

Acclimation

by

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I have to say that things haven't been easy the last two months. I have suffered my third computer crash in recent weeks, and, along with losing some data, I have also lost some emails. Ordinarily, this wouldn't be much of a problem, but because I get so many emails and because I am clearly getting older, I often need them to refresh my memory.

In the process of all these crashes, I have also fallen behind on writing my articles. While this has given me time to do other things, it also leaves me feeling like I am behind, and I don't like to feel that way. One day, just like Forest Gump when he just didn't feel like running anymore, I will get tired of writing or simply run out of things to say (I could have said, "Intelligent things to say," but that probably occurred a while ago), and I will quit writing altogether.

To date, I have written approximately 50 articles (I have lost count because I have written articles for several publications), and that is quite a few by any standard. To this point, I have enjoyed writing, and with all the practice I have probably gotten a little better at it. However, because of the aforementioned computer problems and work-related activities, the last several articles have been more rushed than usual and I am sorry for that.

Recently, my good friend Steen wrote and asked me a question that deserves some attention. It seems that Steen has been adding pigeons to his loft over the last several years. During that period he has gone from liking them to not liking them and then back to liking them. In reality it probably wasn't the initial pigeons that he is commenting on, but rather the offspring.

Generally when we buy pigeons, we tend to like what we have bought at least until we see the youngsters. If the youngsters don't come out very well, then we tend to think less of what we have purchased. Sometimes this is because what we have bought is really no good and sometimes it is because they have not acclimated to the loft.

Most pigeons take two years to fully acclimate to the loft. This is one of the reasons that I don't like purchasing older pigeons. The fact is that older pigeons might not have the time to produce anything before they become too old to produce anything useful.

Pigeons above eight years old do not suffer through an environmental change very readily; in fact all pigeons should probably sit for their first year in a new loft. Obviously this is not always possible, but it is still probably a very good idea even when it is impossible.

This year, I introduced three pairs of Horemans into my breeding loft. I already know that these are excellent pigeons; in their environment, they have proven to be outstanding pigeons. However, when they reached my loft, two of the three pairs stumbled a little bit. I know from experience that very few pigeons come into my loft without experiencing some complication. Obviously, the heat in Arizona is something to be reckoned with, and many pigeons simply can't stand up to it.

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When I first came to Arizona in 1980, I brought in a few pigeons from my old family. This was an interesting experience because I was winning and losing at the same time with the offspring of these pigeons. The simple unfortunate fact was that these pigeons couldn't handle the headwinds—when they were faced with headwinds, they became stressed and got sick. I would win the race and lose half of what I sent all in the same race.

It took me awhile to realize that the native pigeons that I had purchased were not getting sick. However, when I did, I spent a great deal of time thinking about and observing the phenomena. Through study, I came to realize the subtle signs of shock that these pigeons were experiencing. In fact, under the stress of racing, these subtle signs became far less subtle.

The fact is that your breeders are not under the stress of racing, so often the signs are very subtle. It may come in the form of slightly stiffer joints, slightly drier feather, slightly less or more color to the throat. Setting these signs aside, it is probably easier to see when the first youngsters are raised.

Going back to the Horemans, you will remember that I mentioned that two of the three pairs didn't quite breed up to their standard. This is no knock on these pigeons, as they produced extremely well and probably most fanciers would never have noticed any difference, but as I have studied what to look for in new pigeons, I quickly realized that they were struggling. While I would like to have let them set out the year, that simply was not an option in this case, so I had to resort to some things that I otherwise never do.

Upon seeing that they were struggling, I let them raise the first round, but then transferred the second and third round. After these eggs were laid, both pairs looked a lot better, so I let them take a crack at raising another round, which they did with better results.

Yet, with all of this, one of the pairs produced all the way through with no problems, and this pair not only produced, but it produced with amazing results. The offspring from this pair are double inbreds, and there was every reason for them to fall apart, but instead their health has been superior! One youngster even tumbled out of a top nest and broke its leg at about 15 days, but he was fully healed and on his way by 25 days. At every turn these pigeons have proven to be very durable, and I am expecting great things from them.

The other two pairs have had mixed results that I am confident are related to acclimation, and here is why. When my wife was having our first son, I learned a few things. One of

them was that you should never ask the nurse for a warm receiving blanket to wrap yourself in so that you can keep warm, as your wife will tend to frown (or worse) on this. Hey, I was cold!

The second thing I learned was that when a child is born, they do a test on the baby to determine its height, weight, heart rate, and color against a standard chart. For instance, my son was in the 90th percentile. Doctors continue to use height and weight as the standard from there forward.

In the past, I have also written about a classmate of mine from grade school. At that time there was a government physical fitness program in the schools that was set up to measure the physical ability of boys and girls against a standard. Having a useless memory for such details, I can clearly remember that one overcast day she did 40 pull-ups, broad-jumped 9 feet, and ran the 660-yard dash in under two minutes. All of this was at 11 years old. Later I ran into her and her boyfriend at a class reunion and being me I had to recount the whole story to her boyfriend. When I was finished, he said, "And the Olympic Rowing Team." It seems that once an athlete always an athlete.

It is this kind of things that made me start measuring youngsters at a very early age. I have a standard and they need to meet that standard. Well, the point of this is that among the three Horemans pairs, one pair met or exceeded the standard, one sporadically met the standard, and the third has yet to produce a pigeon that has met the standard.

What makes this more interesting is that where the second pair met the standard, it was in the hens and not the cocks (three cocks and three hens). However, in the fourth round when the pair had started to acclimate, they produced two cocks that met the standard. Without the stress of raising youngsters, the pair had made amazing strides toward acclimation.

In a similar fashion, when those pigeons that I had initially brought over from California had been here for two years, they started to produce more normally. While there is no fast rule about how a pigeon overcomes the initial problems with acclimation, there are other supporting factors. Let's take the money races here in the United States as another example. Many areas accept both native and non-native pigeons into their races. They call the latter out-of-area pigeons. This concept got started simply because out-of-area pigeons had a known disadvantage going into the race. True, it doesn't always work out this way, but it does happen enough to have been noted.

It is my strong belief that what happens to a pigeon during any year will have an affect on the moult. It is also my belief that anything that happens to the moult will have an affect on the pigeon during the course of the following year. Therefore, if you purchase a pigeon before the moult, it will have an affect on the moult. If you purchase a pigeon during the moult, it will have an affect on the coming year. If this is true, you will have to complete the second moult to be entirely free of the situation.

It is disappointing to see how many fanciers have purchased pigeons only to go through this problem and then discard the pigeon. Had they waited just one more year, it might have made all the difference!

In the past, I have had pigeons that were either all good or all bad when it came to acclimation. Having a diverse range, such as the one shown by the Horemans thus far, is also going to be interesting. Even with their slower acclimation, I have no doubts that the second pair is going to be extremely successful, and yet the first pair had no problems at all. I will be watching this very closely, as it may lead to some interesting discoveries!

Clearly, Steen has made an interesting observation and possibly this article will help others to understand the reasons.

Until next time!

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