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.

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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 mating 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 pairs 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 a good practice to separate the birds. The parents should be more excitable 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.

**Racing Yearlings on Widowhood:**

Although many believe racing yearlings on widowhood is not a good practice, good success can be attained with fewer 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.