



Gainsborough

TOWN COUNCIL

Pigeon Lofts & Racing Pigeons

The RSPCA advises that the following guidelines are followed:

All pigeon fanciers, in order to race their pigeons against others, need to be a member of a pigeon racing club. These standards have been produced in conjunction with the Royal Pigeon Racing Association, but there are other associations, or homing unions which also govern the sport. In case of serious problems with a loft, or abandoned pigeons, these organisations, as well as the RSPCA, may be able to help.

The loft

Any pigeon loft should be well maintained, and free of any obvious damage, or structural irregularities which could cause damage to the birds. It would probably be at a minimum 12-14 ft long, about 7ft high and 7ft deep, and would need to include access to perches and nest boxes. The roof should be watertight and the whole interior free from damp. Ideally it should be raised from the ground to prevent access by vermin. Apart from the traps to allow entry of returning pigeons the loft should be made inaccessible to wild birds. The loft should face as near south as possible, allowing the birds to bask in the sun, but otherwise should be of draught-free construction. A landing board outside the loft should be provided.

Internally it should be divided into two compartments for the birds, although with the means to open the whole area up as one when necessary. They may be additionally food or equipment storage areas. In the spring nesting bowls will be placed in the nest boxes (provided), but during the remainder of the year perches can be in use. All equipment should be well-constructed and maintained and capable of being thoroughly cleaned when necessary. Water fountains and feed troughs will need to be supplied for each compartment, as will a pigeon bath and small pots for grit and other nutritional supplements. Equipment for cleaning should be readily available.

A well-run loft will not show signs of accumulated dirt; droppings, old feathers or general dirt. There will always be available a good supply of clean fresh water, suitable bedding material, and a regular food supply. Grit should be provided. Pigeons should be allowed free exercise for some periods most days, although the details of this will vary amongst different fanciers and their locations. A typical 14 x 7ft loft normally gives enough space to house around 60 birds, 30 old birds and 30 young birds. They should all have a nesting box and perch available so overcrowding is not a problem.

Feeding and management

There are many different ways of feeding pigeons, all of which may be acceptable. However, it seems to be agreed that regularity is important and that the birds should be fed at the same times each day. It is common practice for the birds to become hungry before the next feed time, and this is acceptable, provided that the feed is supplied on a regular basis. Feed should be dust free and be a mixture of hard corn, peas and beans although this may be varied at certain times during the racing season to build the pigeons up. It should be stored in vermin-proof containers and should not appear stale. Grit should always be readily accessible and it is advisable also to supply a mixture of mineral salts.

Similarly exercise times and cleaning times should be the same each day, so that the birds have an established routine. Many fanciers allow their birds free exercise for several hours most days, but this will vary with the weather, training and breeding programmes and local conditions.

The breeding season starts in January or early February and continues until May or June. The birds are paired up and will be confined to the nest boxes for short periods. The fancier will manage the breeding programme by removing unwanted eggs and replacing them with either pot eggs or old, non-fertile eggs. Records should be kept of all breeding, and indiscriminate breeding should be avoided. Young birds are normally fitted with a leg ring at seven days old. It is normal practice to race the birds whilst they are also rearing their young.

Siting of the loft

Lofts are usually sited with a south facing aspect, and should be raised on brick piers to prevent rot and also reduce the access for vermin. If lofts are sited on the owner's land then the normal planning laws will apply. If they are sited on rented land, the landlord must be in agreement with the use of the land for a pigeon loft and the normal planning regulations should be followed. This would be particularly applicable if the loft was to be sited on local authority land, particularly allotments. Landlords may apply additional conditions which should be complied with.

Loft owners should take precautions to ensure that the movement of other people or their animals which have access to the land cannot gain entry to the loft, or interfere with it in such a way as the pigeons are disturbed. They should also be aware that if the pigeons are allowed free flight, they may cause annoyance to neighbours and this should be prevented as far as possible.