

Van Gent

• Before the Season Begins... •

I hope that you did not suffer from the flooding and other weather related stuff that bothered the UK. I have a love/hate relationship with these periods. I hate the fact that the daylight period is short and that I do not get enough vitamins from the Sun. But I love this period because this is the period of hope and making plans.

• Breeding •

The plan making starts with the mating list for my breeders. I have 10 nest boxes so there is place for 10 couples. I have the habit of changing the couples every year, so each cock and hen get a different partner.

When I make my final selection with the breeders I look at their offspring. First I check if they survive the year as a youngster. When I have too many losses from a pair they have a minus at their report. Then I check, if they are available, the results of the yearlings and the same with the old birds.

When I have a high confidence in a cock or hen and their off spring does not perform well they will get another chance.

I also like to buy or trade new stock birds. Every year there are about 25% new birds in the breeding loft. This year I added a direct Jan Theelen cock, a daughter of a bird which flew succesful 7 times Barcelona, an inbred cock of Louella out of Son x Daughter 'True Grit', a hen of Cees van der Laan (3rd and 7th National Barcelona) and a couple of Jellema pigeons.

Why every year new partners? I am hoping to find more good pairings and not rely on a lucky shot of a pair. And when you have a pair which produced usable pigeons, the hen and cock remain in the loft and you can always re-unite the couple for a round of youngsters during the summer.

I always mate my breeders around Christmas. This is due to the fact that I like to have 2 rounds of youngsters ready for the youngster races, which they have to do 3 of, and I have time available then to do this. So I prepare them as follows:

4 weeks in advance I have the pigeons checked by the vet. I will treat them with the lice and worm drop. I will check the same time the condition of the pigeons. They will be on 50% Depurative and 50% standard mix, so very light. They will keep this until they are mated. 2 weeks before Christmas I set the timers in my loft so that the hens and cocks have light from 0700 till 1900. After a few days you will notice that the pigeons become more active. I use the daylight lamps for this, so the ones that produce the same light as daylight. I prepare the nest bowls. I wrap newspaper paper around the

bowls. To see how see this youtube movie: www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=35u7zFkyMII and when they get their bowl after a day or 2, I also add a nest mat. Of course I try to give them tobacco stalks.



• Plans for the Racing Season •

I also make plans for the racing season. When do I mate, when do I separate the pigeons again, do I let them raise youngsters or not, which races do I like to enter etc.

This year will be a new year for me. I am going to race my pigeons on the natural system. I compete in the extreme long distance and I hope to get better results than I had on the total Widowhood system. So I read a lot of articles, watched a few DVDs and I spoke with successful fanciers who use the natural system.

What I learned is that, as always, there are a lot of ways to success but the majority of the successful fanciers use a kind of dry natural system. With dry I mean, they only race the birds on eggs and not on youngsters. The reason behind this is that pigeons with youngsters suffer more with Canker than pigeons without youngsters. So to prevent a higher risk on Canker the fanciers do not let them have youngsters to race on.

The second thing I learned is that it is better to train the natural pigeons late at night. So just start at 8.30pm with the training around the loft. You just feed them in the afternoon, so 5 or 6 and then let them train for an hour later in the evening. Of course you have to look at the daytime available, so in May you train the birds earlier

than mid July.

The third thing I learned is that each bird that returns from a long distance race is held in his or her nest box for 2 days and gets immediately after arrival a recupe tablet, later on the day of arrival an Anti-Canker tablet and the day after an Anti-Worm tablet., just to disinfect. They get drinks and feed in their nest box and they do not go out to train. The recupe tablet contains electrolytes and glucose for a rapid recovery.

The last thing I learned is that all of these fanciers have a clean start with their pigeons. So the birds are examined by the vet, their droppings are also checked and the pigeons are cured when there is a need to do this.

Then I have to make the planning when to enter which pigeon in which race, and when I know that, I will make a plan of when to mate and when to get rid of the eggs. I put everything in an Excel spreadsheet. So for each pigeon and couple I know what to do when. I have a copy of this sheet in my loft and I amend it when I need to. The first time it is a hassle to get a good sheet, but once I have it, I can copy it from year to year. I have now made my first sheet and I intend to get as much information as possible into it and make it as flexible as possible, so when I change race number 1 for pigeon X, automatically the dates and stats change.

• Besides Planning •

I also make a list of what I can or have to obtain at the Spring Fair in Houten in the first weekend of March. All the companies there have enormous discounts and that is the fair where I can earn some money. During the Autumn fair I bought the nest mats, the lice and worm drops and some new drinkers. Now I have already on my list things like checking the mixtures of feeds with some companies, the recupe stuff and some medicines. The last I know I cannot get there, but I can order it.

I am still checking the pigeon sales. When there is an auction that I am interested in, I do my research and try to handle the pigeons. if it is only an internet auction I try to contact the owner and get some more background information. In November there was a sale of Ernst Verheyen in Putten. I noticed that it was not widely advertised and I also noticed that this man was a champ in his province before he became ill and died. So I did my research and I decided to go there. there was only a live auction. I did not want old birds, I preferred the late breeds that were also in the auction. There were some English buyers in the room as well and they ended up with buying a nice lot of good birds. Well done! I ended up with 2 out of the 5 I selected after my research. 2 of them I did not like the way the birds were after handling and one was just too expensive. I hope the 2 are a couple so I can mate them. I am going to try that coming weekend. Let us see if they are a hen and a cock or 2 cocks. So keep your eyes open, also during the season. When there is a good chance, grab it.