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CONVENTION 1984

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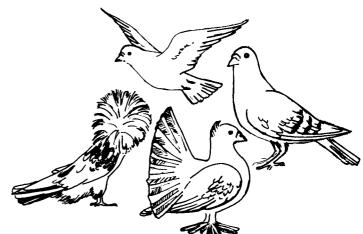
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Blue Chips "Medical Research"

by Bob Phillips **Publicity Chairman**

An eleven man committee, representing a wide range of scientific disciplines to study the health implications of keeping pigeons was named by American Pigeon Fanciers Council Chairman, Joseph W. Ouinn earlier this year.

Under the direction of Quinn himself, the committee will be co-chaired by Richard H. Evans, DVM of Brighton, Illinois. Others named are: Charles Bacon, Ph.D., Athens, Georgia; Richard E. Baer, DVM, Groveport, Ohio; Dino Insalaco, DDS, Long Island, New York; Stanley Kelm, San Antonio, Texas; Raymond Kray, DVM, Burbank, California; Robert J. Mangile, Pittsburg, Kansas; Russell Schatz, MD, Lomita, California; Carl W. Sonderstrom, MD, Morton, Illinois; and Charles Walcott, Ph.D., Ithaca, New York.

The main job of this committee will be "to research the research" according to Ouinn. "Something rather unusual, medically interesting, but almost sinister has happened. At some point in the not-too distant past, somebody gave pigeons a 'bum rap' as a health hazard, and almost instantly, every pigeon keeper in America got smeared by implication. Who knows exactly when it happened, but for lack of a more exact moment, let's look at that infamous paper published in 1955 in a jour-

nal on hygiene, where four public health zealots found some fungi called Cryptococcus neoformans growing in the pigeon droppings on a lot of buildings in New York City. They rushed to the easy conclusion that pigeons were a major cause of Cryptococcosis, and estimated that some huge percentage of the sick people in that city - maybe in every city - could be suffering from something that was carried by pigeons. Right away, the press picked it up, blew it up like a Watergate scandal, and pigeon people everywhere were marked like 'criminals.'

"Just examine that fiasco in the light of modern science - probably even in the enlightened minds of the mid 50s - and it is patently ridiculous. In the first place, their protocol was faulty, and their conclusions were speculative, at best. Secondly, any student of fungi today can tell you that C. neoformans is commonly found growing in all kinds of places, certainly not just in pigeon droppings. Thirdly, animal scientists have never found it in the gut, or even on the cloaca of the live pigeon. And finally, medical mycologists (specialists in fungal diseases) can tell you that only a small percentage of human population is susceptible to the disease. Most people wouldn't get sick, even if you tried to infect them. So

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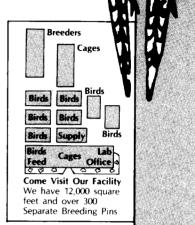
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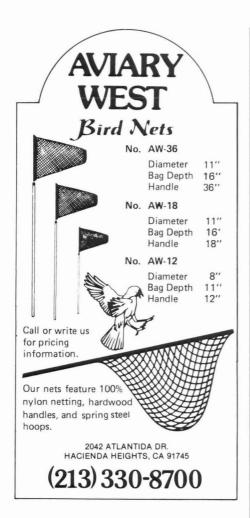
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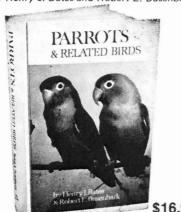


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"Don't take my word for it, however," Quinn continued. "We have letters from eminent professors of medicine at leading medical colleges, stating the same conclusion — in somewhat more polite terms. And copies of these letters are available from the Council's secretary (SASE Please). They can be very useful when dealing with ordinance or neighbor problems even with the press.

"What we have accomplsihed so far only scratches the surface. Exposing the crypto myth was fairly simple. There is a list of diseases where pigeons are implicated, known as pigeon-zoonoses. References to them in the reputable scientific literature are almost beyond counting. The diseases most frequently named are: ornithosis (chlamydiosis), histoplasmosis, and salmonellosis. There is an imperative in the scientific world for a researcher to get his/her work published. There are literally thousands of journals that are devoted to diseases (presence of disease). It is rare to find anything on the absence of disease. Nobody gives awards for debunking myths, or even for purging the system of obsolete science data. Anyone who wants to do that had better be prepared to do it on his own. That's what this committee was recruited to do, one disease at a time.

"All of these workers have a sincere interest in pigeons, and all are volunteering their time to help the hobbiests get rid of 'bad raps.' Through some of these people we will have access to the computerized search capabilities of a very large university and very large corporation. Much of the material will be generated by word processor printout. Then the real work begins, reading and digging, getting to some of the flaws that got published as far back as 50 years ago, and spotting all the instances where 'defective studies' and misleading conclusions have been passed on as 'gospel truths' from one decade to the next.

"As we have our findings ready to discuss, with regard to each disease, they will be written up and offered to the appropriate journals for publication. After publication, offprints will be available for circulation to fanciers, the public and the press. You will not have to ask me if I am going to bet, raise, or get off the pot. You will then see all the Blue Chips on the table and you will have your answer to what is going to happen next. When this series is completed, we expect that it will be a significant contribution — not just to the world of science - but a source of encouragement and solid evidence to the world of pigeon people — to say nothing of the millions of other Avian and animal lovers in the world."

NEWS

United States Department of Agriculture

Office of Governmental and Public Affairs

USDA Joins Fight Against Flu in Chickens in Pennsylvania

WASHINGTON, Nov. 4—U.S. Department of Agriculture veterinarians have set up a task force in Harrisburg, Pa., to help stop the spread of avian influenza in Pennsylvania chicken flocks.

"The virus disease of poultry poses a serious threat to the state's \$400 million poultry industry," said Bert Hawkins, administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. "However, avian influenza does not affect humans."

Hawkins said USDA and Pennsylvania state officials agreed to these points in recent meetings.

—The infected area, plus a buffer zone will be put under federal-state quarantine.

"Pennsylvania has already quarantined infected and suspected flocks," Hawkins said. "We are discussing aspects of the pending federal quarantine with state and industry representatives."

—Disinfection requirements will be established and strictly enforced.

—Disease surveillance will be increased, both within and outside of the infected area.

—USDA will do intensive studies to determine the course of the disease and aid in planning future actions.

When avian influenza was first diagnosed in Lancaster County last April, the disease was not causing significant poultry losses, Hawkins said. Tissue samples containing the virus sent to the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa, failed to have any significant effect on disease-free test chickens.

However, this picture changed dramatically in late October when USDA received reports of up to 30 percent losses in newly infected poultry flocks in Lancaster County. Samples sent to Ames from these flocks caused over 75 percent mortality in test chickens, Hawkins said. •

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