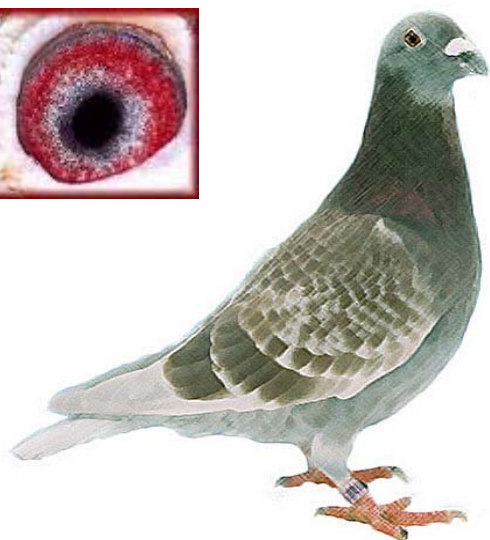


MONTH BY MONTH with Chris



Champion "Tracey's Red" winner of the N.W.C.C. Hall of Fame and over £5,000 in his racing career, for Chris Knowles of Woodley, Stockport.

| 2009 | | |
|--|--|---|
| January S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 | February S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 | March S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 |
| April S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 | May S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 | June S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 |
| July S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 | August S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 | September S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 |
| October S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 | November S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 | December S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 |

September :

Latin *september mensis* "seventh month".

As you can see from the Latin above, September was originally the seventh month. However, as we know it today it is month nine and in almost all areas of the UK. racing has come to an end and all focus now is on rest for the racers and a good clean moult.

The Longest YB race: In last months article, I referred to two races which for me were to be my two longest of the YB season and the two on which I had the most focus. The first one was with The Lancashire Social Circle, which was a mid week event at Portland 199 miles and the other was The National Flying Club coupled with Eccles 2 Bird specialist club, taking place from Fourgeres at 354 miles. The L.S.C. is a club which has now been in existence for over one hundred years and is limited to a fixed membership of forty members. Each member can only enter a maximum of four youngsters plus any youngsters that they have from the two organised breeder exchanges, one within the club itself and the other being an exchange with The Midlands Social Circle. In both cases, members exchange two youngsters which can compete in the exchange races. My entry was six birds, four in the LSC race and two in the LSC breeder exchange. The day of liberation was far from perfect with strong wings and rain approaching from the West. Returns were good in the end but there were sizeable gaps between arrivals and some fanciers had no early times to report. My first arrival was one of my LSC exchange entries, bred by George Mainwaring of Northwich. A young dark chequer cock which, on the day showed real determination, arriving with very red wattles and eye ceares, having been heavily affected by rain. On a day when with clear skies, the birds should have recorded over 1800 y.p.m. this game young cock was timed in three hours and fifty one minutes for a velocity of 1515 y.p.m. The winner of the race returned a velocity of 1535 y.p.m. and was flying to a loft location about thirty miles into the west o my location, where in theory with the prevailing wind on the day, there should have been good velocities. The next pigeon was also into the west and my entry finished in third place. This race was a good example to demonstrate the fact that wind is not always the most influential factor in the outcome of the result. On this occasion it was without doubt rain showers. My remaining five entries were all home within forty five minutes of my first bird and yet none had been visually affected by rain and they all came from a direction West North West of my loft, or to put it bluntly "off the back".

The National Flying Club/Eccles 2 Bird race from Fourgeres has been well documented in the fancy press but I don't feel that it has been adequately described as the poor liberation decision that it actually was.

The air needed time to warm to a reasonable temperature and so provide a line of flight that the birds would tackle and cross the channel into England. However, that was not the case and between the NFC and MNFC, both organisations racing from France that day, it has been estimated that over 8,000 young birds were still missing on day of liberation with very few returning in the following few days.

Not taking credit away from the gallant youngsters that did cross, some great performances were recorded across the country, whilst I am sure that not all those that failed to return, were bad pigeons. My entry was five birds of which two were entered into the Eccles 2 Bird Specialist club event. All five of my entries were in great feather and had cast either one or two primary flights by day of basketing. The two birds which were entered into the Eccles race, were a young hen that was paired and showing up to her mate and a young cock which was on chipping eggs at basketing. All five youngsters had flown four races to Poole, a distance of 188 miles prior to the NFC race and all flown well, as had my six entries for the LSC race. I was fortunate to time what I considered at the time, to be a reasonable pigeon having flown nine hours and twenty five minutes for a velocity of 1103 y.p.m. The final result revealed that the young red chequer cock had finished 15th Section L and 257th Open in the NFC race and was one of only two birds timed on the day in the Eccles 2 Bird event. He won the race with fifty minutes to spare. All in all a satisfactory result but not worth the loss of many good birds to fanciers all over the country!



Young red chequer cock, winner of 15th Section L 257th Open NFC Fourgeres and 1st Eccles 2 Bird Specialist Club Fourgeres 2009 when only two birds were timed on the day of liberation.

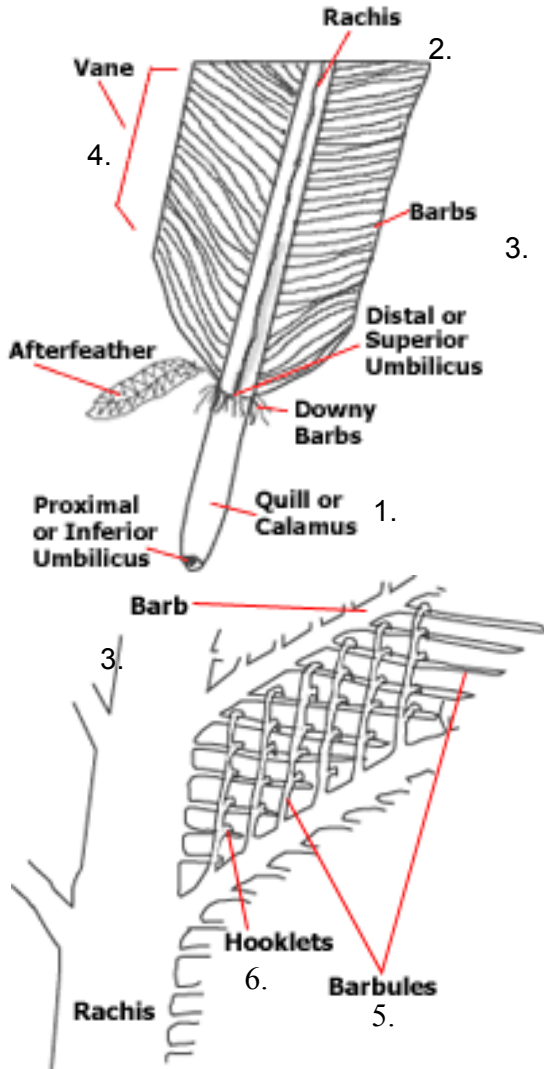


The photo above of Red Chequer was cock taken the day after the NFC race from Fourgeres. The photo opposite, is the chequer cock which was 3rd LSC breeder exchange and the photo was taken in July before racing began for the Ybs. As you can see, at that time I had not allocated the ETS chip rings to my YB race team. The noticeable factor when you compare these two young cocks, is that they are both in super feather, living in the same race section and the photos were taken nearly three months apart. The issue of feather for long YB races is very important in my opinion as I have discussed in a previous article.

THE MOULT : All my focus is now turned towards rest and growing feathers, as the foundation to the breeding and racing seasons of 2010 will soon follow. Health is always number one on my list of priorities at this part of the season, as set backs to a pigeon at his part of the season are hard for the pigeon to overcome in the season to follow. Helping the pigeons to grow strong quality feathers is a must!

Over the years feathers have evolved from the scales of reptiles, and they set pigeons like other birds apart from all other animals. The most important functions of feathers are flight and insulation. Because feathers have numerous variants, there are many different anatomical and technical terms used in their descriptions. I have tried below to give an insight into feather types and what they look like, for those amongst our readers who have an interest in such detail. I think it helps to understand what we are dealing with and how and why they are so important to our pigeons.

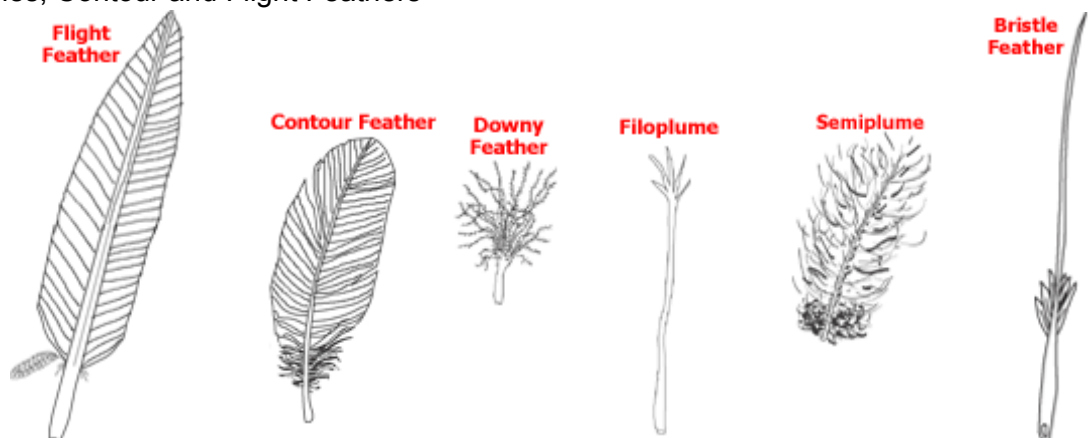
Feathers are made out of keratin, the same protein found in hair and nails.



3. Feathers have a central shaft. The smooth, unpigmented base, which extends under the skin into the feather follicle, is called the calamus(1.). The portion above the skin, from which the smaller barbs or branches extend, is called the rachis(2.) On each side of the rachis there is a set of filaments, called barbs (3.), which come off at an angle of 45°. The part of the feather that has barbs is called the vane(4.). In the larger feathers, these barbs have two sets of microscopic filaments called barbules (5.). Barbules from one barb cross the adjacent barbs at a 90° angle. Barbules, in turn, have hooklets (6.), which hook the barbules together, like a zip. These help to maintain the shape of the feather. Without these strong linkages, the feather would not be able to withstand the air resistance during flight. When barbs or hooklets become separated from each other , the pigeon can reattach them by preening. At the base of the feathers, there are often barbs that are not hooked together. These are called downy barbs.

Types of feathers include; (illustrations not specific to racing pigeons)

- * Feathers with Vanes; Contour and Flight Feathers
- * Down
- * Filoplume
- * Semiplume
- * Bristle



Feathers with barbules and hooklets are termed "pennaceous," just like the type that would be used for a quill pen. Feathers without barbules and hooklets, such as down feathers, are called "plumaceous" and have more resemble the shape of a plume. Some feathers have both pennaceous and plumaceous portions. Some feathers have what are called afterfeathers at the base of the vane in an area called the distal umbilicus. These, really, are barbs without hooks, which help trap air and offer some insulation. Feathers are not arranged haphazardly on the pigeon, but in major distinct tracts called pterylae. The featherless areas between the pterylae are called apteria.

Contour feathers cover the majority of the surface of the bird and provide a smooth streamlined appearance. They provide protection for the pigeon from sun, wind, rain, and injury. Contour feathers are divided into flight feathers and those that cover the body.

Flight feathers are the large feathers of the wing and tail. Flight feathers of the wing are collectively known as the remiges, and are separated into three groups.

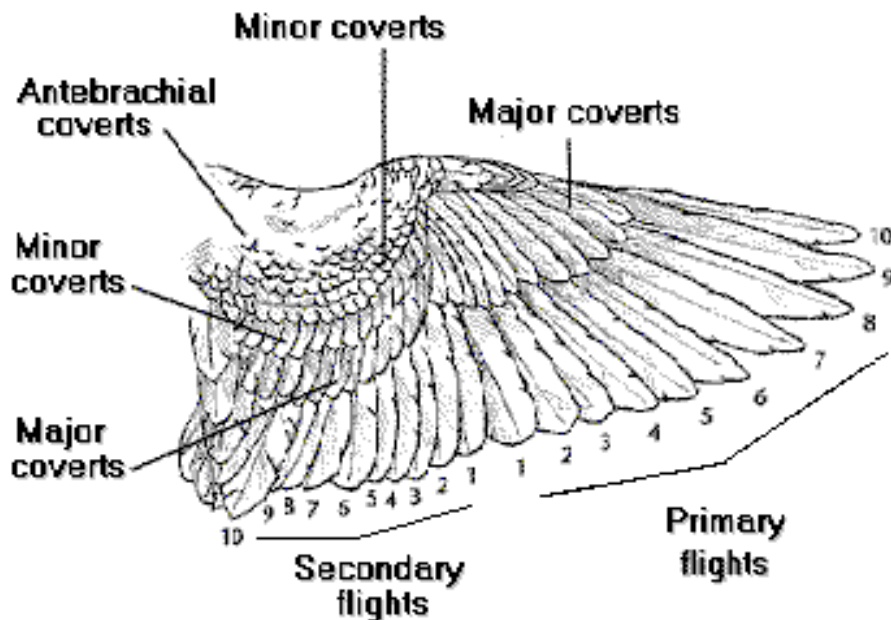
The primaries attach to the metacarpal (wrist) and phalangeal (finger) bones at the far end of the wing and are responsible for forward thrust. There are usually 10 primaries (11 in some pigeons) and they are numbered from the inside out.

The secondaries attach to the ulna, a bone in the middle of the wing, and are required to give "lift." Most birds have 10-14 secondaries, which are numbered from the outside in.

Illustration of a wing showing flight feathers and coverts. The flight feathers closest to the body are sometimes called tertiaries.

The tail feathers, called retrices, act as brakes and a rudder, controlling the orientation of the flight. Most birds have 12 tail feathers.

The bases of the flight feathers are covered with smaller contour feathers called coverts. There are several layers of coverts on the wing. Coverts also cover the ear.



This illustration of a wing which is not specific to a racing pigeon, shows flight feathers and coverts. The bases of the flight feathers are covered with smaller contour feathers called coverts. There are several layers of coverts on the wing. Coverts also cover the ears. Tail feathers, called retrices, act as brakes and a rudder. Most birds including racing pigeons have 12 tail feathers.

Down feathers are small, soft, fluffy, and are found under the contour feathers. Down feathers have many non-interlocking barbules, lacking the barbules and hooklets found in the contour and flight feathers. This makes it possible for them to trap air in an insulating layer next to the skin, helping to protect the pigeon from heat and cold. There are special types of downy feathers called powder down feathers. When the sheaths or barbules of these feathers disintegrate, they form a fine keratin powder, which the bird can spread over its feathers as a water-proofing agent and assists in cleaning as the bird preens.

Filoplumes are very fine, hair-like feathers, with a long shaft, and only a few barbules at their tips. Filoplumes are located along all the pterylae. Although their function is not well understood, they are thought to have a sensory function, possibly adjusting the position of the flight feathers in response to air pressure.

Semiplumes provide form, aerodynamics, and insulation, have a large rachis, but loose (plumaceous) vanes. They can occur along with contour feathers or in separate pterylae.

Bristle feathers have a stiff rachis with only a few barbules at the base. They are usually found on the head and are thought to have both a sensory and protective function.

Although an adult bird will typically replace all of its feathers during a moult, the loss of feathers is staggered, often over several months, so the bird has enough feathers for flight and insulation. A moult is usually triggered by the change in day length or may occur after breeding. This is why the control of light has played such a part in pigeon racing over recent years.

Feather colour is determined by the presence of various pigments, including melanins, carotenoids, and porphyrins.

* **Melanins** are brown to black pigments. In addition to adding colour to the feather, melanins also make the feather denser and more resistant to wear and protect against breakdown from sunlight.

***Carotenoids** are generally yellow, orange, or red in colour. They are synthesized in plants, and absorbed by the bird's digestive system, and then taken up by the cells of the follicle as the feather is developing. As you may know from the colour feeding of birds like canaries.

***Porphyrins** are red and green pigments that are produced by cells in the feather follicle.

Perhaps the next time you look at a pigeon or indeed any bird, this brief article may assist you to understand how its feathers protect it and make it possible for the bird to fly.



There are obviously very important supplements to a good moult such as bathing, feeding/diet, loft environment, rest etc.etc. However, it is not practical to attempt to cover the full spectrum in a monthly article such as this. Perhaps you may wish to utilise the **Prestige Pigeons** site's question & answer forum or even address the online panel with some questions? I know that a lot of work and effort goes into making this site that bit different from others and I hope that these articles are providing some entertainment and interest value to those who read them. Why not take advantage of the interactive facilities that the site provides and share your questions or thoughts with other fanciers? It is a sure way to learn or confirm your beliefs. Nobody knows all the answers and we are all learning all of the time in this sport. There are no secrets but there will be things that that all of us do not know. I try to share my experiences and the bit of knowledge that I have in the hope that someone, somewhere, will appreciate it and hopefully benefit from it. I don't fear that my competitors will see or learn what I do, as I do not believe this sport to be so simple, that a "method cloning" exercise will provide the road to the top, any more than a "super strain" or a bottle of magic potion might! To get to the so called "Top" and by that I mean a position of genuine respect from the fancy in general, I believe that you need to understand all aspects of the sport and be in a position to put them into practice with regularity. When change is required, have the knowledge to apply corrective action with confidence and not just on hearsay. To this end we can all benefit by sharing our knowledge and experiences. Even if "The Top" is a bridge too far, every thing we do brings more reward if we believe we are making progress!

**Good friends are like stars.....
You don't always see them,
But you know they are always there.**

Until next month, Enjoy your pigeons! **Chris K**