

Hens and Cocks Within Sight and Sound of Each Other:

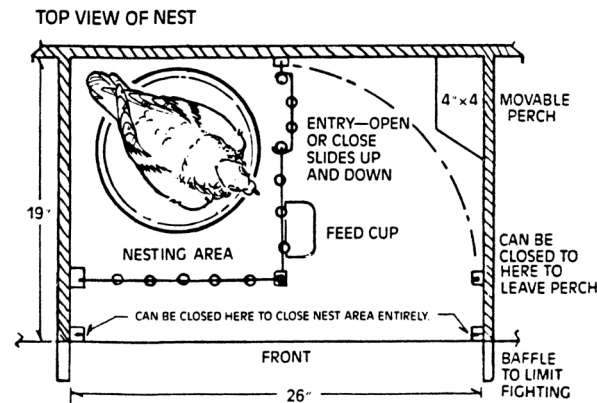
Sound makes no difference, especially if there are other birds such as young birds and/or breeders in the same building. However, being within sight of each other gets the birds too upset and they will not get the maximum rest needed.

Feeding:

The cocks are fed from individual containers in their nests and the hens in a group. An additional advantage in having individual feed containers in the nests is that the youngsters learn to eat sooner and may be removed sooner with less extra care. Most of the feed containers for the nests are too small for use when the birds are feeding youngsters.

Nest Boxes:

Nest boxes should be large enough to handle the system easily, cut down on fighting, and keep the birds happy. Nests are 26" long, 19" deep and 14" high. There is a perch and feed container in each nest. The fittings snap out and the entire area may be left open. Each nest is a color different from those adjacent to it, with the greatest variation in colors next to each other. All nests are within easy reach and the bottom ones are well off the floor.



There are no other perches in the widowhood cock section other than those in their nest.



Showing the Hen Upon Return From the Race:

The hens are shown to the cocks upon return from a race or training and left from 10 to 30 minutes. When the races get longer and birds have been apart for 5 or 6 weeks they are left together a bit longer, sometimes up to one hour.

Special Comments on Widow Hens:

Widow hens are more of a problem than the cocks. If the hens are left together as the cocks are, they are likely to mate later in the race series just when they are needed most. The mates of the top older widowhood cocks are never raced so his mate will always be home upon his arrival.

Most yearling hens will exercise more freely than older hens and are less likely to be a problem in the loft. A few older hens do well and won't mate but many become a problem after several weeks on widowhood. It is a matter of watching the birds and knowing which are the best prospects.

The widow hen section of the loft has 20 boxes which are 12"x12"x12". The hens are shut in these boxes all day so they are forced to rest and cannot mate. They soon get use to this routine. The ones to be raced are let out twice daily to exercise. When they enter the loft the other hens are let out of the boxes and they all eat and drink. They are then put back in the boxes till the next exercising period. Two large doors close over the boxes and when open fit along the walls of this loft section so their maintenance is quite simple.

When to ship:

The widowhood system sounds complicated but is quite simple in practice. One danger is that the birds always look good and one can be tempted to send birds to races when they are not ready or haven't had enough rest to fully recover from the last outing. Follow a race plan, so there will be no temptation to over-race them.

Special Incentives:

Most of the incentives employed when using the natural system such as jealousy or placing eggs in nests may be used in the widowhood system. If there is a widowhood cock that is keen to sit on eggs and he spends more than the normal amount of time on the nest when he was with his mate earlier in the year, it may give him a boost to put a pair of eggs in the nest when showing him his hen before shipping.

Cocks vs. Hens on Long Races:

Many fanciers have contended that the widowhood system is great for short and middle distance racing but that naturally flown hens are unbeatable in the long races. If the quality of the birds is equal, the one in the best form with the greatest incentive will win. Look at and analyze the facts in each area. Regardless of personal preferences, develop a *written plan* to fit particular situations.

Thanks to George Singer for permission to use this material.

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WIDOWHOOD





Racing old birds on the widowhood system is a time-honored method. Just the thought of using such a system reminds modern fanciers of the early efforts of the great masters of Belgium. The worldwide use of this system suggests the high levels of success achieved by practicing flyers. While the system may seem complicated to the uninformed, practitioners claim the system is as simple and easy as it is successful. The most important aspect of the system is to be organized and well prepared.

The following are excerpts from George Singer's book, *Making a Plan to Win - Widowhood Style*

SEQUENCE ROUTINE

The use of exact sequence routine for the old birds each year seems to work best. The routine used by others may be different because of their location and/or method and time of racing, but it is necessary to follow some routine in order to have the birds ready for racing on schedule.

Dec. 10 - Start pairing race team by leaving birds together in cages for about a half hour at a time.

Jan. 1 - Mate birds. Put all race pairs together in the widowhood loft.

Jan. 11 - Most pairs will lay at approximately this time but some, especially yearling hens, may take longer.

Jan. 24 - Separate birds. If any hens have not laid by this time, replace them and re-mate the cock bird before the birds are put together again. Leave the cocks with the nests and eggs in their widowhood section. Remove

the nest bowls and eggs when the cocks leave them. If there is an especially good mating, transfer these eggs to feeders. Keep good records on the transfers.

Feb. 10 - Put mated pairs together again in the widowhood section. This time the hens, even the yearling hens, will lay within a day or two of each other indicating that the timing sequence is going to work. Also when the birds are put together this time there will be no fighting for nests and the attendant problems of broken eggs.

Feb. 15 - Go to two feedings per day so that by March 1 the birds will be used to this timing and can be more easily controlled when out.

Feb. 20 - Most pairs will lay at approximately this time.

Mar. 1 - Birds out for exercise for the first time.

Mar. 10 - Youngsters hatch. If any eggs are infertile, switch a youngster from another pair so that each pair will have at least one youngster to raise. Keep a good record of all switches. Some fanciers contend that the racers should not raise youngsters. However, this gives them a better incentive and seems to have no bad effects when done correctly. The parents should be watched to see that they do not have weight loss and that the youngsters are developing properly. If either of the parents go down in weight when feeding, remove one youngster which almost always solves the problem. If the weight problems persist, it indicates something is wrong with the parent which has to be corrected or the bird will need to be eliminated. Some of the top youngsters come out of the race team.

Apr. 4 - Birds will relay about this time.

Apr. 10 - Most youngsters are removed to Y.B. section by now.

Apr. 14 - The first race of the old bird season. The pairs are separated after the birds have returned from the races and been together an hour or so. The cocks are left in the widowhood section and nest bowls and eggs are removed after the cocks leave them. Again switch eggs from some of the top pairs. Note that this sequence provides an opportunity to obtain three pairs of youngsters from the top pairs of race birds while having them only raise one or two youngsters themselves.



Apr. 14 to June 15 - During this period of time the birds are on widowhood. Some fanciers separate the birds a week or two before the first race.

June 16 to Sep. 1 - After the last race, put the birds together and let them raise a round of youngsters. At this point I remate birds changing to the matings wanted for the next spring. As the birds relay they sit on dummy eggs till separated. During this period, June 16 to Sep. 1, the birds and their records are checked carefully to determine which ones should be kept for the next racing season.

Sep. 1 - Start cutting down the evening feeding in preparation for one feeding per day.

Sep. 10 - Separate the birds. At this point, start feeding just once per day in the morning and the birds do not go out of the loft again until March 1. With lots of large trees around there are many hawks in the autumn and the winter which would decimate the flock if it were out. The birds are kept flying or are in the loft in the early spring to diminish the hawk problem. They are not allowed to sit around outside the loft. Some fanciers contend it is not good practice to shut the birds up for this long a time but this has no adverse effect on the birds' ability in the races. After the birds are released in the spring they are flying for a half hour or longer at a time the third or fourth time out.

Make a sequence routine in writing and work on improving it each year until it is a simple, workable routine.

NOTES ON THE WIDOWHOOD SYSTEM

Additional notes from his book on how George Singer flies the widowhood system follow:

Exercise:

The widowhood cocks are exercised twice daily for one hour and the widow hens 45 minutes twice daily.

Showing the Hens Before Shipping:

Remove the nest bowls during the week instead of turning them over. Before the birds are shipped the cock birds not being shipped are put out for exercise. Next, put the nest bowls in the nests of the cocks to be shipped and in the nest of any widow hen to be shipped whose mate is not to be raced. After the bowls have been in the nests 5 to 10 minutes, basket all the yearling cocks for shipment. After the yearling cocks are out of the loft, the older cocks to be raced are shown their hens but do not let them mate. The older cocks are then basketed for shipment. Next, put the widow hens to be shipped in their nests for about 5 minutes before basketing them.

Racing Yearlings on Widowhood:

Although many believe racing yearlings on widowhood is not a good practice, good success can be attained with few losses. The yearlings go to 300 or 400 miles. Try to keep them calmer than the older birds and if there is a particularly excitable yearling, do not show him the nest bowl before shipping, but rather basket him before putting the bowls in the nests.

Care of the Birds Not Raced:

On race day the portion of the race team not shipped to the race is taken down the road 20 or 25 miles and these birds are shown their mates upon their return in the same manner the birds racing are handled. The birds are tossed in small groups.

Darkening the Loft:

Darken the lofts of both the cocks and hens to keep the birds as calm as possible. They should be given as much rest as possible and kept as calm as possible during the week.