

# Small Stock Project: Pigeons

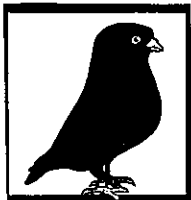
Kenneth S. Olson, Extension Specialist

Pigeons are adaptable to nearly all conditions. They are easy to raise, require very little room and not expensive to have around. They are not very noisy, and have no offensive odors if cared for properly. Pigeons may be raised in rural, suburban and urban areas and are seldom restricted by zoning. Zoning regulations should be checked, however, before making plans for a pigeon project.

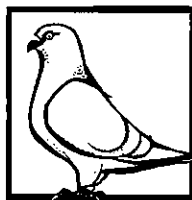
### Selecting the Breed and Variety

Pigeons as a small stock project are usually kept for one of three purposes:

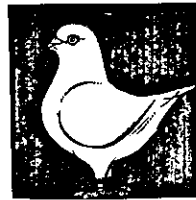
1. **Squab raising** – prolific producing breeds of good sized squabs, with minor consideration given to type and color. The King, Carneau, Mondain and Giant Homer are among the most popular squab producing breeds.



Carneau



Mondain



King

2. **Fancy or ornamental breeds** – usually kept for their beauty of form or color. Strictly for exhibition, these breeds include Fantails, Jacobins, Owls, Tumblers, Nuns and Pouters, etc.



Fantail



Jacobin

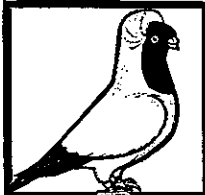


Tumbler

3. **Flying or homing breeds** – used for racing, endurance flying and homing. These include the Racing Homer, with many varieties; and Birmingham Rollers.



Roller



Nun



Homer

There are more than 250 different breeds and varieties of pigeons. The body shape and size determine breed, while the feather color or pattern determines the variety. When you choose your breed and variety, select one you personally like.

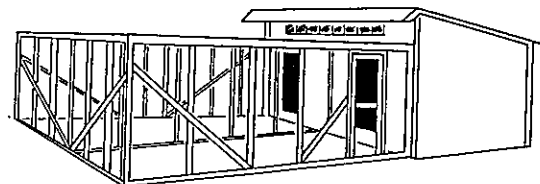
The largest breed of pigeons in the world is named "Runt." There appear to be several conflicting explanations for this paradox. Having originated in Italy and Spain with other super-sized pigeons, Runts have been developed in America by a limited but loyal group. At shows they are weighed and measured for maximum size. Mature birds weigh three pounds, have girth of 16 inches and a wing span of over three feet.



Runt

### Housing

Pigeon houses are called lofts. As long as the loft is kept dry, clean, free from drafts and the pigeons have plenty of fresh air, clean feed and clean water, they will be happy. The loft must be cat and rodent proof. A loft, if too small, will allow cats to torment birds from outside the loft and severely limit the number of birds that can be kept. An ideal loft would consist of two or three compartments, four feet wide, eight feet deep and as high as you can reach, but not over 6½ feet. Extra compartments make loft management much easier. They permit providing a separate loft for young birds and for separation of sexes in the fall. It is advisable to have the loft face south. Pigeons like the sun and enjoy bathing in it. An elaborate loft is not necessary, but it should be neat and tidy. A painted one looks better.

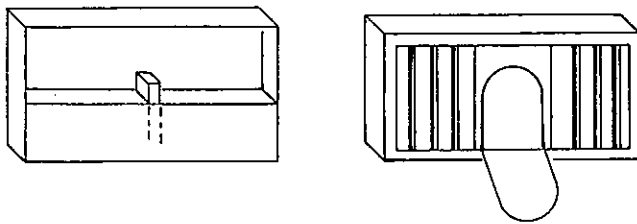


A two-pen backyard pigeon home (loft).

### Equipment

Each pigeon must be provided a separate perch and each mated pair needs two nest boxes about 12" by 12" placed

side by side; 10" x 10" would be acceptable for some breeds. It is necessary to have two nest boxes because the female pigeon will usually lay again before the squabs are old enough to leave the nest. A good size for a double nest is 24" wide, 12" deep and 12" high. A divider about 6" high should divide the nest in two parts. Several kinds of nest fronts can be used. One is a 6" board placed across the front. Another is made in a frame with 1" slats or dowels spaced 1½" to 2" apart with a 6" opening in the center that can be closed, allowing the nest box to be used for a forced mating cage. When open this panel will act as a perch. Both the 6" board and dowel or slatted front should be hinged so that they can be opened up for easier cleaning. Small boxes, about 8" x 8" x 2" deep should be provided in each half of the nest box. Pulp nest bowls can be purchased at most small stock equipment stores.



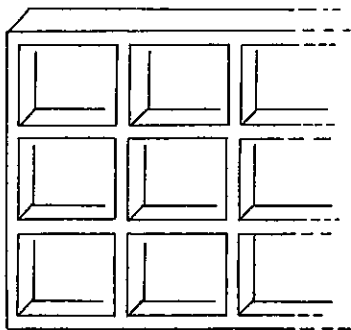
Two types of nests for pigeons.

Feeders with a removable top are easy to clean and are not wasteful of feed. Each pigeon needs about 2" of feeder space. Place feeders away from water to keep the feed dry.

Vacuum or "hooded" waterers are easy to clean and prevent birds from bathing. An automatic fountain can also be used.

Waterers should be cleaned often and kept out of the sun in the summer. Some people like to place the waterer outside the loft so the birds can't dirty the water. Feeders and waterers should not be more than 3" above the perch upon which the birds stand when eating or drinking.

Perches can be constructed of 1" x 4" lumber which will make each perch 12" wide, 10" high and 4" deep. These are called box perches. Another type of perch is the V type with the inverted V's so placed that pigeons won't dirty each other.



Pigeon perches (box type).

Pigeons enjoy bathing, so a container of water 15" to 20" in diameter and 5" deep should be provided once or twice a week for a two or three-hour period.

A small grit feeder with grit should be in the loft. Pigeon grit contains hard gravel, oyster shell, bone calcium, charcoal, a little salt and other minerals. It is not expensive and is not practical to mix your own, so buy it commercially.

### Feeding

Pigeons are grain eaters. They prefer a variety or mixture of grains or commercial pigeon pellets. Chicken mash or pellets are not recommended. Newly harvested grain also should not be fed. It will cause diarrhea. Feed only what your pigeons will clean up in 10 minutes twice daily.

### Management

Let the birds get well acquainted with you. Kind and gentle care results in tame and healthy birds without broken feathers rather than easily panicked birds.

The loft should be thoroughly cleaned at least once a week – and don't forget the nest boxes. An inch of sand on the loft floor makes cleaning easy. Sand can be sifted through fine hardware cloth and reused. If you have a fly pen, which is a wire-enclosed area attached to the loft, it should be kept clean, too.

Pigeons, their nests and quarters should be checked often for lice and mites. If you find them, use recommended poultry lice and mite killers. Keeping sparrows and other wild birds out will reduce lice, mites and other disease and insect problems.



Pigeons grow rapidly, reach squab size in 28 days and maturity in four months.

Seamless bands should be obtained and used to permanently mark young birds while their feet will still slip through the band. Bands are normally put on squabs on the sixth, seventh or eighth day after they hatch. Records of nest inhabitants, matings, eggs and squabs produced and your disposal of birds provide an interesting part of your pigeon project activities.

Both parents care for the young. They feed them by regurgitating a thick, creamy mixture called pigeon milk into the youngsters' open mouths. Pigeon milk is absolutely essential to get young squabs started. It is fed for only 6-7 days. By the seventh and eighth day the squabs are getting grain and can be saved by hand feeding if necessary.

Squabs grow rapidly and are ready to leave the nest in 28 to 30 days. If they are to be eaten as squab, they should

be slaughtered just before leaving the nest. If they are to be kept as breeders or for show, allow them a few days of flight in the pen with their parents before removing them to a separate pen for young unmated birds. They will be ready to mate at about four months of age.

Young birds can be left with the parents, but as they become of mating age, they may try to steal a mate and the accompanying fighting among the birds usually results in broken or abandoned eggs or trampled young.

The art of racing pigeons is always more interesting if you try to learn as much as you can at the same time you are having fun with your pigeons. You'll be missing a big part of learning and fun if you do not join a club. Here is where you meet the others who have the same hobby. You can freely discuss your questions and, hopefully, benefit by their experiences. Besides, you will find "pigeon people" to be a fine group of friends.

There are literally hundreds of local pigeon clubs across the country, and more are starting all the time. To locate those that have activities that fit your particular interest, you will want to pursue two courses. First, contact the people in your area who raise your breed of pigeons, and ask them about club activities. Second, write to the national (or regional) organizations, requesting information on clubs in your area that have activities for your breed.

Listed below are the addresses of a few prominent national clubs. Since locations are subject to change, you may find more current addresses in pigeon magazines.

#### All Breeds

National Pigeon Association  
Box 83, Watertown, WI 53094

American Pigeon Club  
52 Roberts Road  
Medford, MA 02155

#### Racing

American Racing Pigeon Union  
34 South Bryant Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15202

International Federation of  
Homing Pigeon Fanciers, Inc.  
54 Revere Avenue  
Maplewood, NJ 07040

United Pigeon Fanciers  
Route 1  
Greencastle, PA 17225

In addition, there is at least one national or international club for every popular breed of show birds and performing pigeons, and now there are clubs for some of the rare varieties. Send a stamped reply envelope to one of the above all-breeds clubs to obtain information on the specialty clubs for your breed and variety.

The pigeon hobby is fortunate to have a wealth of magazines, news sheets and regular bulletins which cover every aspect of the hobby. Listed below are the regularly published publications.

American Pigeon Journal  
Warrenton, MO 63383

American Racing Pigeon News  
2421 Old Arch Rd.  
Norristown, PA 19401

Your public library may have a number of books on pigeons, and this may be your only source for some of the older volumes that are out of print. However, as your interest grows, you will probably want to have your own shelf of pigeon books. For this purpose we list below some current editions which are of varied interest.

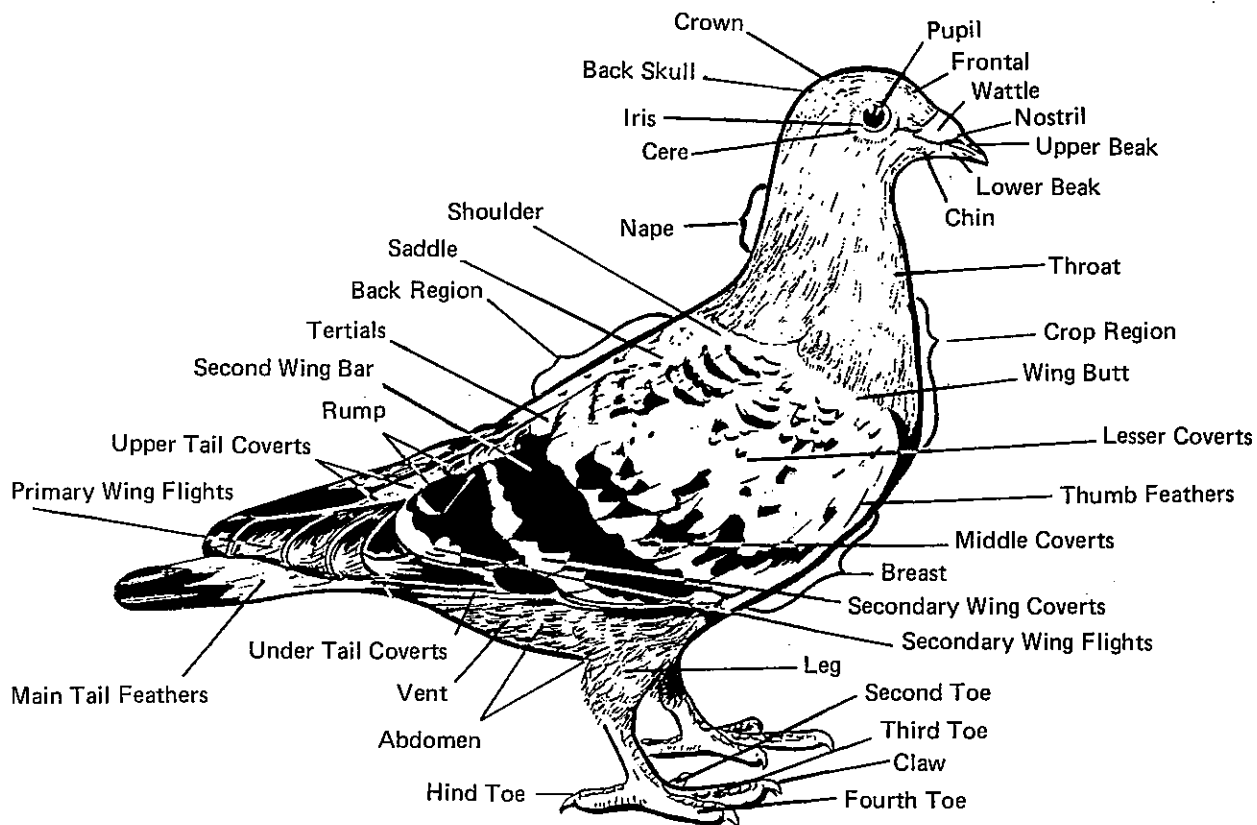
*The Pigeon* by Wendell M. Levi. 615 pages plus bibliography and index. 1,127 illustrations. The standard reference work on the subject. A compilation of nearly everything written on pigeons up to its time. 1969. \$25.00

*Encyclopedia of Pigeon Breeds* by Wendell M. Levi. 768 pages plus bibliography and index. 789 illustrations in color. Describes and pictures practically every known breed in the world. Includes sixteen brief sections on breeding, housing, training, etc. 1965. \$30.00

Both of these are available from:  
Levi Publishing Co., Inc.  
P.O. Drawer 730  
Sumter, SC 29150

*How to Raise and Train Pigeons* by Mervin F. Roberts. 64 pages. 65 illustrations (27 in color). General interest for beginners. Paper-back. \$1.25

Some illustrations in this bulletin have been reproduced from the *Purina Pigeon Book*, Checkboard Square, St. Louis, Missouri.



**Parts of a Pigeon**

### Learning Exercise

Answer these questions:

1. Give five reasons why pigeons are a good small stock project.
2. Why should young birds be removed from their parents and other older birds?
3. Give three reasons why people keep pigeons. Name a breed raised for each reason.
4. How many different breeds and varieties are there?
5. Why does the nest box have to be large enough for two nests?
6. What is a pigeon home called?
7. What kind of home will keep pigeons happy?
8. At what age should a pigeon be slaughtered for food?
9. How much feeder space should be provided for each pigeon in the loft?
10. What is pigeon milk?
11. What should be used to permanently mark pigeons?
12. When should pigeons be permanently identified?
13. Why can't mature birds be marked in this way?
14. What should be done to reduce disease and insect problems in the pigeon loft?
15. How often should the pigeon loft be cleaned?
16. Healthy-looking birds without broken feathers indicate something about the owner. What is it?
17. What and how much should pigeons be fed?
18. Why should the pigeon loft face south or have the sun shining into it?
19. Why should a container of water 15-to-20 inches in diameter and five inches deep be placed in the pigeon loft once or twice a week?
20. Pigeons should have grit. What does it contain that is good for them?

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the US Department of Agriculture. Cooperative Extension Service, College of Agriculture, The University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721.

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## Glossary of Terms

<b>A.O.C.</b>	Any other color.	<b>Breeding pen</b>	An enclosed area reserved for mated pairs of pigeons to raise their young.
<b>A.O.V.</b>	Any other variety.	<b>Broken-colored</b>	Having two or more colors.
<b>A.P.C.</b>	American Pigeon Club.	<b>Broken-eyed</b>	Lacking uniform color of eyes.
<b>A.R.P.U.</b>	American Racing Pigeon Union.	<b>Brows</b>	Skull projections over eyes.
<b>Argent</b>	Applied to Modenas having a white center on the colored feather in the wingshield, called stencil. Their ground color is white. The rest of the bird is solid colored.	<b>Bull-eye</b>	Eye with dark-colored iris; also called "black" eye.
<b>A.R.U.</b>	American Racing Union.	<b>Canker</b>	A spreading, white ulcer in the mouth, caused by colds, unsanitary conditions, spoiled feed, and the like. It is also often known to be caused by a flagellated protozoa, <i>Trichomonas gallinae</i> or <i>Trichomonas columbae</i> .
<b>Badge</b>	Pigeon with colored body and ten white primary feathers on each wing.	<b>Cap</b>	Head markings of such varieties as Swallows; can also refer to shell crest.
<b>Barred</b>	Having bands of alternate colors running across the feather.	<b>Carnucles</b>	Irregular and other more or less abnormal growths of flesh about eyes and over nostrils.
<b>Barrel</b>	Frontal between the eye and the beak-wattle, as in medium-faced Antwerps.	<b>Carriage</b>	General bearing of pigeon.
<b>Bay</b>	Yellow-orange color in eyes.	<b>Carrier</b>	A ventilated container suitable for transporting pigeons.
<b>Beard</b>	White feathers below beak of colored pigeons.	<b>Chain</b>	Fore-part of frill, as in Jacobins; also known as lower part of mane and pick up in Jacobins.
<b>Bell-neck</b>	Colored markings in the shape of a bell on back of neck against white background.	<b>Checkered</b>	Having wing feathers with irregularly colored tips; black-checkered feathers are black tipped with blue; blue-checkered feathers are blue tipped with black; etc.; also known as having wing shields with checkered appearance; very common.
<b>Bib</b>	Patch of colored feathers below beak of white pigeons.	<b>Chuck</b>	White patch below under-mandible, as in Beards.
<b>Bishoped</b>	White shoulder patches or wing-edgings of such shoulder-marked varieties as Oriental Frills and Turbits; a fault.	<b>Clean-legged</b>	Having no feathers on shanks or feet.
<b>Blocky</b>	Having broad, substantial build; see "Racy."	<b>Close-feathered</b>	Having feathers lying flat against body; not loose-feathered; same as "tight-feathered."
<b>Bloom</b>	Gloss, sheen, or finish on plumage.	<b>Cobby</b>	English equivalent for American "blocky"; heavily, solidly built, more or less round in form.
<b>Body</b>	Trunk of pigeon.	<b>Cock</b>	Male pigeon.
<b>Bolting eye</b>	Prominent eye, as in Turbits.	<b>Comparison judging</b>	Appraising show specimens without score card by merely comparing one with another.
<b>Booted</b>	Feathered on shanks and toes.		
<b>Box-beak</b>	Close-fitting beak, as in Carriers and other stout-beaked breeds.		
<b>Breed</b>	A pigeon type determined by body shape and size.		
<b>Breeding down</b>	Process of producing small specimens.		

<b>Condition (noun)</b>	Quality of pigeon as regards state of health and of plumage.	<b>Fluff</b>	Down part of feather; also, profuse soft feathering about thighs and abdomen.
<b>Condition (verb)</b>	To wash, tame, train, or otherwise prepare a pigeon for show room.	<b>Fly pen</b>	Housing area needed for each breeding pair - approximately four square feet of floor space plus four square feet of coop area. An open area pen where birds can bathe and fly.
<b>Crest</b>	Feather tuft at back-skull. If it extends across the head, it is called "shell-crest"; if it terminates in a point, then it is called "peak-crest."	<b>Foreign color</b>	Color not belonging to variety according to standard.
<b>Crop</b>	Pouch-like enlargement of the pigeon's gullet, in which food is stored and softened before it is passed into gizzard.	<b>Foul feathers</b>	Feathers of a color not belonging to variety.
<b>Cull</b>	Sorting out birds that do not meet pigeon standards.	<b>Frill</b>	Fluffed feathers on throat, as in Oriental Frills and Turbits.
<b>Cushion</b>	Excessive quantity of soft feathers about tail.	<b>Frog-headed</b>	Having depression between eyes over crown of skull, as in Viennas and Budapests.
<b>Deep-bodied</b>	Having noticeable depth of body from top of back to lower side of breastbone.	<b>Gazzi</b>	Modenas having white bodies, but colored heads, wings, and tails.
<b>Dewlap</b>	Growth of loose skin below the beak.	<b>Gizzard</b>	The second (posterior) stomach of a pigeon having thick walls and a horny lining for grinding food.
<b>Dominant</b>	Traits or characteristics which predominate in breeding.	<b>Globe</b>	Air-filled, circular throat, as in Pouters.
<b>Double-lacing</b>	Penciling of outer edge of feather, as in Oriental Frills.	<b>Grains</b>	Natural seeds including field peas, milo, wheat, hulled oats and corn used as food for pigeons.
<b>Drives</b>	The cock courts the hen by showy prancing and strutting, bowing, and scraping his tail on the floor as he herds the hen toward the nest and away from other cocks.	<b>Grit</b>	Complete mineral mixture along with shell and granite which are needed for healthy pigeons.
<b>Embryo</b>	The young in the early stage of development before hatching from the egg.	<b>Grizzle</b>	Mixture of primary color (often blue) and white in a sort of "salt and pepper" effect, especially around the head and the neck.
<b>Fancier</b>	Refers to anyone who keeps pigeons with intent of improving their appearance or the performance of the next generation.	<b>Gullet</b>	A pigeon's esophagus or throat.
<b>Feeders</b>	Pigeons used as foster parents to raise the young of the short-beaked varieties.	<b>Hackle</b>	Long, flowing feathers growing on neck of pigeons. There is a family of hackled pigeons to which the Nicobar belongs.
<b>Flight-coverts</b>	Short feathers growing at the base of the flight feathers, which they cover in part.	<b>Handkerchief</b>	Mottling of white feathers on scapular plumage of such varieties as Mottled Tumblers.
<b>Flights or flight feathers</b>	Primary feathers on wings.	<b>Hen</b>	Female pigeon.
		<b>Hock</b>	Joint between thigh and shank.

<b>Homing</b>	Faculty or returning to home loft over territory, which is at least in part new or strange to flyer.	<b>Muff</b>	Growth of feathers on shanks or toes.
<b>Hood</b>	Inverted feathers on neck, as in Jacobin.	<b>N.P.A.</b>	National Pigeon Association.
<b>I.F.A.H.P.F.</b>	International Federation of American Homing Pigeon Fanciers.	<b>O.C.</b>	Old cock (male pigeons at least one year old).
<b>Inbreeding</b>	Mating closely related birds to each other, as father to daughter, brother to sister, etc.	<b>O.H.</b>	Old hen (female pigeons at least one year old).
<b>Incubation</b>	The act or process of a pigeon sitting upon eggs to hatch them. Also known as brooding.	<b>Outcross</b>	Using a pigeon of a different strain for breeding purposes.
<b>Keel</b>	Lower edge of breastbone.	<b>Pecking</b>	A pigeon's act of cannibalism by plucking its feathers and/or the feathers of another bird.
<b>Kit</b>	A number of pigeons, such as rollers or Tipplers, trained to fly together.	<b>Peeper</b>	Squab ready to leave the nest.
<b>Lacing</b>	Marginal edging of a feather; usually darker than the body of the feather.	<b>Pellets</b>	Commercially prepared mixture of finely ground grains and other food particles, minerals and vitamins.
<b>Larking</b>	Triangular brown or black patches on wings, as in Coburg and Nuremberg Larks.	<b>Perch</b>	A resting place for pigeons designed to keep them off the floor of their coop. It prevents their droppings from falling onto the birds roosting below and it provides them their own personal roost.
<b>Leggy</b>	Having legs too long.	<b>Pied (adj.)</b>	Having one solid color splashed with patches of white feathers.
<b>Line breeding</b>	Modified inbreeding from a certain number of birds not too closely related, such as mating daughter to father or son to mother, according to a definite plan.	<b>Pigeon fly</b>	Sometimes called "tick fly"; a highly specialized fly living on pigeons.
<b>Loft</b>	Building or cage that shelters pigeons and keeps them dry and protected against predators.	<b>Pigeon milk</b>	Soft, white substance secreted by crop and fed to newly hatched squabs for some days.
<b>Magnani</b>	The almond color in Modenas.	<b>Pinch-eyed</b>	Having slight narrowness at rear part of otherwise round eye-cere of Dagoon.
<b>Mandibles</b>	Horny, upper and lower portions of beak or bill.	<b>Primaries</b>	Flight feathers.
<b>Mane</b>	The string of feathers that surrounds a Jacobin's beak.	<b>Racy</b>	Applied to a slender, trim, tight-feathered bird of alert carriage.
<b>Markings</b>	Lacing, barring, striping, or any other kind of marks on plumage.	<b>Roach back</b>	Hump-back.
<b>Mealy</b>	Powdery silver with red bars; color of meal, usually ash-red.	<b>Rose</b>	Center of the rosette forming the frill of the Jacobin; white feathers appearing on the shoulders of certain varieties, such as Pouters, in the shape of a rose; a compact group of feathers, the size of a half-dollar piece, radiating from the center of the skull, as in Trumpeters.
<b>Molt</b>	Gradual loss of old feathers which are replaced with new ones.		
<b>Mottled</b>	Having small, crescent-shaped patches of white on a ground plumage of a single or "self" color.		

<b>Rose-wing</b>	Having several white feathers near the center of each wing; applied only to solidly colored birds.	<b>Split-eyed</b>	Having the iris partly black and partly bright-colored.
<b>Saddle</b>	That portion of the back extending between the transverse median line of the back and the base of the tail; also refers to a white bird with colored wing shields.	<b>Sport</b>	Sudden spontaneous variation from type or breed; a mutation.
<b>Scaly leg</b>	Mite-disease of the shanks and feet.	<b>Squeaker</b>	Squab ready to leave the nest; especially applied to young racing homers.
<b>Schietti</b>	Applied to Modenas, meaning colored all over, regardless of kind of color; classification includes white self-colored.	<b>Standard</b>	Description of the ideal pigeon in each breed.
<b>Secondaries</b>	The long quill feathers of the wings, growing next to and above the primaries.	<b>Stippled</b>	See "Splashed."
<b>Self-color</b>	Any uniform or solid color.	<b>Stock birds</b>	Pigeons withdrawn from racing and from showing and used solely for breeding; often have some fault.
<b>Shank</b>	That portion of the leg between the toes and the hock joint.	<b>Stockings</b>	Short feathers covering the lower joint and claws of such varieties as the frillbacks and the Ancients.
<b>Sheath</b>	The covering of a new feather. It splits and falls off as the feather develops.	<b>Stop</b>	An indentation causing an angular appearance between a projecting beak and a rising forehead, as in the short-faced Tumbler.
<b>Shoeing</b>	The feathers below the main tail feathers; especially noticeable in Fantails.	<b>Strain</b>	Birds of one variety bred in line for a definite purpose for five or more generations from a certain number of foundation birds; sometimes called "family."
<b>Short-faced</b>	Having very short beak and frontal, as in Turbits and Owls.	<b>Stud</b>	Collection of pure-bred birds.
<b>Shoulder</b>	Front, or upper part of the wing.	<b>Team</b>	Four pigeons on exhibition: a pair of old birds and a pair of youngsters.
<b>Shoulder-butt</b>	The same as the shoulder.	<b>Thighs</b>	Upper segment of the leg.
<b>Show stick</b>	A 15-to-18-inch, smooth, straight rod with rounded tip used to train pigeons for exhibition.	<b>Throat</b>	Same as gullet.
<b>Silver</b>	Ash-red.	<b>Ticked</b>	Having plumage with spots of color different from that of the remainder of the plumage.
<b>Slipped wing</b>	A wing with twisted or improperly folding secondaries.	<b>Tight-feathered</b>	See "Close-feathered."
<b>Smooth-legged</b>	Having legs without feathers, stubs, or down on the shanks.	<b>Toy</b>	A small pigeon bred only for markings; at least 15 breeds of German Toys produced from the Saxon Field Pigeon, bred mostly for their markings, such as the Ice, the Crescent, the Archangel, or Swallow.
<b>Snip</b>	Patch of white or colored feathers above beak.	<b>Trap</b>	A one-way swinging door into the pigeon loft through which the pigeon can enter, but not leave, their loft.
<b>Spangled</b>	Dark marking at the tip of a feather.	<b>Trimming</b>	Preparation of pigeons for exhibition usually considered unethical.
<b>Spindle-beak</b>	Thin or pointed beak.		
<b>Splashed</b>	Having uneven markings (color and white); sometimes called stippled.		



<b>Tucked up</b>	Applied to wings held up nicely; not drooping.
<b>Type</b>	Form or carriage peculiar to a certain variety.
<b>Utility</b>	Bred for squab production, not for fancy or exhibition purposes.
<b>Variety</b>	Pigeon breed determined by feather color or pattern.
<b>Whiskered</b>	Smooth continuation of reversed frill feathering, beginning at breast and running to sides of head.
<b>Wing-bar</b>	A broad stripe of color usually different from that of the remainder of the plumage, running across the wings.
<b>Wing-butts</b>	Ends of flight feathers; misnomer for wing-points.
<b>Wing-coverts</b>	Feathers covering the roots of the secondary flight feathers.
<b>Y.C.</b>	Young cock (male pigeon with a current year's band).
<b>Y.H.</b>	Young hen (female pigeon with a current year's band).