

Moving to all Natural for Super Health

Pigeons have been in existence for an eternity and survived long before we decided we knew what is best on how to keep them healthy. I am a firm believer that you can race successfully without ever flock treating the pigeons with antibiotics. The commitment to natural health is just that, a commitment. An antibiotic free flock will not happen overnight but over time.

Many make excuses and say 'because of my climate I must treat'. Massachusetts has every possible climate during the seasons from cold dampness in April to high humidity and warmth in summer to below freezing temperatures in winter.

When you first decide to race and breed antibiotic free you may have a higher percentage of losses and possibly but not necessarily a higher percentage of young with respiratory and canker. My thought process is, do you really want the pigeons that cannot stay healthy without antibiotics? Sure you will lose more youngsters by never treating them but over time the pigeons will get stronger and losses will be less.

By year two with no flock treatments the pigeons are producing much stronger babies and the race team is having sustained excellent performances. You are learning which pigeons have the best immune systems and these are the successful birds and the birds to breed from. If you enter one loft races it certainly helps to have pigeons with super immune systems.

Several years into antibiotic free pigeon management you will find the occasional bird with canker, respiratory or one eye cold. Treat that pigeon individually but leave the pigeon in the flock to challenge the immune systems of the other pigeons. At my lofts if a sick pigeon is not being picked on by the loft mates it will always remain with the flock.

When you decide to go antibiotic free it is definitely a commitment but you must vaccinate for PMV, pox and salmonella. Buy combination vaccines and use them also. Alternate vaccines from different companies and vaccinate the pigeons each year. Using the vaccines from different companies enhances the changes for a resistant flock. Worm the birds regularly and use natural products to enhance health like oregano, garlic and apple cider vinegar.

Many that have been in the sport for a long period of time have found the great champion pigeons both racers and breeders never get sick and always look and act spectacular. The superstar pigeons have a stronger immune system and a more efficient immune system. Like any other aspect of genes and genetics superior immune systems can be passed on or inherited.

When I speak at events I talk about challenging the immune systems and you can read about this in two of my other articles. An Immune System is a Terrible thing to Waste and Antibiotic Free Racing and Breeding at McLaughlin Lofts.

This past year (2017) after the Million Dollar Race pigeons were shipped to South Africa I moved my own stock pigeons and race team into the Million Dollar holding pens without doing any sanitizing or disinfecting. Most fanciers fear placing their own pigeons into pens that contained strange pigeons, I welcome this. The more you challenge an immune system the better the immune system becomes. The more the immune system is challenged, and the more the pigeons are vaccinated for different diseases the better the immune system.

Some immune systems are better suited to fight disease but until they are challenged with disease, with strange bacteria/virus and or vaccinations the immune system will not be at its best. Think about how rare it is for doctors and nurses to get sick but yet they work with endless sickness all the time.

An immune system that is challenged continuously over time continues to strengthen over time. If the immune system is not up to the challenge of a sickness then the inevitable happens and the pigeon selects itself out of the population.

Here at McLaughlin Lofts I witness the occasional pigeon with canker or respiratory etc. Now and again a pigeon will have some sort of intestinal disorder. The sick pigeon will be treated individually and if strong enough will remain with the other pigeons in the section while being treated. A pigeon is treated one time in its life and after that if sickness strikes again that pigeons genetics will be removed from the colony. Health issues usually come from the pigeons that are new to the loft. I find it takes a good year or slightly more to get new pigeons immune systems up to my existing pigeons.

Super genetics will proliferate over time but you must stick to your commitment of natural products and natural health. The pigeons must be provided the basics, like space, dryness, air, sunlight, proper minerals and nutrition to achieve your goal of a highly resistant flock. The strongest pigeons will not remain healthy if kept in terrible conditions with inadequate nutrition.

Each year I receive pigeons for export to South Africa for the Million Dollar Race. Each year the same few lofts have pigeons that get sick when mixed with others. I am not certain but I feel the heaviest antibiotic users are the lofts with the highest rate of sickness. Maybe not sickness at the home loft but sickness when they are moved to another loft.

Caring for thousands of Million Dollar pigeon has helped me refine my skills on keeping pigeons healthy. This year I had about 20 sick pigeons out of 1800 pigeons. Two with canker that fully recovered, one with PMV, two with Salmonella several unexplained deaths where I could tell something was not right one or two days prior to death. Several with a failure to thrive which the pigeon slowly loses body weight even though the bird is eating and drinking. Three pigeons had some sort of respiratory complex where they lost body weight rapidly at the same time they were gasping with a respiratory issue.

After living with pigeons for 45 years I am able to recognize a pigeon with a problem before the pigeon even knows it has a problem. A pigeon that has a reaction time maybe a fraction of a second slower than the rest has a problem. A pigeon that eats excessively, has a problem, a pigeon that drinks excessively also has a problem. Anyone who claims the pigeon was healthy one day and dead the next just missed the signs of a very sick pigeon trying to act well. Nature has provided birds with a survival mechanism to try to look well so predators cannot single out the sick easily.

Keeping a couple thousand Million Dollar pigeons healthy can be incredibly challenging and stressful. I like keeping the same 100 pigeons together until export. I do not sanitize the drinkers unless there is a sick pigeon and I am very careful not to mix bacteria from section to section. Once I have the pigeons about one month they are usually safe and will remain healthy for the entire stay. By living within 100 pigeon groups the Million Dollar Pigeons are exposed to pigeons from maybe 20 lofts. There is enough variation in the 100 pigeon group to expose each pigeon to many different pathogens as well as challenge and cause the immune system to respond positively.

The easiest way to keep pigeons healthy is to eliminate stress and make sure they are nutritionally complete. Minerals and grits are the most important aspect to keeping pigeons nutritionally complete. Eliminating external parasites also lessens stress. You certainly need plenty of space and along with fresh air.

Up until this year I felt that the Million Dollar pigeons for export needed to be kept on grates. This year many of the Million Dollar birds lived on solid floors. The pigeons living on solid floors remained as healthy as pigeons kept on grated floors.

At your home lofts if you provide space, air, sunlight, proper nutrition and your pigeons still get sick you may think about getting new pigeons or totally changing your health program. If your old birds are getting sick something is seriously flawed in the care or the pigeons. Sickness starts with stress caused by, overcrowding, dampness, poor ventilation, parasites (internal or external) and nutritional deficiencies. Most likely a combination of two or more of the prior.

I would like the entire pigeon sport to strive to keep their pigeons antibiotic free. The future of our sport and our pigeons will be better for this.

