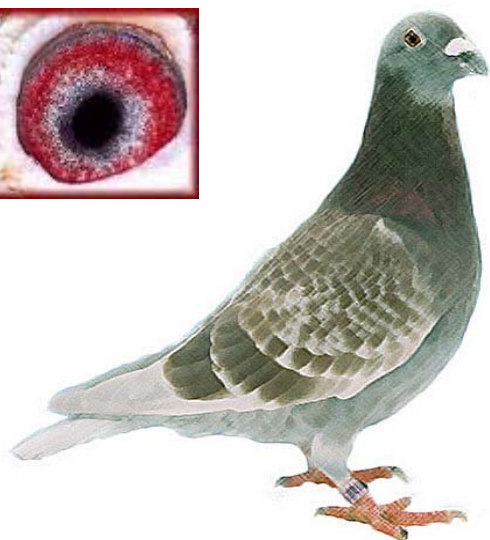


# MONTH BY MONTH with Chris



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	February	March	April	May	June
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## February -- month of Februa:

*Februarius* had 28 days, until circa 450 BC when it had 23 or 24 days on some of every second year, until Julius Caesar when it had 29 days on every fourth year and 28 days otherwise. Februa is the Roman festival of purification, held on February fifteenth. And so we have the February that we know today with possibly the best known date of the calendar month being the 14th day, on which we recognise St. Valentine and a date on which many many fanciers in decades passed, have chosen on which to pair their pigeons.

Blackpool was once again a good show in most aspects, the fancy pigeon section up in the Spanish Hall was very popular again and looking at the class winners in the main show, it was great to see dark chequers taking major honours when in recent times domination seems to have been with more modern colours like the Opals. Once again Norman Perry had a great show winning the Supreme Champion Class as did Mr. & Mrs. Ron McCarthy taking BIS & BOS. If the BHW got one thing wrong this year, in my opinion it was narrowing the aisles in the main show hall to fit in the racing classes. Not only did it make moving around the pens difficult but as anyone who was there at three o'clock Sunday will tell you, it made unpenning even more difficult. The only consolation being that competitors were allowed to get their baskets that bit earlier than in past years.



Generally speaking nowadays, February is the month that most fanciers use as final preparation prior to the O.B. race season and the month in which many youngsters bound for a season of racing on the darkness system are weaned off and made ready for the challenge to come. My first youngsters hatched on the 28th Jan. from the stock birds and the racers are now sitting tightly and on course for their pre race preparations. Monday 2nd Feb. Has seen snows and freezing conditions sweep across the country and as usual when the snows strike, the cross Pennine Roads are hit badly and the first to go near me was Snake Pass in both directions between Glossop and Sheffield. Despite the sometimes gale like conditions the pigeons were still in the aviaries with their wings up and making the most of it! By the time Feb. 14th arrives, the sun will rise in my part of the world at around 07.25 a.m. and set at around 17.20 p.m. Which is round about 9,8 hours of light and things are beginning to look up for the wild birds.



These pictures taken early February, shows the access that the yearlings have to the aviary cages throughout their coupling cycle and leading up to the point where they begin exercise once again. As you can see from the pictures, this gives good sunlight when open and is closed down each evening to shut out the wind, rain and snow just lately. When closed down from about 16.30 p.m. the temperature inside the loft is better for the pigeons as any draught is excluded and the humidity can be controlled. When necessary I have radiant heaters to put on, which are thermostat and hygostat controlled. The hen on the left is in the sun as she sits her eggs.

The one thing that I find most advantageous about having large aviary cage trapping systems, is the flexibility that they give me to provide my birds with regular baths at the time of year that they need them most and are not going out to exercise. This means that they can have ample access to bathing and sunshine whilst there is a zero risk to hawks. It is also ideal for my show racers which never fly out and you can see below, their condition is first class.

The Sun Rise & Sun Set times for February 2009 in my area.

Day	RiseTime	SetTime	Length Of Day
1/2/2009	7.859	16.940	9.081Hrs
7/2/2009	7.688	17.129	9.441Hrs
14/2/2009	7.467	17.352	9.884Hrs
21/2/2009	7.229	17.572	10.343Hrs
28/2/2009	6.976	17.789	10.813Hrs



American Football fans amongst you will no doubt have been part of the one billion people who have just watched Superbowl XL111( 43) and the victory for Pittsburgh Steelers, which brought to mind for me the famous quote from the American Football coach Paul Bryant who said “**It’s not the will to win, but the will to prepare to win that makes the difference**”. I couldn’t think of a more appropriate quote for the month of February!



Above picture taken on the morning of 5th February 2009. The blow up on the right clearly shows a female **Sparrowhawk** nicely inconspicuous as she watches the pigeons in my aviaries from her spot in the trees behind my lofts.

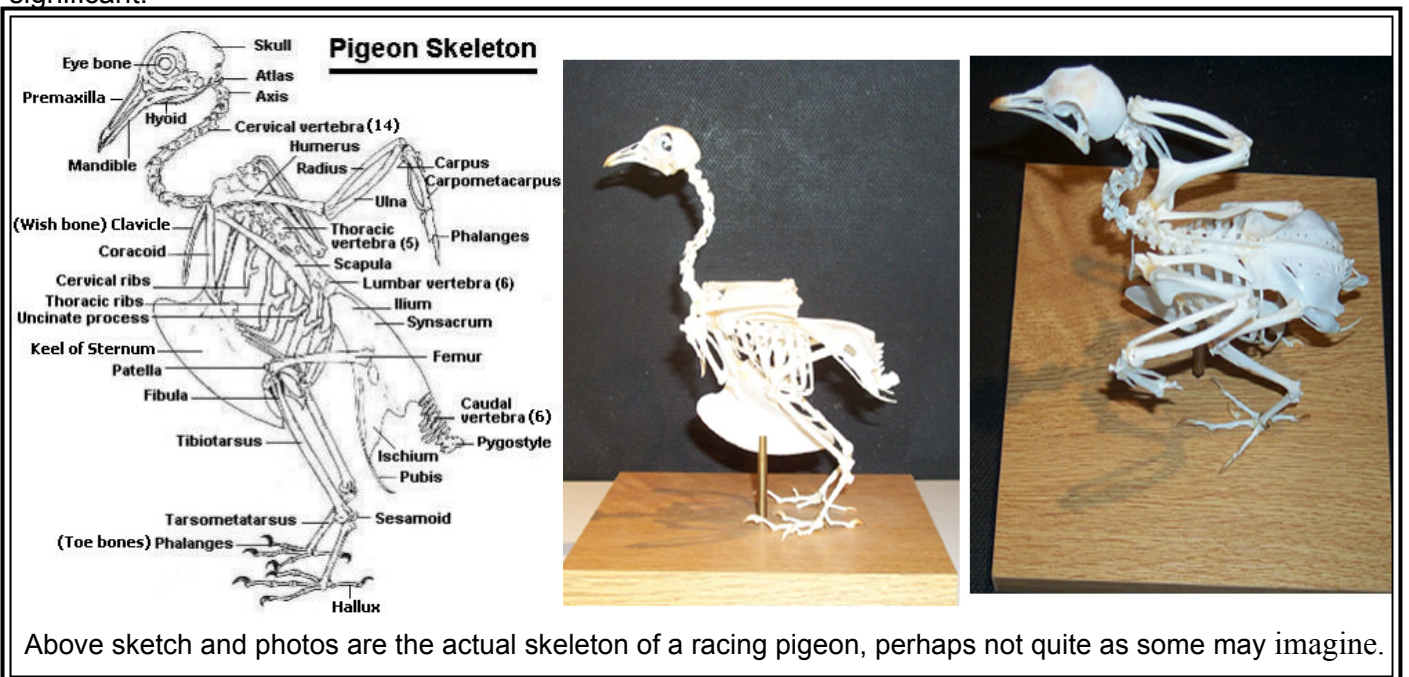
The above photo illustrates graphically the dangers from the hawk at this time of the season and why I believe so strongly in confining the pigeons until the odds are more in my favour. On this occasion I was lucky to have my camera to hand and was alerted to the hawk’s presence in the area by scattering street pigeons, all too often the only way you can know, that they have visited, is the tell tale signs of stripped feathers from a blackbird, sparrow or collared dove, usually lying some place near to the foot of one of the hedges!

Despite the distraction of the hawk, I ensured that I completed my task for the day which, was to compile a list of what nestboxes had youngsters to be rung on what day. I do this every season and use my first hatching as the base to calculate against. This year it was youngsters being rung on 4th February from 1st eggs laid on 11th Jan that I have based forecast ringing dates for all other pairs. It is not always 100% accurate but I never miss ringing and it gives me an idea of how well each pair is feeding against the benchmark. I also use this chart if I experiment with feeding something new to breeders in a specific section which, I do from time to time as a trial to see if it aids YB development. I know that record keeping is not for everyone but I can honestly say that it has helped me considerably over the years and as I get older, the more I need to write things down!

**Weaning Young Birds:** Now is the time that I do my preparation for the weaning of my youngsters. This is something that I have done religiously since I first began to send youngsters to races from France in the year of their birth. Although I do not believe that we should be sending YBs to such races, at a time of the year when the daylight hrs. are not sufficient to allow liberations later in the morning when temperatures are suitable for 300 plus races, I do enjoy the challenge that they bring. My first step towards this, is to ensure that babies are weaned into baskets from the nest pan, so that they learn to eat and drink from the word go. I will take some photos and include them in the March article to show how I set this up. I am not saying that it makes the YBs win these races but it has helped me to time in many times when good fanciers have failed to get a bird on the day. I know that it is not the only contributory factor but for me, I believe it to be MAJOR. The preparation is the cleaning and disinfecting of the weaning crates so that they have ample time to dry out, at a time of the year when good drying days are sparse. The crates have a layer of about one inch of wood chips (Horse Bedding) with a small trough inside for food and an external trough for water. They are then fed and watered twice per day for one week before going into the race section when they are darkened from day 1. No youngster has it's head dipped and any deterioration by the end of the week and a youngster would be disposed of. I can honestly say that this has only ever happened with three or four youngsters since 1992.

The weaning of the youngsters is then followed by vaccination which I do when I have my full race team weaned into their race section. I think that the earlier the youngsters are vaccinated, the better and especially before they begin flying out. I 1991 when flying in partnership as Hulme and Knowles, the Ybs were left during the day and were not being vaccinated until May/June. The result was a confirmed case of paramyxo in the YBs and what followed was a night mare. It served as a very good lesson and I learned a great deal from the experience but I do not intend to repeat that naive mistake. As things transpired, once the all clear was received, we went on to win 1st Section NFC Bordeaux 598 miles and 2nd Section NFC Pau 700 miles with another 3 pigeons in the first 25 of the Section result. So as you can see it did not affect the OBs but the YBs did not race, a No. had to be killed and I never had any faith in the YBs born that year other than the summer bred youngsters that followed.

**Dehydration:** The whole point of basket training the YBs at the point of weaning and the repeat refresher training from baskets, is to prevent or at least the the youngster the best chance of avoiding dehydration during transit. I also believe that the refresher training for old birds is worth while at the early stages of each season. I will include a photo of how I do this in the March article. There is also one more point to make on the subject of dehydration, which I meant to cover earlier and that is the care of stock birds when feeding youngsters of around seven to fourteen days old. Obviously with the transition from feeding soft milk to hard corn, the parent bird has to use water as it's transport agent for the feeding. During this time I like to supplement the parent birds with an additive in their water for five or six days. The additive is a combination of electrolytes with vitamins, trace elements and amino acids. Given at the rate of two tablespoons per litre of water, the benefits in the growth of the youngsters and the health of the parents is very noticeable. The product that I favour most id Belgasol from De Weerd in Holland but you could use any similar product or indeed make up your own. The cost doesn't need to be silly and the benefit is significant.



**Beyond the skeleton:** Beyond the skeleton is everything that we are working hard at this time of year to assist. Just having finished helping the pigeons to grow the best set of feathers possible, now we have to ensure that the essential organs are healthy, the body weight is right and that the muscles are gradually worked and fine tuned in readiness for the forthcoming training and racing. As you can see from the skeleton of the pigeon above, the keel or sternum is the one place that is specifically designed to house the major muscle mass and the strategic position is critical to the aerodynamics of the pigeon in flight. These muscles that we refer to as the pectoral muscles, need to be prepared sensibly and methodically if a pigeon is to enjoy a season of real success. Feeding and exercise along with a correct environment are the key ingredients and although I do not intend to cover such a subject in this article, I do encourage every fancier to start thinking seriously now about it, if you haven't already done so. If there is one thing for certain in this sport nowadays, it is that if you race at the highest levels, you will be racing against specialists. By this I mean, sprint specialists, middle distance, long distance and young bird specialists as well as the good old fashioned "all rounders" and if your not preparing methodically you can bet they will be!

**Friends:** I would like to think that over the years that I have enjoyed within the pigeon sport, the most valuable assets that I have obtained are the friends that I have made. In closing this month, I am dedicating this final passage to a true friend Richie Ryder pictured below, who has spent the last three



Two very good friends, on the left Arthur Cowley and right Richie Ryder, taken at one of Lancashire Social Circle gatherings.

months or so in hospital, including his Christmas and New Year. Richie has suffered on and off for many years with lung problems following an industrial accident when employed in the printing industry. As Secretary of the Lancashire Social Circle he is a tireless worker and has a personality second to none. I know that I speak for all members of the LSC and indeed all who know him, when I say, "Get well soon Richie" ! He is the type of fancier and friend that makes this sport worth all the time and effort that we put into it. I wonder at times without such friends whether the sport would be worth while?

**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**