

# Tumblers

## a challenging breed

by Martin W. Cameli  
Centereach, New York

My start with pigeons goes back to my early boyhood days growing up in the borough of the Bronx, New York City. During the war years, most everyone living in the big city lived in large apartment buildings. It was an era when Frank Sinatra was becoming a big star in the entertainment field. Your Hit Parade played the number one songs in America every Saturday night. A time when Major League baseball lost many ballplayers to the military draft and almost suspended play, but carried on through the war with wartime

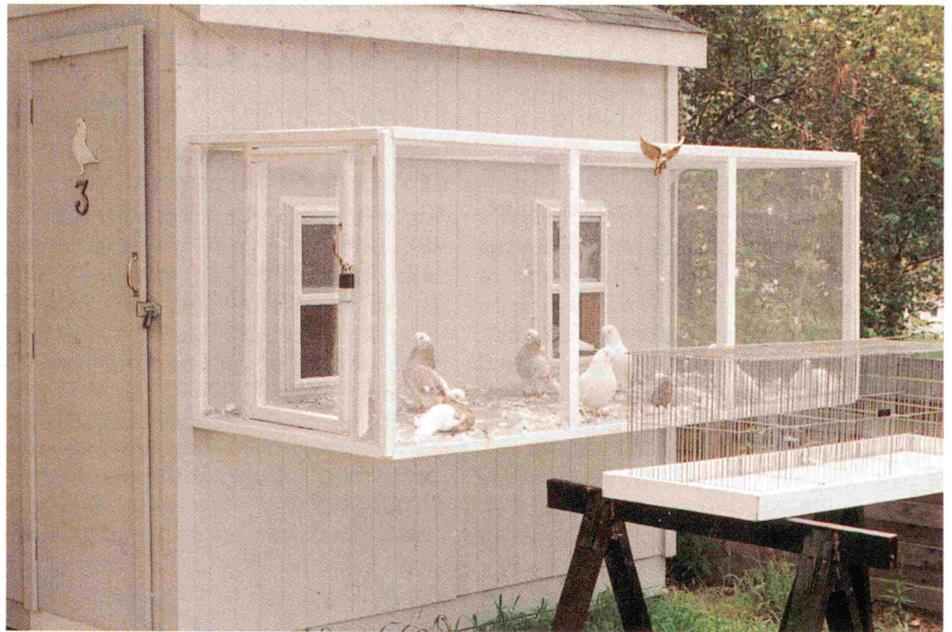


*Black flying flight pigeon. This is the type used for foster parent feeding.*

ballplayers. The war brought on the rationing of sugar, coffee and gasoline. Radio was the next popular thing in many homes. Television wasn't too far in the future. Many people worked in defense plants. With all of this going on, my life revolved around a fantasy world. I went to school, played ball, and took care of my father's pigeons.

My father kept about 75 pigeons of all varieties on the roof top of our apartment building. It was my job to feed, water and fly them after school. I received 50 cents a week for this chore, but I would have done it for nothing! Weekends, in between playing ball, I was up on the roof chasing the pigeons in the sky.

The fun in flying pigeons in those early days was in trying to catch the other pigeon keepers' birds. Sending



*10' x 8' rear yard pigeon loft of Marty Cameli, Centereach, New York.*



Photos by Marty Cameli, Centereach, NY

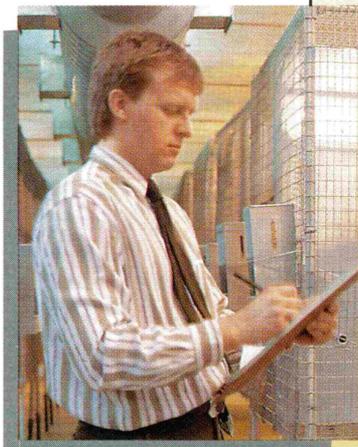
*Lavendar Tumbler.*

your flock into the air, they often mixed with the other guy's pigeons and you wound up trying to catch each others birds. Of course, it was all done in friendly good humor. If you lost a bird, you had to pay 25 cents to get it back. (The sport of pigeon flying, called Tiganieri, originated in Modena, Italy around 1300.)

My love for pigeons continued until

it was temporarily halted by my induction into the U.S. Army Signal Corps. After being stationed state-side, my orders read Boblingen, Germany, a small town outside of Stuttgart, Germany. I spent 18 months in Germany, and while there, I had the opportunity to visit some fanciers — mostly famous for racing pigeons.

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Mark Hagen is Research Director at HARI. He has a Master of Agriculture from the University of Guelph and specializes in Psittacine Aviculture. His continued Research includes Nutrition, Incubation and other Psittacine Aviculture research projects.



The HAGEN AVICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE (HARI) located in Rigaud, Québec was established in 1985 to study the captive breeding and maintenance of companion birds. At present, the breeding colony houses 150 pairs of 40 various parrot species.

The birds are housed in separate, double door rooms incorporating the latest techniques in environmental control.

- Insulated walls and ceilings are totally waterproofed with PVC plastic sheeting.
- Sloped poly-urethane concrete floors are drained to an environmentally secure in-house septic system.
- Down draft ventilation is connected to a high tech air-to-air heat exchanger and multiple fan system which provides fresh warm air.
- 400 watt sodium and fluorescent lights with timers provide photoperiodic manipulation.
- Green House misting system provides continuous humidity control and a rain-like effect which the birds love.
- Large eight and ten foot suspended flights and gravity feeders provide privacy and minimal human disturbance.

Research fields include disease control, pair bonding, nutrition and the influence of temperature, humidity and light cycles on breeding. Progress has been rapid in the area of feeding research at HARI.

Hagen's new VME seed line (Vitamin and Mineral Enriched) incorporates the most effective supplementation for smaller bird species. HARI research determined that vitamin and mineral enrichment of dehulled seed kernels was more effective than other industry methods, such as coloring the outside hull or simply mixing seeds with poultry type pellets, which are often rejected by the birds.

PRIME, a unique vitamin/mineral and limiting amino acid supplement which includes beneficial bacteria and digestive enzymes, was also developed by HARI. The formula is designed for birds on a soft food or seed diet, ensuring that all essential nutrients are made available in the diet.

The TROPICAN line of formulated, fruit flavored extruded foods for parrots is the direct result of intensive nutrition research at HARI. The TROPICAN line includes both a High Performance formula for breeding birds, moulting or periods of stress and the Life-Time formula for normal maintenance conditions. Both PRIME and TROPICAN have been fed to HARI's own colony of birds since 1985 with excellent results. Hari has raised many of the larger parrots and is presently supplying pet stores with tame babies.



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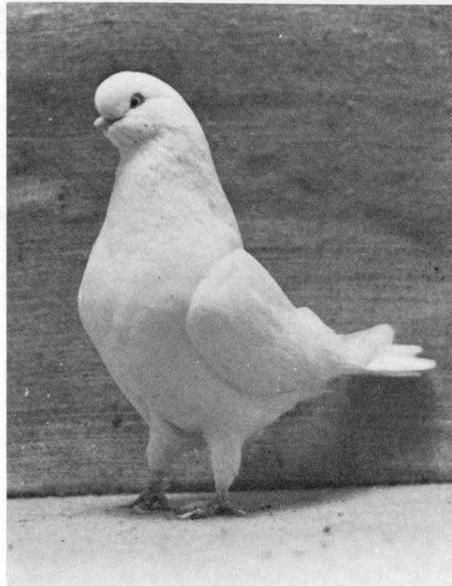
Upon my return to civilian life, I became interested in Birmingham Rollers, a high-flying breed. Soon afterwards, I became interested in showing pigeons. I joined a few pigeon clubs and was on my way to the most challenging and rewarding experience since starting the hobby.

At a show I attended, I kept finding myself watching the Long-faced Clean Leg Tumblers. This is a breed that originated in England around 1765. Today it is one of the most popular breeds in the U.S.A.

Many fanciers have crossed the tumbler for breed improvement.

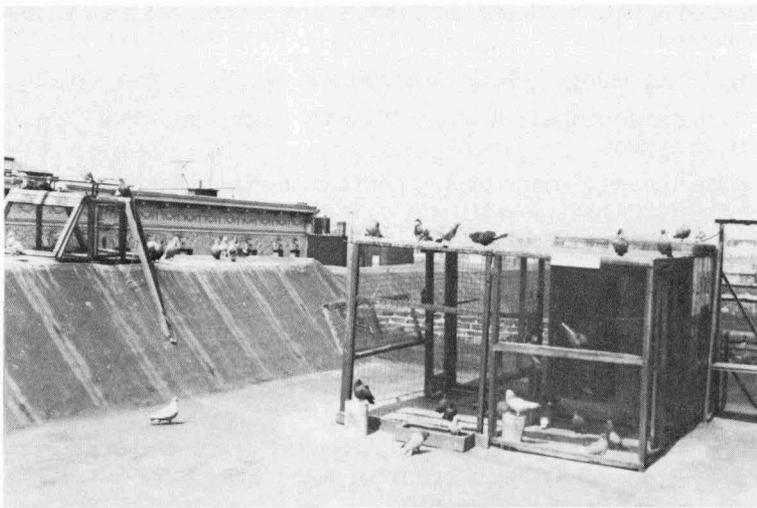
Tumblers weigh about 12 to 14 ounces and are short-legged and cobby. The head is usually plain, although a strain does produce crests. The eye is pearl.

The tumbler comes in a variety of



*Clean-leg White Self Long-faced Tumbler.*

Photos by Marty Cameli, Centerach, NY



*Typical New York City rooftop pigeon loft.*

colors. Selves range from white, black, red, dun and yellow. Barred tumblers come in blue, silver, cream and mealy.

The baldheads come in dun, blue, red, silver, black, yellow, mealy and cream. Other colors that appear at the show halls are grizzle, checkered, lavender, strawberry and almond.

When judged for show, the tumbler is judged on the basis of 100 points, broken down as follows: head, eye and cere, beak & wattle (40 points). Neck and body, legs, flights, tail & condition (40 points). Color, feather quality, markings, (20 points). Before showing, birds should be given a bath and the beaks should be filed two days prior to showing. Legitimate trimming is also acceptable.

I start breeding my tumblers in mid-February and breed until the end of June. I try to breed from 12 pairs of carefully selected stock.

The birds usually take about a week

to mate and I keep all mated pairs in separate compartments which is a 12 inch by 18 inch nest box.

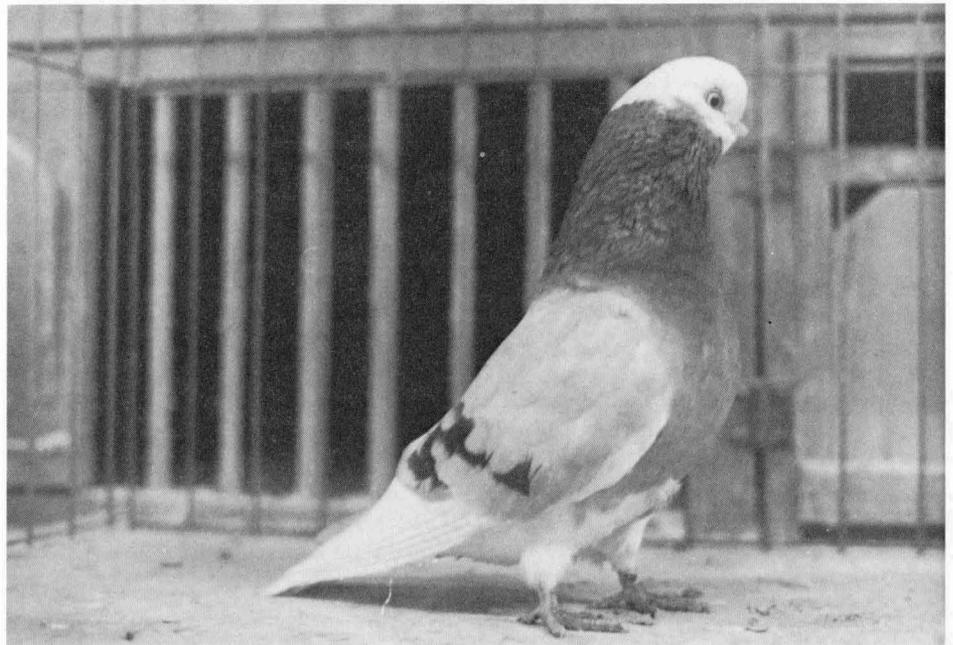
The tumblers are only released from the compartments to eat and drink during the mating period. It should also be noted that the tail feathers are cut even with the wing tips and the thick vent area is trimmed with scissors. This is done to facilitate breeding and insures more egg fertility.

A nest bowl and nesting material is provided. Straw, hay, tobacco stems or pine needles can be used for building nests. I prefer pine needles as they are easier for the tumblers to handle.

Prior to egg laying, the male will bring nesting material to the hen who will weave the nest. The first egg is usually laid about 5 p.m. A day is skipped and then the second egg comes. This way both eggs will hatch about the same time.

Tumblers cannot feed their own young. The short beak length makes having "pumpers" a must. (The name long-faced is misleading!) So, in breeding tumblers one must keep foster parents — long-beaked varieties such as flights, rollers, or homers of another type. I prefer the flying flight. Two pair of foster parents must be kept for every pair of tumblers. And, of course, the foster parents must also have available the bowls and nesting materials.

Pigeon eggs take about 18 days to hatch. Both male and female take turns incubating the eggs. The male sits from about 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and



*Silver Bar Baldhead Tumbler.*

the hen from 4 p.m. to 10 a.m.

Close records must be kept because the foster parents and tumblers must lay their eggs at the same time. This allows for the build-up of pigeon milk which is regurgitated to the young for about a week. Without this "pigeon milk," the squabs cannot survive.

At about the 10th day of incubation the foster parents' role comes into play. The tumbler eggs should be candled and if the membranes are seen and the egg has a bluish color, it is fertile. Candling will show a fertile egg as dark, where an infertile egg will remain clear.

I take the tumbler eggs and place them under the foster parents until hatching. By taking the tumbler eggs away at 10 days it doesn't harm the tumblers, and keeps the breeding cycle going. In another 10 days the birds will produce another clutch of eggs. (The foster parents' eggs are thrown and when the tumbler eggs hatch under the fosters, they are fed as if they were their own.)

The squabs are fed about one week on pigeon milk and then on whole grains. At 10 days old they are banded. In about 35 days they are full grown and nearly on their own.

Young males show their sex at about 3 months.

For those who'd like to try their hand at raising this beautiful but challenging breed, here are a few tips:

1. Have a dry loft, free of drafts with good ventilation
2. Separate lofts for breeders and young birds
3. Provide an outdoor fly pen for young birds
4. Fresh clean water (change daily)
5. A good feed ration
6. Plenty of grit should always be available
7. Bath water should be offered frequently.

I give cod liver oil capsules and Brewer's yeast tablets twice a week.

Like many tumbler breeders, I strive to breed the perfect bird. It's not easy. It takes time and effort, plus good record-keeping. Sometimes it is such a challenge that the person decides to go with an easier breed. But I've done some winning at the shows and can say that it's worth all of the time when a judge picks your bird as number one.

Win, place or show, the tumbler is quite a rewarding breed, though quite a challenge! ●

# Softbills for a Mixed Species Flight

by Jerry Jennings  
Fallbrook, California

Aquariums are said to relax people and are often found in the waiting rooms of doctors, dentists and attorneys. Indeed, anyone should be understandably anxious in such circumstances. Less frequently encountered in the professional's antechamber is the small aviary or bird cage, perhaps because most people automatically "think parrot" when contemplating a bird or two. Parrots can be quite noisy, occasionally bite, and are prone to great feats of scenery mastication. Hardly the sort of behavior designed to put one at ease.

Fish, on the other hand, are quiet and offer the opportunity to lose oneself in one's thoughts, and to focus on nature and natural things. But fish are not the only route to achieving communion with the natural order. A mixed species flight of small softbills provides a warm experience that can be pleasing both to the eye and ear. Small softbills exhibit such pleasing characteristics as beautiful voices and radiant colors. A mixed bag provides a riot of color, a symphony of sounds, and a cornucopia of curious behaviors. It is easy to forget why one entered the room after having become intently absorbed by the spectacle.

Mixed species softbill collections lend themselves to every occasion and setting including the dinner table. Dinner table? Yes! And at nice restaurants, too, such as Samson's Restaurant at the Koll Center in downtown San Diego. The aviary, over two stories tall, is in the shape of an octagon, each side of which is a series of glass panels six feet high by ten feet long. The aviary is part of the initial design of the multi-storied post modern architecture of the brand new Koll Center, whose office space is leased primarily to professional corporations (attorneys, etc.)

Samson's Restaurant is a tastefully appointed New York style Jewish delicatessen with an extensive menu. The aviary is the center of attention, near which are situated tables for close observation of the inhabitants within. The main feature of this enclosure is a very large, artificial, tropical forest fig tree, constructed in the best Disney style tradition, which cost over \$40,000 and looks quite real, as it should for that price tag. Around the base of the tree is a small pond with a waterfall, and numerous tropical plants (real ones). Small speakers on the outside emit occasional bird songs, though they are not of the inhabitants', but of native California species.

Approximately 30 birds are maintained in the aviary. With the exception of the Ringed Teal male, whose mate passed away, all the birds are in pairs. These include Black Crakes, Brazilian Cardinals, Palm Tanagers, Kiskadee Flycatchers, Gray-headed Purple Gallinules, Black-throated Laughing Thrush, Red-winged Laughing Thrush, Hartlaub's Touracos, Fischer's Touracos, Finch-billed Bulbuls, Spot-billed Toucanets, and Luzon Bleeding-heart Doves. The Kiskadee Flycatchers were busily hauling bits of Spanish Moss up into the large tree in attempts to build a nest and the other birds were actively scurrying about their home. All the birds were in excellent condition and harmony with each other.

The enclosure is maintained in an immaculate state and the feeding station is situated in an inobtrusive location among the plants on the ground. The enclosure was stocked by the firm, Wildlife Concepts International, owned by Scott Dreischman, former Curator of Birds at Sea World in San Diego. Wildlife Concepts International also provides for the daily care of the birds and