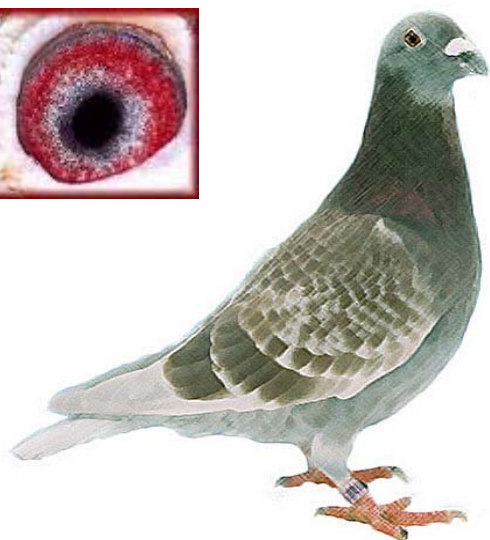


MONTH BY MONTH with Chris



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

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June -- Juno's month

Old English Junius, Latin Junius mensis "month of Juno". Juno was the principle goddess of the Roman Pantheon. She was the goddess of marriage and the well-being of women. She was the wife and sister of Jupiter and is identified with the Greek goddess Hera.

It is not unreasonable to expect good racing weather in the month that we British loosely call "Flaming June". Well as am sitting at my computer to sketch the outline of this month's article, I have just read the Liberation news from the N.F.C. Who have held over a second day at St. Nazaire and are moving the birds to Alencon. I will not express any opinion on such decisions as this is neither the time nor the place but there is one thing you can be sure of, the winning loft and winning bird has now changed as a result of the decision. It is even possible/probable that the geographical variation of the liberation point in the prevailing weather conditions, will change what would have happened in every section, had the race taken place from St.Nazaire as planned and as entered by ALL competing members. It does give food for thought, maybe not so much in the case of the race in general but with respect to the large amount of cash pledged by members to pool their birds from St. Nazaire and not Alencon!

Today, the 7th June in my neck of the woods is a howling East North East wind racing across a heavily overcast sky which frequently delivers showers of rain, some of which are very heavy. At the beginning of the week, there were blue cloudless skies, very hot and humid conditions in which pigeons would not fly for more than a few minutes and even then they would land panting. Any exercise had to be carried out before the sun rose in the sky and at the end of the day whilst light and temperature/humidity permitted. Just so that I would be able to illustrate this type of problem that can occur in our climate at this time of the year, I released my youngsters at 13.30 Hrs on one of these days and photographed them on landing. On normal days they exercise for a minimum of one hour but on this day they only flew for 15 minutes and you can see below the outcome.

I would like to touch on the subject of hydration and dehydration this month, as I think that it is a very appropriate time of the season and no doubt as I write, the problem that is Young Bird Sickness, will be rearing it's ugly head and causing much pain and grief for many fanciers. In fact a friend of mine who flies on an allotments was telling me last week that it has already struck some of the members in his area. I am obviously not going to attempt to tackle the subject of YBS in this article but I would like to draw attention to the facts surrounding Dehydration and stress which, I am sure are major players in the game of YBS.



This picture shows my YB team, having just landed after only 15 minutes of exercise in the heat of the day when temperatures and humidity **were not suitable** for pigeons..



As you can see, these youngsters know that there is always a drink on hand! On this occasion the drinker contained electrolytes in expectation of the reaction from the youngsters.

The subject of Electrolytes amongst Vets renowned in the pigeon world, is one of some controversy. Yes many of them do not believe them necessary for pigeons and indeed in some cases harmful. My own view is that they are a benefit but that they must be followed with cool clear water. My logic is that when you replenish body salts you must also replenish the pure water store to regain an equilibrium. The last thing you want is to increase the salts level whilst the water level is reduced, especially when the bird requires to lose the build up of body heat. The best policy I feel with youngsters is to keep them away from excessive heat. My sole purpose of the above was to enable me to illustrate what I believe to be a critical issue with youngsters.



This is a picture, taken the day after the race 30th May 2009, when my 2 year old dark cock, won 1st Club 1st Section Fed. and 1st Open Fed. from over 3,000 birds at 152 miles into an Easterly wind, flying to one of the longest locations. The purpose of including the picture is to show the condition of such a winning pigeon when correct management has been applied both before and after the race. You can see the wattle colour and eye lustre which exude good health and fitness. Racing the previous week from Lessay, 291 miles, my race team were 1, 2, 3, club 1st North Section Fed. 6th Open Fed. from almost 2,000 birds.

'Electrolyte' is a medical and scientific term for numerous salts found in the body. The term 'electrolyte' means that these chemicals are electrically-charged and move to either the negative (cathode) or positive (anode) pole: The main electrolytes that we should consider are: sodium (Na^+), potassium (K^+), calcium (Ca^{2+}), chloride (Cl^-), magnesium (Mg^{2+}), bicarbonate (HCO_3^-), phosphate (PO_4^{2-}) and sulfate (SO_4^{2-}). Such electrolytes are important chemicals that certain cells, especially nerve, heart, and body muscle utilise to maintain voltages across their cell membranes. They carry electrical impulses like nerve impulses and muscle contractions across themselves and to other cells. The kidneys work to keep the electrolyte concentrations in the blood at a constant level during changes in the body.

"Dehydration" what is dehydration? One dictionary definition is **"an abnormal loss of water from the body, especially from illness or physical exertion"**. This definition is a good fit with our sport as 99% of the cases that we will encounter are due to mainly racing or long/hot flights of one description or another and illness. The best way that I can give an example of what lack of water does to a pigeon is to ask you to picture a newly weaned youngster that has not been to the drinker. It is looking slightly sorry for itself and its eyes are blinking very slowly. The rate of eye blink, is for a very good reason. The cause is the fact that the blood is now thicker and not moving around its transport routes like the tiny vessels in the nictitating membrane (third eyelid) and so its function is impaired and hence the change of blink rate. So you can imagine what is happening to a pigeon during flight, when that protective eyelid cannot protect it against the cold, wind and rain, as it should do. My belief is that one of two things will likely happen, either the pigeon will land to seek water or the worse case is that it will be the victim of some form of accident. This is why I think it important to understand dehydration and what we can do to help prevent it becoming a problem and how to manage birds who show the symptoms. When a bird loses body water the blood flows to the muscles and the fluid is withdrawn from the muscle tissue to compensate water loss. Once water is taken from the muscle, it cannot function properly and therefore, the bird cannot fly efficiently. Birds at this stage are less capable and they become more stressed.

Some interesting FACTS:

- + Pigeons do not have sweat glands and so cannot lose body heat through sweating.
- + In pigeons, body heat is lost by evaporative cooling from the air sacs.
- + When pigeons become hot, they start to pant which, increases air flow over the air sacs and so increasing evaporative loss which leads to cooling.
- + At 25 degrees Centigrade, if deprived of water, pigeons become 5% dehydrated in only 24 hours.
- + Pigeon that are 5% dehydrated become quiet and fluffed up and will readily drink if water is provided.
- + When 10% dehydrated, these symptoms become more exaggerated.
- + When 15% dehydrated, due to a reduction in the circulating blood volume, various organs are inadequately supplied with blood to function normally and there is interference with the level of consciousness.

+ Importantly, that at 25 degrees Centigrade no dehydration will occur if birds are provided with water.
(This why water should be on baskets at marking and adequately provided before race release).

To round off on dehydration I would just like to suggest a few scenarios where dehydration WILL happen. The most obvious is high temperatures, by which I mean over 25 degrees centigrade. In such temperatures the pigeon will need to evaporate more fluids via it's air sacs. Very low or very humidity. Very low humidity has a similar effect on the air sacs as high temperature. Low humidity tends to more readily dry the air sacs which will cause a more rapid fluid loss. Very high humidity on the other hand will decrease evaporative cooling and cause a high body temperature. Perhaps the most common one is when a pigeon is flying into a wind which, causes an increased level of carbon dioxide in the blood stream. This increases the respiratory rate and increases fluid loss from the air sacs. Such a pigeon is then exposed to dehydration.

The last thought that I would like to leave you with on this subject is, the temperature reached on the average pigeon transporter. Normal body temperature of a pigeon is 41.7 degrees centigrade and a loaded vehicle can quickly reach over 25 degrees centigrade! You don't need me to tell you therefore, that if your pigeons are not offered water from the start of basketing and on arrival at the race point up to release, they will already be suffering some degree of dehydration! The importance of access to water whenever possible prior to liberation cannot be stressed enough. It is our responsibility as members of every organisation, to ensure that it is happening, if not there is no point in complaining when birds are lost on seemingly decent race days.



This close up shows how stressful heat is to pigeons. The pigeons in the photo had total access to water prior to release for exercise and were always in site of their loft. You can imagine how stressful it must be when they are racing and faces with a similar problem. If they have not been adequately watered prior to release following transportation to the race site and after being stacked row on row with probably no air conditioning, then the consequences will be dramatic. In fact down right cruel! With this in mind, we all owe it to ourselves and our pigeons to ensure that EVERY effort is made by our organisations to ensure that our pigeons are hydrated.

AFTER THE RACE: Caring for your pigeons during exercise, training and pre race is very very important where hydration and dehydration are concerned but perhaps the most important time of all is after the race. Never more so that when your pigeons have spent more than one in the basket and travelled for hours over land and sea in those baskets. It is sometimes very visible that an arrival is suffering from loss of fluids and body salts but sometimes it is not so apparent especially if the pigeon has achieved a good result. There is always the danger of thinking, I'll send it back ! Sometimes the pigeon comes again but many times it is lost or finished for the season. We must ask ourselves, how credible is it to replenish fluids, salts and refill the fuel tanks in the time between arrival and the next basketing. When the muscles have been stripped of fluids to help keep body temperatures stable in long flights, the essential factors for full recovery along with feeding etc. are time and rest combined with a progressive exercise build up to return to full fitness. The complication is that it differs from pigeon to pigeon and this is where your experience and knowledge of individual pigeons is invaluable to you. They say that patience is a virtue and never more so that with pigeon racing. My only aim is to urge you to think carefully about this aspect of our sport. Good pigeons are

Hard to come by but can very easily be ruined or lost in the quest for success. I hope that this month's article will inspire a percentage of readers to give the points discussed some thought and maybe those thoughts will repay in the races to come.



This 2 year old blue cock won 1st Club 1st North Section Federation and 1st Open Federation from Messac 387 miles with a velocity of 1480 y.p.m. From almost 1,200 birds 18 y.p.m. clear of the next pigeon which was flying over 15 miles shorter. He was not raced as a youngster and only trained to 40 miles, liberated with several hundred birds as a yearling. Messac on 13th June 2009 was the sixth race of the season and his first ever race from France. He is a G.Son of 1st National from 23,500 birds and the patience that I have afforded him, was my reward! It does not happen with all pigeons but has worked well for me over the years. Photo taken next morning after race. Race result still provisional at time of writing.

The pictures below were taken on the Monday morning after the Messac race and the Lancs. Social Circle Fourgeres race. Left is the blue cock pictured above and right is my "51" cock a winner of 8 x 1sts and my first bird in the LSC race at 354 miles, he has no ETS ring as this club does not have ETS marking yet.



I would not normally allow my pigeons to pick on the grass but when they have worked hard as these two did, I think a little bit of extra relaxation and doing what they enjoy naturally, can only help their recovery, from a mental aspect even if not physical. Once they have completed about 30 minutes exercise, I allow them 15 minutes to do as they choose before I get them in, feed and lock them up for the day. This is the only time they will be allowed this treat. From the next exercise period they will be back to normal practice in readiness for their next race. Even though the cocks that raced the channel will not race on the next weekend, they will begin their gradual recovery and will be expected to conform with the rest of the race team. My hens are treated in a very similar way but I do not allow them free time outside the loft, as my neighbour is a pigeon fancier and I need to avoid contact with his cocks.

**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**