

PIGEONS.

Pigeons' Lofts and Matching Pens.

Having selected the kind of birds to be kept, the first consideration with a fancier is to find them suitable accommodation. It seldom occurs, however, that a room is specially built for pigeons, but where there is a choice of locality it is best to select one with a southerly aspect, as it tends to encourage early breeding and is more healthy for the birds than a room exposed to the cold blasts from the north. A dark room is objectionable, it is not as healthy for the birds, especially if they are not suffered to fly out. In any establishment of this kind a good system of ventilation is of the utmost importance. Nine-tenths of the diseases which afflict our high-bred pigeons arise from their being crowded together in dark, dirty, ill-ventilated lofts. Cleanliness, too, is no less an essential, particularly if many birds are kept and not permitted access to the open air. The loft should be cleaned out daily, and under no circumstances should the dung be allowed to accumulate until it becomes offensive to the smell. Fresh gravel, sand or dry earth, should be thickly strewn on the floor every day, and the dung which accumulates in the nest-boxes and around the nest-pans not suffered to collect in any quantity. It is necessary in constructing a loft that provision be made against the ingress of cats, rats and other vermin. Strange cats are most destructive to pigeons. It is said that when a cat has once tasted pigeon, she prefers it to all other food. Rats also are great destroyers of eggs and young birds, and even attack old birds; means should therefore be adopted to prevent their climbing to the nests, which may be accomplished by nailing pieces of tin or zinc round the walls of the loft, so as to prevent their cutting through into it.

Pigeon lofts should, if practicable, be so arranged as to admit of being divided, so as to enable the separation of the birds during winter to be readily accomplished. This is not absolutely necessary with the more common hardy breeds, as in a well sheltered room they will go on breeding successfully nine or ten months out of the twelve; but with the more artificial and delicate high-class varieties, it is useless to attempt to rear the young during the cold months of the year, and therefore it is desirable to separate the sexes after moulting time, or the autumn. This is most readily done by dividing the loft. If the birds are flown, the loft should be so arranged that the cocks and hens can be let out separately, and they may be given their liberty on alternate days. Next in importance to be considered, is the proper arrangement of breeding places or nesting boxes. These are of two kinds—shelves placed against the wall or placed on the floor—if the rooms are crowded shelves may be placed round the walls, and the spaces between them divided by upright divisions, placed about three feet apart, so as to form pens or breeding-places for the different pairs of birds. And if pouters are kept, the distance between the shelves should not be less than eighteen inches; but for the smaller varieties, a foot or fifteen inches will suffice. The ends of each pen should be boarded so that the centre only is open. When lofts are sufficiently spacious, nest-boxes may be placed on the floor and are much more convenient, there is then no danger of the young ones falling out of their nests. When nests are placed on the floor, breeding boxes for the concealment of them are very desirable, they should be made without bottoms, so as to be merely covers to slip over the nests.

We have now to consider the best kind of nests to be used. Round flat saucers are considered the best, and may be made at any brick or tile yard. In size, these pans should vary with that of the different breeds; for small birds as tumblers, seven or eight inches in diameter is quite sufficient; but for pouters, ten inches is not too great. These pans should be made heavy so that they are not likely to be upset by the old birds resting on the edge. In damp or cold weather, or when the nestlings are very young, a handful of saw dust or bran speedily absorbs all

moisture, and the nest becomes dry and wholesome. To keep the eggs warm, a little soft hay, or cut straw, bran or saw dust should be placed within them. Unlike fowls, pigeons are not dusting birds, but, on the contrary, they cleanse themselves by washing; they are fond of lying down in shallow pools of water, expanding their wings, loosening the arrangement of the feathers, and then when the plumage is well nigh saturated, they give a vigorous shake, and the water at once becomes quite white and milky, with the scurf thrown off from the skin of the bird. Shallow pans of water should therefore be placed in their lofts, so that they may indulge in this pleasure when desirable. Pigeons are very thirsty birds, a supply of drinking water, should therefore be always within their reach, especially so when the young are being fed, as after picking up a cropful of corn, the old bird has to take a copious draft of water before it can disgorge it into the throat of the young, and too much stress cannot be laid on the fact that a supply of pure, clear drinking water, is absolutely essential to the health of the birds, an ordinary drinking fountain is the best, if so constructed that the bird cannot step into it, and render the water filthy. Pigeons have a great fondness for salt, a natural instinct which should be indulged. Some fanciers nail a piece of codfish near some convenient perch, so that they can supply themselves whenever desired. Others keep lumps of rock salt in vessels for the same purpose. A very necessary appendage to a loft is a mating or matching up cage. In order to breed birds of any desired properties, it is requisite that the parents should be matched together, according to the judgment of the owner, and for this purpose all that is necessary is to place them in a mating cage for a few days. For this purpose an ordinary pen or cage with an open wire partition separating the two birds will do, the cock is placed on one side, the hen he is desired to pair with, on the other. They should be placed out of sight of the other birds, when the cock will soon make advances towards the hen. The partition may then be withdrawn, and the birds allowed to go together. When the cock is observed calling the hen to nest.



they may be considered as paired, and they then can safely be returned to the loft. The length of time necessary for pairing, depends much on circumstances—pigeons at times, are more anxious to mate than at other times, and when this is the case they will mate sooner. Care should be taken that too many cocks be not allowed in the same loft, as odd cocks are continually persecuting the hens that are mated, and driving them off their eggs, thus causing much fighting and turmoil. A cock should never be allowed to become master of two pens, for he will never rest until he has driven the other pair from their nest, and demolished their eggs or killed their young. In such cases it is better to transfer him to another loft, and in re-mating the birds which is sometimes desirable, if possible, the cock should get the same habitation; if not he will master two pens. Hens when thoroughly mated, will follow their cocks, the same care with them is not necessary. When hens are near laying, the cock manifests great anxiety and will continually drive his mate from place to place, till she goes on her nest. Sometimes he is too violent in his attention, it is best then to keep him penned until after the hen has laid her eggs. At this time hens are observed to sit with their feathers up as if unwell, and protuberance is often seen on the rump, with the tail drooping. A hen usually lays her eggs, skipping one day between the first and the second, after the second egg is laid, incubation commences, and after the seventeenth day the egg will be clipped and hatched. Pigeons require calcareous matter to furnish the materials of the egg shell, and for this purpose a quantity of old mortar rubbish should be placed within easy reach of the birds. If this is not accessible, oyster shells burnt, so as to render them brittle, powdered up and mixed with a little salt is very good. When pigeons are not flown, but kept continually confined or enclosed in aviary, much care must be exercised in the choice of their food. Peas, barley, wheat screenings, and crushed Indian corn are very good. A quantity of green vegetables is also necessary to their well-being.

An Erroneous Idea.

Many beginners in the business of raising fine fowls start out with the mistaken idea that they must have the so-called "exhibition birds" among pure-breeds, in order to accomplish anything like satisfactory results; and that having secured such birds, they will, on the principle that "like begets like," be able to turn out exhibition fowls in unlimited numbers.

No greater mistake could be made, and the tyro who is so unfortunate as to start out with such expectations is doomed to certain disappointment. In a large number of cases, exhibition birds do not prove successful as breeders, they are not so mated as to produce the best results, and are not such birds probably, as their breeder would have selected for his own use. Of the hundreds of trios of prize birds sold annually at our exhibitions, we don't think ten per cent. of them ever produce chicks as good as themselves; and it is from this cause that many of the complaints arise. Young, hopeful and ambitious beginners purchase these fowls, and with the first season's breeding discover that a large proportion of their produce are very ordinary birds, and immediately condemn the strain of blood as poor; forgetting the fact that the birds they purchased were the choicest trio of a hundred, perhaps, and could not reasonably be expected to produce a large number of young equal to themselves.

The surest and most satisfactory way for a beginner is, to visit some yard where his favorite breed are kept, and see for himself just how they are reared. Then by selecting good, vigorous, healthy birds, above the medium quality, he can by mating them so as to counteract any wrong tendency observable in the stock from which they sprung, produce a stock of fowls which with good management will improve from year to year under his hands, and prove a source of constant satisfaction.—*Live Stock Journal.*

The Diet of Fowls.

The diet of gallinaceous birds, when they are in a wild state, contains a large proportion of highly seasoned or aromatic substances. The buds and berries plucked in the forest are generally spicy, or well flavored with bouquet, or are peppery or pungent. Hence the peculiar game flavor possessed, as every epicure knows, by the flesh of wild animals. Our cultivated grains have a delicious aroma, as proved by newly popped corn, or the fragrance of a loaf fresh from the oven. The flavor of wheat belongs more especially to the portion of the kernel nearest the hull, one reason for the popularity of Graham flour. The flavoring principle in articles of food, such as fruits, nuts, grains or other seeds, consists in a peculiar volatile oil. Now, aroma, bouquet, flavor, or whatever we choose to call it, in food, possesses almost universally a tonic or stimulating property. It gives zest to the appetite and aids digestion. To apply these remarks to the diet of fowls; though grain is aromatic, it is but slightly so, compared with the intensely seasoned forest fare of the partridge, wild turkey, or the parent of our domestic fowl, the wild jungle hen of India. To restore the lost balance, therefore, between the nutritive and stimulating properties of the food of our poultry, a little cayenne pepper, ground mustard or ginger may be added to their meal, dough, milk, or mashed potatoes, with decided benefit to their health and prolificness.

As to cleanliness of henneries, we recommend great care in summer. Carbolic acid dissolved in water should be sprinkled over the wood work of the insides, and a little added to the whitewash, which should be used each season. The nest material should be often changed, that being specially liable to be foul when the birds are confined. Regularity of food, with plenty of pure water and sharp gravel, of course, must not be overlooked.