird groups that are significantly different in age can be bad for both. The younger group tends to keep the older group from routing and developing as they should. And, the older group can take the real youngsters too far from the loft, too soon, and get them lost. You will find, however, that as they gain some maturity, the two groups can be brought together with good success.

The above is an additional reason for not breeding too many rounds of youngsters before splitting up your breeding pairs. All youngsters that you raise should be old enough to allow road training out to at least 30-40 miles in the fall of the year. Young birds that are not trained will generally be of questionable value as candidates for your old bird racing team the next spring.

THE RACES



You have done your homework. You have given your young team a foundation that has them fit and confident. You'll find the races themselves are great fun and relatively easy.

If this is your very first racing season, you may approach it just a bit differently than the veteran who already has an established old bird team. Many flyers feel the best plan is to send all birds that are healthy and fit to every race, as long as the race time is under six hours in duration. If the race goes beyond that, then the birds would not be sent to the next week's race.

Another qualifier might be that birds that are molting heavily around the head and body should be held out of competition until they pass through this phase.

You may want to consider another strategy. You may want to split your team into an "A" group and a "B" group. You can race one group one week, the other the following week, in rotation. Expected weather conditions on a given race date and your own good judgment will be important additional factors in your decision-making. As you make your start in pigeon racing, your objective should probably be to thoroughly test each pigeon's racing ability, but to also apply restraint as you build your loft of racers.

On the day of shipping to a race, the birds should be fed about the normal amount fed in the morning. In the evening, before basketing the birds to ship to the race, feed a **small** amount of grain. You don't want to fill them up with feed, but you do want to encourage water consumption before shipping.

Any birds not going to a race should receive a training toss from 30-40 miles that weekend. Race birds should be fed lightly the day of return and the morning after. Without forcing exercise, the birds should be put back in their routine the day after the race. All of your youngsters should be given a bath the day after the race. It's preferable to give the bath outside of the loft, on the landing board.



We have not directly addressed the maintenance of the health of your young bird team. Instead, you are referred to another pamphlet in this series, "Health Care Regimen." We feel it is important, however, to remind you that at least the most basic preventive steps should be taken. You should vaccinate young birds for Paramyxovirus some four weeks before the start of training. After consulting with a veterinarian and/or knowledgeable veteran flyers in your area, you may also want to vaccinate for Pox and Paratyphoid.

Good luck, and good racing!



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YOUNG BIRD RACING





GENERAL

Working with young pigeons, and preparing them for competition, is one of the most enjoyable parts of the racing pigeon sport. Your “young bird team,” once they have been weaned, should be housed separately from older pigeons. Most fanciers wean the youngsters at 25-28 days of age.

Newly weaned birds should be fed the same high quality, varied diet (breeding mix) their parents were being fed. During the first few days after weaning, your primary interest is that the babies find the feed and water. Observing them for only a few minutes, you’ll be able to spot those that are not drinking. If you see a repeated blinking of the eyes, you will want to pick up the youngster and gently dunk its beak in the water. One and not more than two such lessons should be sufficient.

Each youngster should have access to its own perch. If anything, you will want to have more perches than birds. The section of loft being used should be dry at all times, and allow plenty of fresh air and sunshine, without being drafty. The front of the loft should have a large landing board, a trapping device such as stall trap or “bobs,” and an opening to allow the birds to exit the loft for exercise. Your own management for the young bird team is also important. For example, they should have access to grit at all times and should be given baths regularly. Most prefer twice-a-day feeding of the grain ration. Your daily attention to loft cleanliness is also a key.

SETTLING

Early training and conditioning is critical with young birds. The youngsters should be

put on the Landing board, in a wire settling cage, beginning a few days after weaning. The first time or two out, and before feeding them, you may want to actually catch them and place them on the board. After being given plenty of time to observe their surroundings, you should later call the youngsters in by rattling the feed can or whistling. They will quickly learn that they receive feed when called to enter the loft.

This is a time for patience in the handling of your birds. Remember, they are very young. With repetition, they will learn surprisingly quickly. Just be sure to be realistic in what you expect of them in the early weeks after weaning.

After a week or so of daily release to the landing board and settling cage, the young birds will be ready for the next step. This is their first release onto the landing board—without the settling cage. Do this in the late afternoon and when they are good and hungry. Some will fly to the roof of the loft, while others may not leave the board. Be careful not to frighten them or push them at this time. After a few days of these releases, and being called in by the feed can, they will understand what is expected. In getting acquainted with their surroundings, some of the youngsters may land on a neighboring house for a time. Not to worry, this will pass quickly, and they will soon be flying like they know what they are doing!

Depending on your own lifestyle and schedule, the birds should be released for exercise once or twice daily. Most fanciers like an early morning and a late afternoon exercise period. Always exercise before feeding, and call them into your loft after the exercise is complete. This establishes their habits and will make good trappers out of them for life. Under no circumstances should the birds be allowed “open loft” (to come and go from the loft at will) all day long. After just a couple of weeks, your youngsters will begin to get much stronger on the wing. They will fly for gradually longer periods, and they will fly together as a kit.

As they progress further, the young birds will begin to “route.” This refers to the team leaving your sight, and exploring the countryside for 30,

60 or more minutes at a time. They are conditioning themselves and are learning to confidently navigate over new territory. It should not be necessary to force young pigeons to fly if they are healthy. If you have doubts as to the health of your team, don’t hesitate to ask a veteran flyer to help you evaluate their health and fitness at this stage.

TRAINING

As with many things relating to pigeons, it’s good to remember that there are not absolutes when it comes to the road training of your team. There are various practices and approaches to training that can result in developing the bred-in ability of your birds. Your objectives with training include the conditioning of the birds, building their confidence, and generally laying a foundation to prepare them for competition later on.



So, when to start? The various rules of thumb that fanciers use include, when the young birds have reached about three and one-half months of age; or when the birds have been routing more than an hour, for a couple of weeks. Others like to wait until about six weeks before the first race to begin the “road work.”

And, what distance to start the training? Once again, there are a number of approaches that are

sound. Just remember, you’re building confidence and a foundation. We offer here one approach that should work well for you. The first toss can be from 3-5 miles. Assuming the birds have a good trip and return readily, the second toss can be from 8 miles. Then, from 10, 12, 15, 20, 25, 30, 40, 50, 60 and 70 miles. At any point, if you have a bad training toss and experience losses, consider backing off of your schedule and giving a couple of remedial tosses. One sound rule of thumb is that the youngsters should receive at least twenty total training tosses before being sent to the first 100-mile race.

Other guidelines in the training of your young bird team: (1) Train generally from the direction of the race course. (2) Birds should be trained in good weather conditions and released from unobstructed sites. (3) Upon arrival at a training location, allow the birds to set in the training basket ten minutes before release so that they can get oriented. (4) To encourage independence and confidence in your birds, you may want to release them in small groups on some tosses. (5) Early morning is generally considered the best time to train. (6) Birds should arrive home to feed and fresh water; always call them in if you can be there. (7) Once the race series begins, training tosses through the week from 30 to 40 miles should keep your birds conditioned and sharp. Two or three such tosses per week should be adequate. (8) As you ask more of the birds in terms of their work and flying, be aware of adequate nutrition. Without overfeeding, you want to insure that your athletes are getting enough. They should be allowed to consume all they will clean up within fifteen minutes, twice a day.

TEAM MAKE-UP

Ideally, all of the members of your young bird team should be nearly the same age. This allows you to train and work with the full team in the same manner. As a practical matter, however, this often is not the case. If, for example, you have one round or group of youngsters that is sixty days older than a younger group, you need to consider managing them as two separate teams. That includes housing them in two separate sections of the loft.