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Madame Jacqueline Francqueville of Chauny, France, with her friend "Jimmy", the Show Racer, which was shipped to her as a fertilized egg from Earl Deal in Wichita, Kansas. See attached article for the story of Jimmy's fight for life and ultimate survival with the extraordinary care of Mme. Francqueville.

From One Continent to Another— The Adventure of Life in an Egg!

by Jacqueline Francqueville
Chauny, France

For many years, I had been nurturing the desire to import a gene from America. The gene has the name "indigo". It can produce many beautiful colors in pigeons — for instance, in conjunction with black (spread on blue) it creates "Andalusian Blue". And since I had seen "Andalusian" chickens, I wanted to experiment with the same color in pigeons.

Through correspondence with Tanner S. Chrisler in St. Louis, I learned that indigo was available in a few Kings, and Mr. Chrisler sent me the address of a knowledgeable breeder who had Andalusian Kings — Earl Deal in Wichita.

While I knew that it was possible to import the live pigeons I wanted — with considerable expense in air freight, tariffs, etc. — I believed there surely must be a simpler, more efficient way. Why not bring in eggs, fertilized with this gene, and avoid all the hassle? The fact that I did not know of anyone having done this before was not the slightest deterrent. The intuitive logic of the idea appealed to me. "There must be a way", I thought to myself. So I began writing to Mr. Deal. And to my delight I found him to be a man

of venturesome spirit, ready to be helpful to a fellow breeder — even though the fellow breeder was on the other side of a great ocean, and the fellow breeder was a "she"!

Before shipping any eggs, Mr. Deal had taken the trouble to do two things: first, he had separated several pairs of indigo Kings, then remated them, so that all the hens should lay eggs at about the same time; secondly, he made a special shipping container for the eggs. The package arrived in July, 1978. By air mail it took just four days from Wichita to my home, 110 km (about 70 miles) from Paris — fast delivery by any standard. The box was huge, just the size limit that is accepted by the postal service. It was made of thick cardboard. Inside the big box there was a small box, fastened to the outer box at its eight corners by rubber bands, and filling the space in-between there were styrofoam pellets. These were designed to deaden the bumps along the way. The small box was divided into nine carefully stuffed cells. In each cell was one pigeon egg — all nine in perfect condition, at least in appearance. Everything had been minutely planned.

photo from Mme. J. Francqueville, Chauny, France.

As I removed the eggs from the cells, I candled them and saw that the shells were not of uniform tint. There were spots that suggested that the membranes were no longer adhering to the shells. Immediately, I placed all nine eggs under hens that had just started incubating eggs of their own. After five days, I candled them and found that, of the nine, only two contained live embryos; and of these, one seemed very small, as though it was abnormal. The other seven eggs looked "blank". If they had been fertilized, the germs were dead, and it looked as though the yolks had been broken and mixed with the albumen. It was obvious that the eggs had been subjected to severe trauma en route. In other words, "scrambled". How sad.

At the end of the incubation period, only one of the eggs still had a living embryo. It was the smaller of the two that showed life. As it began to pip, I found it half-crushed by the heavy Mondain that was setting on it. So on the 18th day I decided I was obliged to help it out of the shell. After extracting it with the greatest care, I had in my hand an extremely weak little pigeon, breathing with great difficulty. It took a breath only every three or four seconds. At that moment, I realized that I was about to lose the last fruit of a great deal of work, unmeasured care, and unbounded hope. Here was a live baby, that had crossed the ocean as only a fertile egg, and I ought to try everything I knew to save its life. It was 11:00 at night. I knew it needed constant heat and no more trauma. So I put it in a transparent plastic incubator, which I had used before with baby chickens. I checked the temperature every five minutes for the first two hours and found the incubator was working properly. So I watched and waited. For several hours its breathing remained weak. But by 5:00 a.m. it had lifted its head. And by 8:00 a.m. it had visibly moved forward; so I made it a nest in the lid of a box, in the incubator. It was alive, but it was far from being saved.

Soon my new baby would be hungry. What was I to do about food? It was so small and frail that I did not dare give it back to the massive Mondains. It needed a foster mother of calm and gentle disposition, which had just hatched a squab of her own. But I did not have one. The closest I had was a pair setting on an egg that should have hatched two days earlier. So I tried putting my new baby under them. After a while, I realized that the baby was not getting any milk — just a greyish liquid that I could see through the skin of its crop. Probably, the crop milk in this pair had stopped, because their egg was long overdue. I decided I could not leave my



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frail friend there any longer. What was I to do? To keep it alive, I gave it a little warm water from a teaspoon, and I decided to leave it there overnight. The following morning, it still had not received any milk from the parents. Bad.

Then I had an idea. Baby pigeons need milk. Where is the best source of pigeon milk? Answer: in the crops of four or five day old, plump, healthy squabs. So I selected a donor, the plumper of two in a clutch from a pair of a Cauchos mated to a Carneau. Using a sterilized razor blade, I made an incision one-half centimeter long (about 1/4") in its crop. The I gently squeezed it and collected the precious food in a spoon. Pigeon milk looks like cream-colored granules; it contains mostly proteins and fats — no carbohydrates. I crushed the granules with a clean finger in another spoon and mixed the "milk" with a few drops of warm water. My baby pigeon drank hungrily. A few hours later it looked invigorated; it was nodding and asking for food again. So I gave it some more. In between feedings I kept the tiny supply of pigeon milk in a refrigerator, but the milk I got by surgical extraction lasted only one day. After that was gone, what was I to do?

I remembered reading in the *American Pigeon Journal* that some breeders had used a special type of baby food with good results. So I went to my pharmacist and asked him to mix something for me that would closely approximate pigeon milk. He gave me something from a powered baby formula, and I went home eagerly to try it. Little did I know. It nearly turned into a disaster! The baby pigeon could not digest it, and the poor little creature looked exhausted. But it was stronger than I thought, and it lived through is ordeal.

Luck began to smile on me, I thought. The next day, a pair of Cauchos had two babies hatch; so I moved them to another nest and replaced them with my weak little import from America. I watched from a distance, and to my great relief, I saw the cock begin to feed it. After a while I went back to check everything. I was nervous and more than a little bit frightened. Lo and behold, my fears were justified! Instead of seeing cream-colored pigeon milk through the skin of the crop, I saw *grains*! The baby was only three days old, and I was sure it could not digest grain yet. More problems. What could have happened. The only explanation I could think of was that animal instinct is not infallible, and this foster-father had made a mistake. He had still been feeding an old squab when his new babies hatched. He must have filled-up on grain, thinking he was still feeding the old squab, then went to his nest

to set on the new baby. I made a point of watching him closely during the next few days, and he never made the same mistake again (with his own babies, which I put back under him), but after the first mistake I could not trust him with my frail import. So I removed my ill-fed traveler to the incubator.

At this point, it seemed to me I was running out of practical options for feeding this little creature, and I feared the grain in the crop might be the beginning of the end. So I decided to consult the top authority in France. This was Dr. Stoskopf, a veterinarian who specializes in pigeons. I phoned him, long distance, and told him of my predicament. I can recall his every word, "The grain has come in; it can go out. Make the squab drink some water; then press its crop gently to make it regurgitate." I tried the good doctor's advice several times, but I could not get the grain to come out. I was very worried.

I went to bed that night, but I could not sleep. Finally, about five o'clock in the morning, I decided to risk an operation. I knew that it would be more dangerous to open this little fellow's crop than it had been with the previous patient. The first one had been very robust and healthy before the surgery. This pathetic creature was already four days old, and it was hardly any larger than at the moment it hatched. On the other hand, it was becoming weaker and weaker, and it would surely die of an occlusion, if I did nothing to help. Therefore, no more hesitation! On with the operation!

First, I cut through the skin — then into the crop. I must be honest: I could not help trembling. I made the opening as small as possible, just large enough to pick out one grain at a time with a pair of tweezers. When the job was finished, I had plucked out 26 kernels of wheat (swollen with water) and many globs of curdled baby formula, which could not be digested. To close the wound I first stitched the crop, then the skin separately, with one suture in each, applying an antibiotic ointment between the two layers. After this the patient was returned to the incubator, very tired and weakened. Two hours later, it looked better and could drink a little water.

Later that morning, I placed the baby under a pair of Carneaux which had just had a new pair of squabs hatch. I removed their babies to other parents, so that my under-nourished little friend could get all the milk from both of its new foster-parents. Success, at last! For several days its growth was very slow, but its vigor improved. Finally, some feathers started to appear, and I believed it was safe!

Reviewing my letter from Earl Deal, I


was reminded that he had sent me seven King eggs and two Show Racer eggs (just to fill the box). As I watched the baby develop, I become convinced that it was not a King — but a Show Racer. You might think I was disappointed, to have gone through all of this and not have it be the kind of pigeon I wanted — probably not even with the gene for indigo color. Well, truly, I was not disappointed at all. The bird was living, and that was the main thing. As I continued to observe the smaller size and the curve of its head, I became certain it was a Show Racer, a breed that is practically unknown in France. As the feathers grew to full size, I could see it was an ash-red with black flecks in the tail; so even before it left the nest, I knew it was a male, T-pattern, ash-red, carrying blue. (Elementary to any student of pigeon genetics.)

It was then, August, 1978. When friends and neighbors would drop by to visit, they would not ask, "How are you?" They would ask, "How is your pigeon?" I began to think I should publish a hospital bulletin every morning! One day, a friend said, "How's *Jimmy*?" We laughed, and this is the name that stuck. From then on, everyone asked, "How's Jimmy?" Need I explain?

Over the winter Jimmy lived in a cage on my veranda, because I was afraid his health had been impaired by the trials he had suffered. At 25 days old he had a mild catarrh, and it took him some time to recover. But his vigorous constitution overcame it. When it was time for him to molt his flight feathers, he achieved this in a normal way, and I knew this was an important sign of good health. At the time of this writing, I am happy to say he is over a year old and has fathered his fourth clutch of youngsters.

The ordeal of Jimmy has taught me many things. First, he is living proof that heretofore unimaginable feats are possible in this jet age. Secondly, he is the fruit of much labor — by both the shipper and the recipient. However, much more work must be done to make this technique of shipping fertilized eggs reliable. The experiment was repeated four more times in 1978, in both directions — from the US-to-France and from France-to-US. Unfortunately, Jimmy remains the only living survivor. Nearly 30 eggs were involved. They were all from good, fertile parents. Very few embryos survived the trip alive. Of these, all died after only a few days of incubation. Obviously, we must revise the packaging and try again. New solutions are needed. Any constructive suggestions will be most welcome.

At the same time, we should be working

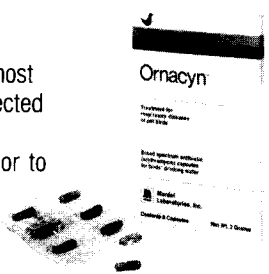
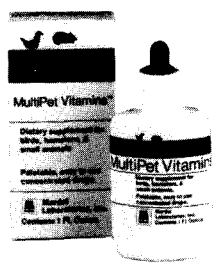



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on a substitute for the real pigeon milk — some commercially available formula, which the baby pigeons can digest — to feed them, in cases like mine, when we have no foster parents at the right stage of lactation. On the positive side, we have learned that real pigeon milk *can* be extracted from the crop of a five-day-old squab with no detrimental effects on the donor, and perhaps it can be stored in a freezer until it is needed. We know it will "keep" for one day in a refrigerator.

But — to me and my family — Jimmy is not just a "guinea pig" that survived a dangerous experiment. During the fall and winter of 1978-79, he became a "member of the family". Like the dog and the cat, with whom he got on good terms right away, when we would let him on the floor, he would "walk" up the stairs — one step at a time, find my bedroom, and jump onto the bed. He loved to sit on my shoulder or on my head, which are still his favorite perches. Still, his instinct is intact: he knows his cage is his home territory, and he will defend it from any intruder. Now, when I visit the pen where he lives in the loft, he will fly to his favorite perch — on my head. And whenever I say his name, he comes to me. He is never afraid when he is in my hands, because he was always handled with the greatest care. Really, it is not necessary to "hold" him at all; he will stay on my hand without trying to fly away.

Before this experiment, I would not have believed that such a close relationship could exist between a pigeon and a human (and I have been raising pigeons for most of my life). I used to believe that some animals, such as dogs, were superior to birds — and that man was superior to the

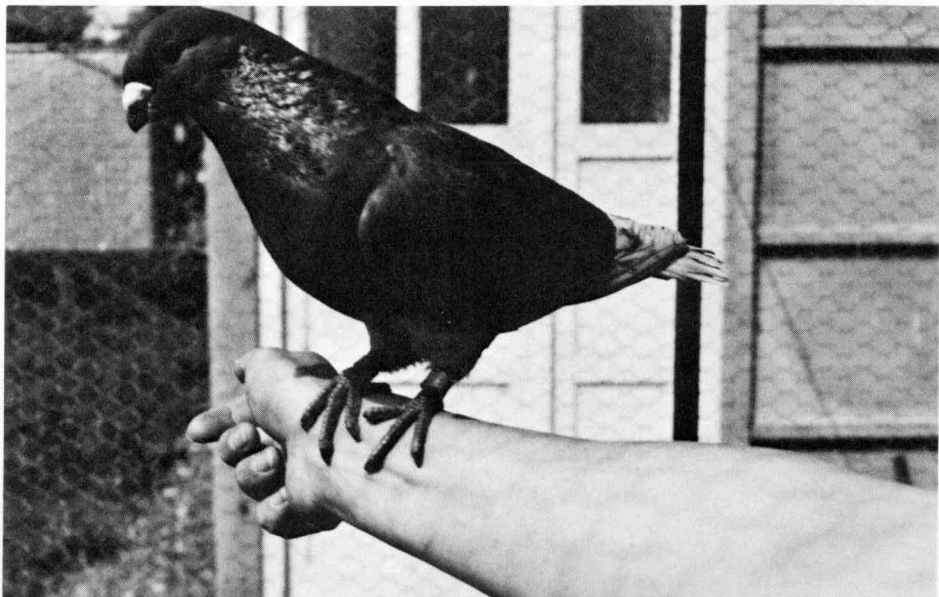
animals. Now I question the whole idea of "superiority". Does it really matter? Living in peace, one with the other, we may each learn something more about life . . . and love. I know that I have. And I think Jimmy has, too.

Before closing, I wish to express unbounded gratitude to my American penpals, without whose kindness and help this story could never have been told. "Merci beaucoup, gentlemen!"

* * * * *

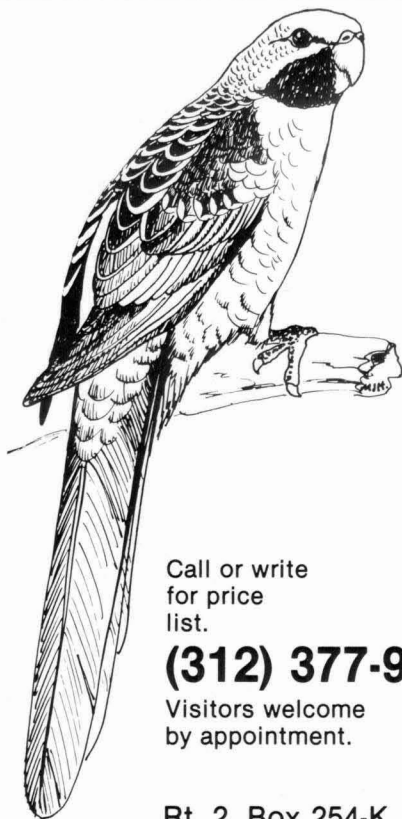
Madame Francqueville took early retirement from her position as English teacher in her local school system, so she could devote more time to her avocation, the breeding of rare poultry — chickens, geese, guineas and meat-producing pigeons: Carneaux, Mondains, Cauchoix, Polish Lynx, and Romain (Runts). She has served as a Board Member of the Societe Central d'Aviculture de France; she is the editor of "Colombi-culture", the monthly all-breeds pigeon magazine of France; she served as president of Carneau Club Français; and she has been active in many other related organizations. She is one of the most in-demand judges (of all breeds) in France, where she travels to every area during the show season, working a show every weekend. She co-authored "Pigeons pour la Table et le Plaisir", 1978 published by La Maison Rustique in Paris. Her husband is a teacher and a judge of rabbits.

Readers wishing to correspond with her (in French or English) may address: Mme. J. Francqueville; 19, rue du Moulin; Abbecourt; 02300 Chanuny; FRANCE.

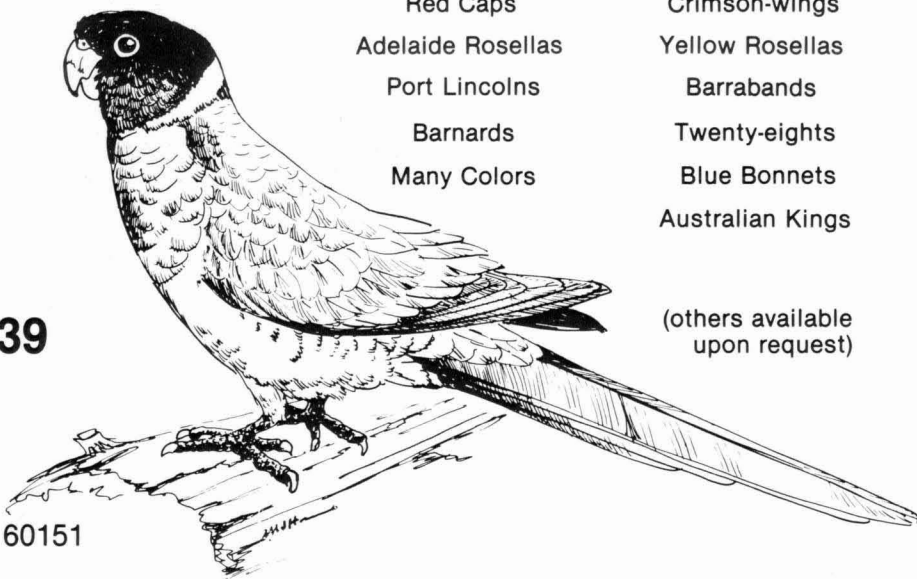


"Jimmy", the American Show Racer pigeon, which was bred in Wichita, Kansas, and hatched in France. On his right leg he has an American band, NPA (National Pigeon Association) F 363 '78. On his left leg he has a French band, SNC (Societe Nationale de Colombiculture) 16789 '78.

photo from Mme. J. Francqueville, Chauny, France.



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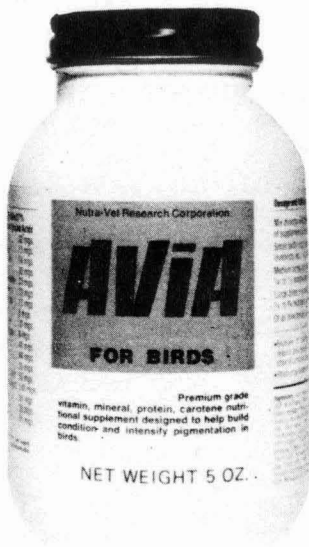
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