

# The Pigeon Genetics Newsletter, News, Views & Comments.

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## "BULL'S EYE" !



Our Racing and High Performance pigeons often seem to have a 'Bull's Eye' painted on their back as we watch helplessly during Hawk attacks ! What to do !?

I may have told you the story previously about science researchers in Africa who were studying the Giraffe Herds and wanted to be able to recognize various animals , so they decided to chase them down by Jeep and once close enough , they sprayed an identification mark on each one. They did not know at that time that all they had to do was take a photograph of each one as no two Giraffes have the same colour markings . It was not long before they discovered that all of the sprayed animals had fallen prey to Lions.

The marked animals stood out to the King of predators as injured or in some way different enough to make it a prime target. They were wearing a painted 'bull's eye' so to speak.

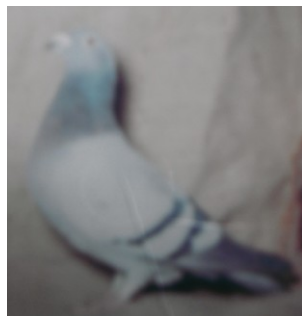
That is how Birds of Prey operate also. They watch potential targets in search of some sign that it will be an easy catch. They have it in their best interest to spend as little energy as possible as they may have to make many strikes before they are successful. When feeding hungry nestlings, they have to make numerous kills a day to keep up with the demand.

The Term "Wild Type" has a significant meaning here as it is the size, shape, colour and behaviour that affords anything a fighting chance to ward off attacks by any forms of predation. The birds that best avoid attack get to breed on and thus those traits get permeated, so that the species has a set of characteristics that tend to make all specimens of a given species look very similar if not identical. A predator grows familiar with this 'phenotype' and avoids wasting its energy trying to catch them. The ones that stand out for any reason are the ones worth a crack at hunting down. That is why most 'mutations' that have any significant change from the norm fail to survive in the wild. Deformed, old, and injured birds are also sitting targets.



Wild type blue bar Feral *Columba livia*. photo Bob R.

Most Racing Homers are bred in the 'wild type' as Blue bars or blue checkers. Nevertheless thousands are killed by Hawks every year. You may wonder why? Well the answer is that they wear a "Bull's eye" sign on their very behaviour! They may LOOK like a wild pigeon to us, but to a Hawk they stand out as easy pickings. That is made even greater when they have additional colour differences, or other notable markings.



Wild type Blue Bar Racer hen bred by Bob R.

Hawks come in many sizes , shapes , and colours also . Pigeons soon learn which ones to take seriously and which ones they can actually fly out among and take a closer look. My Friend in NewBrunswick Canada , **Barry McPhee** told me about a little Flying Oriental Roller hen that he flew in his flock. She would dart out aggressively toward certain Hawks that seemed to be stalking the flock. The hawks didn't quite know what to think of this aggressive little bird and were more likely to retreat as opposed to challenging her. Many Hawk species have no interest in Birds at all and particularly not Pigeons.

Camouflage is the name of the game! The better a species colour blends in with its surroundings , the better are the chances for it to avoid detection and being caught by predators. This is played out by many bird species whereby the female is a drab combination of earth tones and stripes that allow her to easily remain hidden as she nests on the ground , in the fields and bushes. The males are usually very brightly coloured to attract the attention of predators and to lure them away from the nesting female. This may be seen even in some Dove and Fruit Pigeon species.

Below Ferals scatter for a nearby spruce tree to hide from a Falcon others freeze on the ground to blend with the shadows.. Photos Bob R.



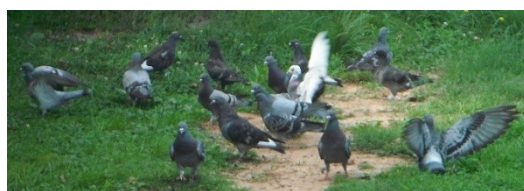
However; in the air, birds such as the Pigeon *Columba livia*, have evolved with very specific markings that not only allow the females to nest in Rock crevasses undetected, but also make it difficult for other birds of prey to single them out while in pursuit at high speed flight. The wing bars and tail band must be of specific importance or they would not have evolved with such notable markings. The T-pattern most likely would be far more common than it is in Rocky cliff areas ., whereas it is much more common in feral flocks in the asphalt roof cities. .



I have watched my study flock of ferals for about ten years and seeing them react to a Hawk attack is unbelievable ! If a Falcon attacks , and quite often two Hawks will work together on this , it sends an explosion of panic among all of the Pigeons. They shoot off in all directions , diving and darting wildly, while some will drop to the ground and hide under bushes, or in the branches of trees. If it is possible to get inside a building , they will do that . The Hawk(s) will attempt to flush them and get one to fly off for safety elsewhere. THAT is the one they will get. Falcons will often patiently cruise alongside of such a bird and wait until it slows a bit and starts to accept its pursuer as not something to fear. The Hawk will then turn on its side and grab out at the pigeon. Pigeons have another tactic . They then do a side - rolling drop. This can save it , or leave it open to the high speed dive of the Hawk. I watched a Mourning Dove attempting to out maneuver a Hawk as I drove along the highway. I could not keep as close an eye on it as I wanted to and stay safe myself, but the effort this little bird made to outwit its predator was nothing short of amazing! I finally lost track as the Dove was able to get gradually down to tree level after getting up to an extreme high position for a Dove.



Other features involve the 'albescent' (whitened) areas of the outer edges of the two outside tail feathers and the back of the pigeon. These serve a purpose during courtship to attract the females but also are suspected as a tool to distract a bird of prey. It seems that when a Hawk looks down on a flock of pigeons in flight, the white patches create a collage of spots much like the stripes on Zebras confuse Lions and other African Predators when they stalk a herd of Zebras. Often a Hawk will grasp the Pigeon by the tail only., and another aid kicks in whereby the tail feathers are immediately moulted/ released so that all the Hawk gets is a foot full of feathers. All photos by Bob R.



Training birds can be planned such that you are not being predictable in your timing . Some people like certain times that suit their schedules , but soon the Hawks learn to wait in anxious anticipation of an easy meal.

I am certain by now most flyers have said or thought to say , " just get yourself a gun and shoot the buggers". Sadly every Hawk that looks as if it may take your pigeons , actually may be out there working for you by hunting down rodents, even stray cats , skunks, young raccoons etc. It is therefore very important to know your Hawks as well as your Pigeons. Shooting is not always an option as you may live in a suburban area where gun discharge is not permitted. Every Hawk serves a valuable purpose in Nature to prevent overpopulation of things such as Feral Pigeons that often become completely out of control. Every time you shoot a bird during breeding season , you cause the slow death of its young. This can have devastating harmful effects on the environment we all value so highly.

The main idea is to **outfox** the predators. We are now seeing a great many Breeders selecting "COLOUR" in their Racing teams. Rare colour is all the rage. However this is very likely causing a great surge in the Predatory Hawk population as there is much more FOOD for them to catch and catch easily. Remember the sprayed Giraffes?? Pigeons that stand out get nabbed ! Pigeons that blend into the collage find safety in numbers.



"Bull's Eye"-- Pied , not Bulleye Pied!



Albescent back patches and missing tail feathers.

Yes we all know that pigeons will moult their feathers normally , but that is done such that it does not hamper their ability to fly well enough to escape capture. Sudden moult is caused by fright during a very close encounter with some sort of a predator.

We can easily see how natural wing patterns and base Colour Pigment have evolved to help protect the Pigeons in these traits to survive and reproduce more of their kind. But what about the Breeds that sport rather showy traits that one might consider detrimental , such as the grizzles?

The Highflyer Breeds of the World are extremely popular especially in the Middle Eastern Countries , but also in Europe and North America in the form of Flying Tiplers.

These Breeds have been bred without out-crosses to other Breeds and colours for many years . In fact it is virtually unheard of as the Breeds are carefully kept pure for their flying ability and one set colouration.

That colouration is based upon a mutation of the 'grizzle' family and in some regions also a Pied factor. I feel quite certain that I will be proven correct eventually as I have stated that I believe that this is a distinct mutation called "PRINT GRIZZLE". It varies greatly based upon the fact that it has been selectively controlled so long that it actually has in some flocks become a SET grizzle marking that normally would be very random. The Pied markings have also become set. By set , I mean they express the same way in just about every bird. This acts much in the same way with these Highfliers as does the wing shield PATTERNS of the Racers and others.



Photo by **Noor E Alam Nabil**. Heterozygous Print Grizzle, blue/ black series , Bar pattern.

Additional colour Modifiers often seen in these birds are smoky (sy) ., and Dirty (V). The above bird would be the standard heterozygous Print Grizzle from one blue bar parent, or from two hetero Prints. Many of these Highfliers in Pakistan lack a bronze trait. In North America , the Flying Tippler is the counterpart and they often DO express a bronze generally referred to as Tippler Bronze.

The popular colouring in these birds in both Countries however is that of the homozygous Print Grizzle. These birds have much more white expressing over the entire bird except the flights and tails.

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Photo by **Awais Cheema** Pakistan. These are similar to the 'Storked' Homozygous Tippler phenotype but almost always have much more colour in the flights and tails plus more over the heads and necks.

The expression is slightly different also depending upon the actual wing pattern, Bar , Checker , or T-Pattern. Each of course showing progressively more colour in the shield area.

Some of these birds are selectively bred to be nearly all white with darker beaks. Some will have a coloured chin 'chuck' much like the Chuck marking in the Tipplers in NA.



Photo by **Choudhry Zaheer Pigeons**. Chuck Marked Homozygous Print Grizzle.

SO., how do they fare while out with the Hawks. Losses do happen ., but we may be surprised if compared to losses in NA and Europe among Racer and Roller Breeders. These rather gaudy looking birds SHOULD stand out to the Hawk as something ideal to chase and catch .... but it seems not so !

One reason is that it has become the norm. All birds in the flock tend to look much alike . To the attacking Hawk , it might look like a wall of dancing black flecks with an all white background.

Here in North America , we tend NOT to allow our birds to range about outside. It is a matter of sending them out for a quick fly then trap them back in quickly for food. That cuts down considerably on the time that they are exposed to Hawk observation. On the other hand, this robs them of the chance to become "street savvy" so that they will know how to recognize danger and outwit it.



I asked **Shoibal Sabbir** of Bangladesh about their Highflier Hobby. He explained that these birds all originated from Pakistan. They are kept in mixed lofts however, spend a lot of time outside and have regular encounters with Hawks. This exposure makes them very aware and ready to take flight. Some breeders have a practice of spraying each bird with a type of paint or dye that ironically acts as a deterrent for Hawks.

Very tall platforms are constructed as 'sitting' sites for the youngsters to allow them to become familiar with the surroundings. These usually have a wire netting over them to contain the birds at first and also protect them from attacks.

Here are some photos of Shoibal's birds:



There is an interesting story behind these birds. Here it is in Shoibal's own words :



Foundation Sire.

Their 1st. father we got luckily. Someone flew a kit of flyer pigeon in our area purpose of short distance race. That kit got falcon attack & that father fell down near in my friend's loft. Without any attack signs in body; it's just scared and came down from kit. After 2 days it came for food to my friend's loft and almost three months never fly. One day it's start flying & from that day he is top bird of our area and continuously start flying in the whole night also . Even his all generations babies also fly in night. We all got surprised to see this performance. The fact is ; from that bird whatever baby has come out they can fly long time with top height on top of the loft. And while take place in distance race: till now 50 kilometer up distance race they did with training. And without training 20 Kilo up race they covered. In Dhaka whomever has this bird's generation they are getting better result. We remarked that 1st. father was the lucky bird for my friend, still with my friend but infertile. So I am keeping direct generation. Above shared images. ~ Shoibal Sabbir.



This from **Adam Archer** : First I'd like to show you these images sent to me by **Malik Hamza** of Pakistan with this description: "These are called Liusha and Dosha eyes. This is not due to any diseases and Chinese people says that this trait is inheritable. The tiny black dots in eyes can freely move in eye when bird moves or shaken. All pics are of one bird only and this trait is visible only in one eye."





Adam continues to say :

Second: you may have seen on Facebook that I'm ramping up efforts on my PigeonGenetics.com project, especially the "Pigeon Genetics Wiki" - this is a Wikipedia-style site devoted totally to pigeon genetics. It is meant to be collaborative and people are welcome and encouraged to edit and add to it if they have knowledge or experience they'd like to share. The site is totally free, I'm trying to encourage the free sharing of pigeon knowledge as much as possible. If you think it would be appropriate to mention in the newsletter that would be appreciated, the wiki address is <https://www.pigeongenetics.com/wiki/>  
Thanks! Adam Archer.

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Correction: A while back I reported that Jerry Sindelar had left the Hobby and asked to be removed from the Newsletter. That was a mix-up in names as it should have read **Jerry Sternadel** !! I apologise for that confusion .

Below I have extracted information from a couple of letters from **Jerry Sindelar** of Canada.

Hello Bob,

I am writing you again about your info about me...when you mentioned in one bulletin about 5(?) months back that I quit hobby.

I like what you do for the hobby, work so good and needed, I would never quit, it could be some mistake or somebody's work...but why? I was born in Europe- licensed judge and still active there, but I feel and do all for Canadian hobby, wherever I go, I go as a Canadian, to Australia several national shows, South Africa only one ever who judged nationals for both associations, USA-master judge, I am only Canadian judging any true European show and everywhere I go I bring some stuff of CPFA with me as presents, giving speech at banquets etc.....

I try to find more successful breeders worldwide and inform them about your bulletin and info how to be a part of it...

-sending you again a picture of new breed that I am developing-the Niagara Pouter, true Canadian breed.



That is it for the Month of August from here in the Loft. ~ Bob R.

Special thanks to **Jerry Sindelar** and **Robert Mangile** both for their promotion for new members.