



BIRDS IN TRAINING/RACING

In the first few days after weaning, you will want to have the breeding mix readily available to youngsters. In what is a brand new world to them, this is not yet the time to limit feed. In addition, a four-week old youngster, though almost at his mature size, still has some developing and growing to do. As the young birds have settled to the landing board and are beginning to fly around the loft, remember never to feed before they are let out for exercise. As they complete their exercise and you call them in for feed (using a whistle, feed can, or other sound), put down some feed for them to find upon entering the trap. A good rule of thumb is to feed only the amount that will be cleaned up in 15 minutes. Dump any leftover feed. Exercise and feed morning and evenings, you will find this approach will give you the makings of a healthy yet disciplined young bird team.

The basic ration with the young team is a commercial "racing mix" or one that runs approximately 14%-15% crude protein. As the youngsters begin to "route," or leave the loft

area for extended periods when exercised, this is the time to consider adding supplemental barley to the mix. This "lighter" ration should contain roughly twenty percent barley. You will find your birds will eat the barley last, or only reluctantly. Persevere by adjusting the total amount of feed fed, as barley is an excellent ingredient.



As heavy training and racing take place, you should reduce the amount of barley. Although fat pigeons cannot perform well, remember that heavy work burns a lot of energy (calories). To perform at their peak, your birds must have at least adequate reserves to meet the challenge of a 200 or 300 mile race. This does not suggest that the birds are put on full feed. Quite the contrary, they are still fed twice a day and only what they clean up in 15 minutes. As you begin road training, this would be an excellent time to invite an experienced flyer over to your loft to help you evaluate the body condition of your birds.

If you have developed some mastery of the art of feeding both your breeding pairs and the young bird team, you should find the old birds a breeze. The role of nutrition in the performance and general level of health in the

old bird team, however, is every bit as important as it is with youngsters. The same basics apply. Controlled feeding. Do not overfeed but do not cut them short. Diet is adjusted to workload. Refinements and making adjustments to either a natural or widowhood flying method will come with just a small bit of additional study on your part.



FINALLY...

There are only a couple of cautions necessary in the handling of feed. It should be as clean and dust-free as possible. Feed that is wet, or has been wet, should never be fed to your birds. Damp food is every bit as disastrous as a damp loft. Store feed in a manner that prohibits rodents from having a chance to be in contact with feed. Basic steps such as removal of all feed from the loft at night and storage in mouse-proof containers will serve you well.

The addition of supplemental vitamins and minerals, most often via the water, has become a common practice among pigeon fanciers. During times of stress and heavy demands on your birds, there may well be a benefit to the practice. As with most things, however, moderation is recommended here. The pigeon has evolved and adapted over time to the point that it receives most all of what it requires from its diet. Remember, balance.



PRINTED BY THE
AMERICAN RACING PIGEON UNION, INC.

FEEDING



For More Information Contact:

American Racing Pigeon Union, Inc
P.O. Box 18465
Oklahoma City, OK 73154-0465
PH: 405-848-5801 Fax: 405-848-5888



BACKGROUND

No matter the animal or livestock species, feeding is one of the important variables in the overall care of the animal. In fact, your nutrition program is right there with genetics (breeding), health, conditioning and your own management skill in determining your loft's performance. Pigeons are grain and seed-eaters by their very nature. Just as with humans and other animals, they do best and can be expected to perform at a high level when provided a balanced diet.

In developing the diets or feeding rations for any species, professional nutritionists start by identifying the needs and requirements of the animal at the various stages of its life cycle. It is not an overstatement to say that little scientific study has been devoted to the nutritional requirements of the pigeon. The reason for this is simply that there isn't a sufficient economic incentive for feed companies and universities to devote the necessary resources to the in-depth study of pigeon requirements. Nevertheless, based on some feeding trials done by feed companies, as well as the transfer of knowledge gained from other species, and throw in the practical experience of sharp pigeon flyers over the years, you can be confident that the pigeon feeds sold by reputable manufacturers will do an excellent job for you.

THE BASICS

The basic nutritional requirements of the pigeon are for protein, energy (best sources are fats & carbohydrates), minerals and vitamins. Each of these nutrients is found, but in varying amounts, in all of the grains used in pigeon diets. The general rules of thumb are that pigeons have a higher protein requirement during the breeding season; they have a higher energy requirement during periods of work, such as heavy training or racing. You will find that commercial pigeon mixes all have a feed tag on the bag. This tag lists the percentages of protein, fat and fiber in that feed. The tag also lists, in rank order, the major ingredients of that particular mixture. The protein content has become the quick reference, or shorthand, used by many in the purchase of feed. For example, a 16% feed refers to one that has a crude protein content of 16%.

In articles and books, you will sometimes see references to "heavy" feeds, or to "light" mixtures. The "heavy" is a general reference to a ration that is higher in energy; the "light" to a ration that is lower in energy and higher in fiber. Among the best energy sources are corn, milo, safflower and when used sparingly, raw peanuts. For protein, various varieties of peas have been found to be outstanding for use in pigeon feeds. Barley is a grain that is moderate in most nutrient levels, but is high in fiber, making it a desirable and versatile feed ingredient. It is one of the important grains in the conditioning of performance pigeons.

North America has abundant grains and a wide variety of seeds that are suited for use in pigeon feeds. As touched on earlier, one of the principles of sound nutrition is balance. Balance is achieved by variety. So, although a mature pigeon could perhaps survive on a diet of nothing but wheat, for example, it will thrive on a diet of assorted grains. This becomes especially important in the rearing of young pigeons.

BREEDING SEASON

As your breeding pairs have been mated and the hatching of eggs approaches, you should have your birds on a high nutritional plane. Most experienced pigeon flyers like to feed breeders a ration in the 16-18% crude protein range. If the mix available to you carries a protein level of 14%, for example, this is the time to consider adding supplemental peas to the ration. The levels fed would be approximately 1/5 peas and 4/5 mix in this example. Breeding pigeons have great demands placed upon them by the two rapidly-growing youngsters. It's therefore important that they be on full feed, meaning they have access to feed at all times, during daylight hours.

When youngsters reach 18 to 21 days of age, many fanciers place small containers of the breeding mix in the nestbox. This serves as a supplemental feed source to the parents, and eases some of the demand placed on them. But, more importantly, this practice helps youngsters learn to eat grain on their own, thereby reducing the considerable stress that weaning places on them.

Pellets, which are grain parts in a compressed form, are an option that is popular with many, particularly in the breeding section. Manufacturers are able to provide a balanced diet right from the bag. This seems to have the greatest pay-off in the rapid development of youngsters in the nest. The downside of feeding pellets is in looser droppings.

Your breeding pairs, as with all pigeons in your loft, must have access at all times to fresh grit and to clean, fresh water.

MOULT & OFF-SEASON

The fall season is when the pigeon moults its old plumage, trading it in for new. This carries with it the need for a fairly high nutritional plane, but since the birds are not racing or in training, the energy requirement is reduced. Most flyers feed a diet of about 16% protein, with barley again being a significant ingredient—in the range of 20%-25% of the ration. The same approach to limited feeding (consumption in fifteen minutes) and twice a day, is preferred by most fanciers.

