

## Pigeon and Pet Stock Department,

—CONDUCTED BY—

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### Training Homing Pigeons.

I have lately had enquiries from a number of fanciers who have come into possession of homing pigeons for instructions how to train them, etc. For their benefit I will give the plan I adopted with mine, and found successful.

Training may be commenced when the birds are three or four months old, after they have had a couple of weeks to fly about their home, to gain muscle and a knowledge of their surroundings. They should first be taken 1 mile in the direction in which you intend to train them, and liberated in an open space, some distance from any buildings. The next day increase the distance to 2 miles, the following day to 4, when a day's rest may be given. The distance may now be increased to 8 miles, then to 15, with a day's rest between; then to 25 miles, after which it may be largely extended, say to 40, 60, 100 miles, with a rest of three or four days between each flight. If the birds are early hatched, 150 miles should be covered in the first year's training. I would strongly recommend careful training at first until the birds acquire a knowledge of what is expected of them. The training should be kept up steadily when once started until the season's work is accomplished, not in jumps and starts with long intervals between. The best time to liberate is early in the morning, and when a distance of over 50 miles is to be covered the birds should be at the starting place the previous night.

The hampers used for carrying homers should be light, roomy, and so constructed that the occupants will always have plenty of fresh air. The regular homing pigeon hamper is made of wicker. The usual size is 26in long by 16in broad, and 12in deep. A line of about two inches in width is left uncovered by the horizontal strands of wicker, which leaves spaces of about two inches square between the upright strands, around front and ends of hamper, about half way between top and bottom. This serves for ventilation. The bottom of the hamper and up to these openings is lined with canvas, to prevent the birds breaking their feathers on the wickerwork. In the cover—which is full size of the hamper and hinged at the back—there is a wicker-covered opening of about 6x3 inches, through which the birds are put into the hamper. To liberate them the entire cover is raised. A hamper of this size will accommodate from 12 to 15 birds. The wicker hampers in which liquors are imported make good substitutes for these hampers, with a little preparation, such as lining, and removing the horizontal strands to form a line of openings as described above. The food and water can be given in shallow troughs either in the hamper or outside in front of these openings.

When the birds are sent for liberation full instructions should accompany or precede them, stating when and how they should be liberated. An hour or so before being liberated they should be fed and watered, then taken to an open space, some distance from telegraph wires or other obstructions, and the lid of the hamper quietly raised, the party liberating standing behind the hamper. They should not be liberated in wet, very cloudy or hazy weather. I have lost more birds from this cause than any other—except it may be from the depredations of hawks,—anxiety on the part of those to whom the liberating is entrusted to see the birds fly often prompts them to neglect instructions. Where the birds are detained over night, or for several days on account of unfavorable weather, they should be liberated in a room or loft to give them an opportunity to exercise their wings. I have found that long confinement in the hamper will sometimes cause partial paralysis of the wing muscles, and the bird will be unable to fly. When this occurs a few days in the loft will restore wing power, and the bird may be liberated.

In purchasing homers it should be the aim to get them just when nicely able to feed themselves, and before they have flown out, then there will be very little trouble experienced in "homing" them, or getting them attached to their new home. Have the place of egress to the loft easy of access, and allow them to find their way out when they are ready to fly; never chase them out. If allowed their own way they will take the whole situation in, and be able to return when they wish. With old birds the risk attending liberation is always great—the better the stock the greater the risk. They should not be allowed their liberty until they have hatched a couple of pairs of young and have eggs in the nest.

When homing pigeons are kept in a town or city they should always be fed, watered, and be supplied with everything necessary for their health and comfort in the loft. If this is done they will not be so apt to become the prey of trappers and pot-hunters, as they will seldom alight anywhere but on their own coop, and after a flight they will at once enter their loft for the refreshment they require. This is a great point in training, as the time of entering is what counts in a match. It is very provoking to have a bird arrive home some time before the other competitors in a race, and, instead of entering the loft, fly off to a distant spring or river for a drink, or to the fields in search of food, while those later to arrive enter at once and receive the prize. If they find a little hemp seed when entering the coop it will be an additional inducement to enter quickly in future.

The homing pigeon is the most hardy of the pigeon family, and there is no trouble in breeding them. If they are supplied with old pease and wheat, fresh water daily to drink and bathe in—in separate vessels, of course—old mortar, gravel, a lump of rock salt, and coarse straw or hay for nest-making, they will breed, thrive and keep healthy and vigorous, especially if they have their liberty. They will endure a great deal of hardship, and coddling only unfit them to bear the strain of long flights. They are naturally of rather wild disposition, but with a little patience can be made very tame, and will show attachment almost equal to that of a dog to the attendant, and at the same time be very shy with a stranger.—J. F.