NEST SET-UP

There are several ways to get pigeons to mate, build nests and lay eggs. While not quite as prolific as rabbits and rats, they don't need a whole lot of encouragement!

Since team members' primary incentive to return home is based upon mate and eggs, allowing pairs free mate selection seems appropriate.

If the flyer wants youngsters out of a certain pair of flyers, then pre-mate a specific pair or so. Eggs can be transferred or the pair can't raise the youngsters themselves before the season begins. Just remember that raising youngsters taxes the parents and what's taken out of them in March may not be there for the long races in May and June.

Most top natural flyers prefer to fly strictly to eggs, avoiding the problems and stress of youngster raising. While this exclusion does make the term "natural" a misnomer and "nesting" probably a more accurate label, it is merely a matter of semantics.

The 21-day cycle is the easiest program to compete on. The flyer should try to determine which races he wants his 2-5 year olds to go to. By removing the eggs 3 calendar weeks before a specific race date, the bird in question ought to be on eggs approximately 10 days.

When the birds return on Saturday from the race, simply remove the eggs on Sunday and the cycle repeats itself for 3 weekends in the future. If there is a particularly hot bird, especially on the shorter races and the fancier wishes to repeat the bird the following week, it is a simple matter of allowing the pair to sit on the eggs an additional week. Slipping a 2-3 day baby under the hen a few hours before shipping **sometimes** does magical things. Just be sure that the bird hasn't flown more than 7 hours the previous week. Well rested is more important than motivated!

The key to being consistent over the whole series is to have an appropriate percentage of team members prepared (nest position and condition) to compete in each scheduled race. This can be accomplished, to a large degree, by listing scheduled races and those birds on the race team.

Consider the long races first and plan on setting up those qualified long distance candidates first by removing the eggs 21 days prior to each particular race. Try to get these select distance performers to 2-3 shorter races before the first long one—sometimes like 150-200-300 (remove eggs) and 400/500 three weeks later.

With the sprint vets and yearlings, supplement the distance birds to fill out the limit and use them exclusively between long distance events. They can also be set up on the 21-day cycle.

In-season training should include at least 2 longer tosses (T-Th 60 miles) and possibly a 20 mile toss on Friday with race candidates for Saturday's race. Those team members not going to the race can go 100-120 miles on a Saturday or Sunday toss, particularly those birds not raced for a couple of weeks.

Above all—pre-plan, be patient and flexible!

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AMERICAN RACING PIGEON UNION, INC.

OLD BIRD FLYING

NATURAL/NESTING METHOD

By
Steve Lawler

OLD BIRDS-NATURAL

It seems that the recent trend has swung decidedly towards the Old Bird flying methods of Widowhood, Double Widowhood, and Celibacy. While these techniques have proven successful, there exists a need for information on the "ins-and-outs" of good old-fashion Natural/Nest Old Bird Flying.

Before the specific details are examined, a section suggesting the appropriateness of the schedule (including dates of long distance events); composition of the individual Old Bird team, including such considerations as number, age and type (sprint or distance) of those team members, seems necessary if one is to have a chance for success in the Old Bird arena.

THE SCHEDULE

The absolute need for an enlightened Old Bird schedule can not be stressed enough. It is of the utmost importance that the schedule be built backwards—that is, selecting dates of the long distance events first and then supplementing the schedule with other shorter races.

If for the sake of example the last date a particular organization wishes to have their birds compete is June 18th (perhaps up through May 28th in the southern climates), then that should be one of the long distance weekends. Scheduling of two races (A and B from the same location of perhaps a 500 and 600 released simultaneously or a 600 released and a 500 driven back and released) really makes financial sense.

So let's say the 500 and 600 are on June 18th. Three weeks prior to this (May 28th) another double long race distance event is held—maybe a 400 and 500. Three weeks prior to that (May 7th) a double 400 or a 400/500 could be scheduled.

By scheduling the long races **three weeks apart**, the same birds can be used in top nest positions (10 day eggs) over these three races. If the long races are bunched, especially near the end of the season, a large number of long distance types must be maintained. This is ridiculous and can be avoided by simply scheduling intelligently.

So the schedule could look something like this: April 2 - 150, April 9 - 200, April 16 - 250, April 23 - 300, April 30 - 250, May 7 - 400/500, May 14 - 250, May 21 - 300, May 28 - 400/500 or 500/600, June 4 - 250, June 11 - 300, June 18 - 500/600.

With a schedule like this, yearlings and sprint birds can fly numerous races without taxing themselves. These birds can also be set up to fly to 10 day eggs by removing previous nest eggs three weeks before the date desired to race (approximately 10 days to lay and 10 days on eggs).

TEAM COMPOSITION

The make-up of the Old Bird team should reflect a solid veteran group of birds 2-5 years old. Oftentimes fanciers stop flying quality old birds too early. These veterans should be about half sprinters and half distance birds. A fancier really needs to have at least two families, maybe more, to cover all the bases during the season. Besides birds for the sprints, there are easy and tough middle distance races and easy and tough 500/600's. It takes different kinds of birds to be on top in each type of race because of conditions encountered.

Approximately half of the 40-60 OBs (depending on bird quality, course, conditions and flyer experience/capabilities) should be yearlings. These birds are the lifeblood of the team. They will carry your "colors" over the next 2-3 years.

TRAINING AND EXERCISE

The composition of the Old Bird team will determine the type and amount of training needed. Late hatches and/or lightly raced young birds plus the bona fide yearlings need additional training compared to the old veterans.

Don't be afraid to start earlier training with the inexperienced (or less experienced) members of the team. Many late hatches have been trained in 10-15 degree weather over Christmas vacation. The great Otto Meyer has related stories of Signal Corp pigeons being trained in the Arctic at 40 degrees below zero!

Retrospectively, late hatches really should go out at least 40 miles in the Fall to "set" that homing instinct early in their lives. These more inexperienced birds can be trained at 5 mile intervals like young birds come Spring time.

Starting early (end of February for mid-April start) allows weekend training on good days only. Avoid starting late and feeling forced to go down the road "no matter what." As the distance increases out to 20 miles or so the old veterans can be added to the training. They should of course have been outside exercising at least 2-4 weeks before they begin road work. Same goes for the yearlings before they start down the road.

Get the old birds out to 50-60 miles before the first race with plenty of exercise (free loft, if possible, in each respective locale). The more time in the Spring sunshine, the better the early performances. The yearlings need to be worked more strenuously, very much like the young bird training (out to 100 miles). Get them out on plenty of short tosses, too.

A wise, patient flyer is only going to go 300, possibly 400 miles with these youngsters their first year on the OB team. Invest the time and effort to get them ready and confident to perform a realistically selected series of races.

With such a variety of conditions, weather patterns, hawk migrations, race season starting dates, etc., each flyer needs to adjust dates according to his own unique situation.