

Fun With Pigeons,



Now here's a question not many people can answer: What does the Queen of England have in common with Sylvester Kautzer of New Holstein, Wisconsin? The answer is simple. Both Elizabeth and Sylvester raise Jacobins.

So fine. What are Jacobins? Well, every well versed aviculturist should know the answer to that one. Jacobins are an extremely ornamental breed of show pigeons. So ornamental that their head looks like a big feather duster. And so attractive that thousands of people in Europe, Asia and America raise them as a hobby!

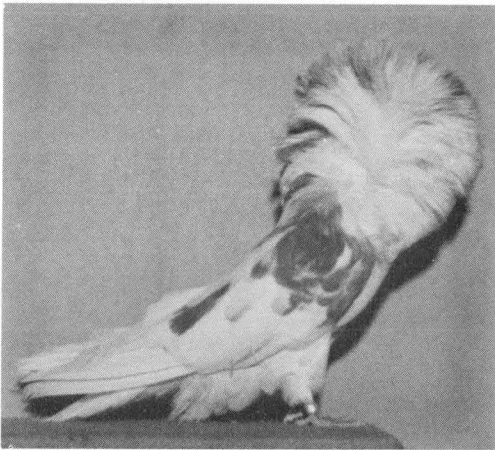
"You're putting me on, fella! Who ever heard of civilized people actually raising pigeons? I mean, on purpose?"

Well, that's the real question, "Who ever heard?" Unfortunately, for both us and the general public, no very many people have heard. Too bad, too, because our hobby is probably one of the oldest in history. Nobody knows when it started, but there are archaeological carvings and other evidences that men and pigeons

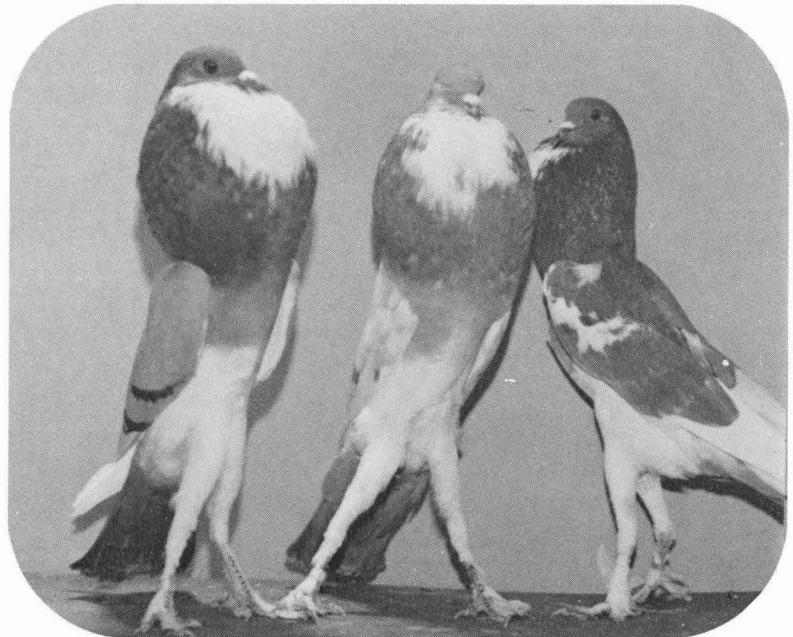
became friends as far back as 5,000 B.C. Noah had them on the Ark — in pairs, of course — and sent one out to search for the nearest land after the flood. Greek and Roman literature have many references to people keeping pigeons. The Christian tradition made a pigeon the sign of the Holy Spirit, the essence of love, peace and wisdom.

Through the Middle Ages the monasteries in Central Europe developed their own "breeds", obviously by selective breeding, which might have been the first experiments with birds, purely for ornamental reasons. As a means of communications, armies from Hannibal to Napoleon to Eisenhower used homing pigeons to carry vital messages, and these agile fliers have saved countless thousands of lives over the centuries.

When we speak of pigeons, we are referring to just one species (*Columba livia*). There are dozens of other species of pigeons in the wild — and probably just as many more species of doves — throughout the world. But the scientists tell us all our domestic pigeons have one



JACOBIN — *The original Jacobins may have come to Europe from the East by way of the Island of Cyprus. The Jacobin has been called the "Crysanthemum of the Pigeon World" due to its beautiful and unusual arrangement of feather. Jacobins have been bred in this country for several years and improvements are continually seen in the length of hood feathering and the high, erect station.*



PIGMY POUTER — *The pigmy pouter is not an old breed of pigeon having been developed in the 1800's by Sir John Sebright (creator of Sebright Bantam chickens). Sebright was instrumental in the beginning of miniaturization of pigeons and the Pigmy Pouter is an identical miniature of the English Pouter which stands 18 inches high.*

The pigmy pouter displays man's art of selective breeding to its utmost; the crop area can be inflated like a balloon, the legs are long and feathered, the waist slender and the station very erect. The pigmy pouter also possesses a very friendly disposition and will readily respond to its owner.



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You Say?

by Tanner S. Chrisler
St. Louis, MO.
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Photos and captions
accompanying this article
have been submitted by
Tally Mezzanatto, an
active breeder of show pigeons.
Exception noted.

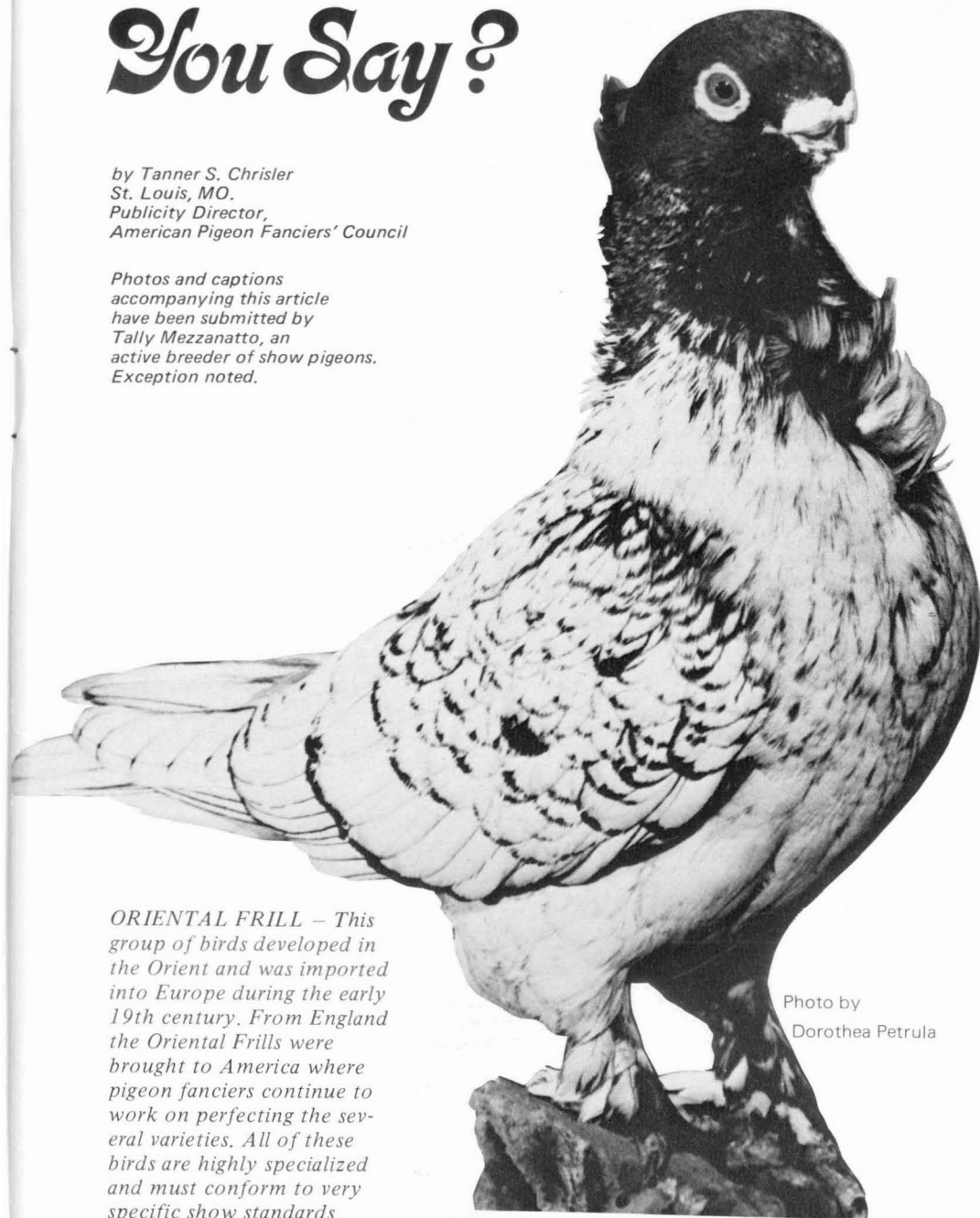


Photo by
Dorothea Petrula

ORIENTAL FRILL — This group of birds developed in the Orient and was imported into Europe during the early 19th century. From England the Oriental Frills were brought to America where pigeon fanciers continue to work on perfecting the several varieties. All of these birds are highly specialized and must conform to very specific show standards.

common ancestor, the blue Rock Dove, which inhabits the coasts of the North Sea, the Mediterranean and the Mideast. These wild birds look much like some of the feral pigeons you see today, which nest in barns and church steeples. Their color is dark gray to blue with two black bars on their wings. The common pigeons you see that look like this are a simple demonstration of reversion to wild type; all the rest are just displaying genetic mutations — or deviations from the original color.

Two unusual traits distinguish birds of the Family Columbidae (which includes all the pigeons and doves). First is the pigeon's characteristic way of drinking. Instead of dipping for water and raising

their heads after every mouthful, pigeons and doves put their beaks deep into the water and suck it up in long draughts. Second is the special food they give their newly hatched babies. A highly nutritious, curdy material known as "pigeon milk" is secreted from the lining of the crops of both male and female parents and is fed to the helpless babies by regurgitation for the first 6 to 8 days, or until the pin feathers begin to come out. During this time the baby squabs practically double their weight every two days!

Pigeons have a "different" kind of mating call and love dance than other birds, too. The monotonous coo-coo-cooing attracts a mate. When she comes close-by, the male changes his "song" to

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a tootling signal of courtship. After the lady is properly impressed, she starts dancing with him. They kiss, and the two set about building a crude kind of nest with whatever twigs are available. The hen lays her first egg, skips a day, lays her second and then both male and female begin incubation. Babies hatch on the 18th day after the second egg is laid. The altricial squabs are fully feathered and ready to leave the nest at 25 to 30 days, depending on the breed. Most breeds will bring up two or three clutches of babies during the spring breeding season, while others can produce as many as

ten 2-egg clutches in a year, and as long as there is no interference from the outside world, a pair of pigeons stays "married" for life, which is probably why the dove became the emblem of innocence, love and fidelity. Pigeon fanciers have such a beautiful demonstration with their birds, it is a pleasure to explain "the facts of life" to their children.

Scientifically speaking, all pigeons and doves belong to the Pigeon Family; however, in general English usage "dove" is applied to the smaller species, while "pigeon" is applied to the larger ones.

You'd never suspect it, just by observing the feral population, but the variety of mutations that our pigeons have undergone (and have been preserved and developed by man with centuries of careful breeding) will boggle your mind. Surely, no other bird has been bred with so many variations — and constantly "improved".

Some examples may be useful. Consider the homing pigeons. Back in the early 19th Century homers were used to carry market quotations across the English Channel, from London to Antwerp, a distance of under 200 miles by air. Back then it was considered

speedy communicating if the birds got their messages delivered in one days time. Today, any self respecting racing homer ought to fly the same trip in four hours or less! And not be very winded! Today, all over America — and Europe and Japan, too — carefully regulated races are held, where adult racers come in from 600 miles in less than 12 hours. That's an average of 50 miles per hour, and with a little tail-wind they go faster.

Consider the acrobatic pigeons. These are the cute little fellows which have the ability to flip over in tight somersaults, head-over-heels in mid-flight, and not just one bird at a time but a whole flock, all at once, as they go around the ends of the figure-8 patterns they fly over their home loft. It's a rare sight to behold. And they do it without any training from their human keepers. It all comes naturally, by way of selective breeding. These performers are called Rollers. Their close cousins, which turn only one or two flips at a time are called flying tumblers. Still others that do their somersaults on the ground are called parlor tumblers. Some fun!

Then, finally, there are a bunch of us who raise special breeds of pigeons that don't "do" anything. They just stand

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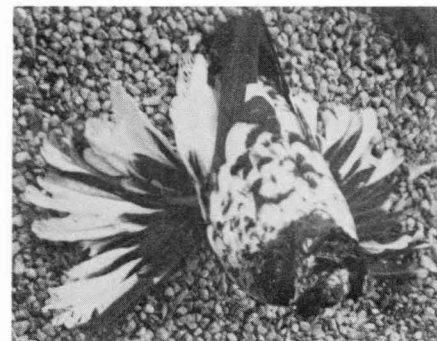
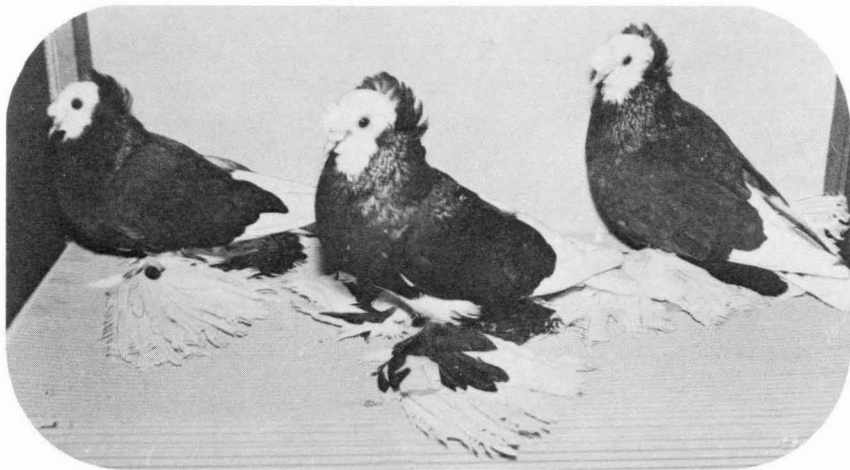
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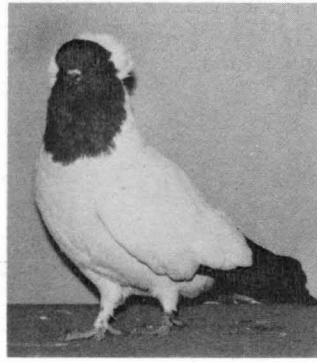
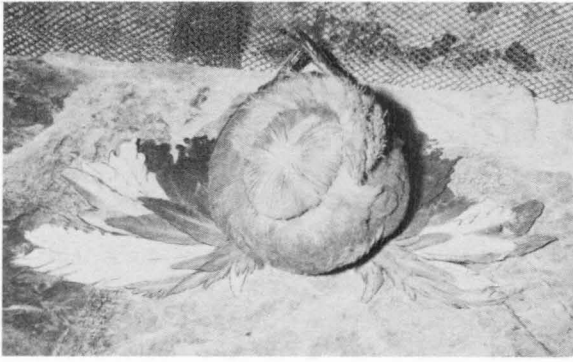
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ENGLISH TRUMPETER — This trumpeter breed may have originally come from Egypt or Arabia. The English developed the breed for several years until the introduction of the Bokhara Trumpeter which by reason of its far superior development of the rose and crest put the "English trumpeter" in its shadow.

English Trumpeters have been in the U.S.A. since the 1800's but it has only been during the last 15 years that the greatest improvements have been made in this docile breed. The breed is characterized by a crest ending in swirls called rosettes, a tuft of feathers over the beak, large, full muffs on the feet and a short blocky body.



BOKHARA TRUMPETER – This unique breed of pigeon was developed in Turkestan during the Middle Ages, the Bokhara coming from the country Bokhara. The trumpeter pigeons differ from other types of pigeons by their peculiar voice properties called trumpeting which is a melodious gurgling type of coo.

The Bokhara trumpeter has a large, circular feather formation on top of its skull called the rose. Some fine show specimens have possessed roses with a two and five-eighths inch diameter. Couple the rose with the shell (the feather formation on the back of the skull) and the long foot feathering with the overall size and you have a very far cry from the common pigeon.

there. And look pretty, or colorful, or imposing, or wierd, or unbelievable – like the Jacobins with the feather duster heads. One group has beaks so short and heads so round they look like tiny parrots. These breeds have names like Owls, Frills,

NUN – The nun is an ancient breed and is discussed in the oldest English literature on pigeons. It is described as a dainty pigeon with white body, colored head, tail, and primaries with a shell crest.

Nuns appear to have been introduced into this country during the 1800's. Since that time the nuns in this country have been greatly improved in quality. Nuns today have greater width of skulls, taller and fuller shell crests, and shorter, cobby bodies.

Turbits, and they come in a variety of feather decorations and artful colorations. Some have heads like billiard balls. Some have tails that fan out like a peacock.

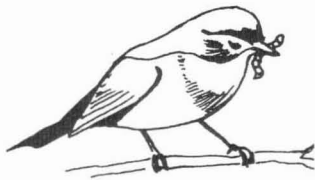
Some have long feathering on their feet that look like a second pair of wings. Some can fill their crop with air and make such a balloon they can not see over it. Some are just "cute". Some are just colorful. Some are just big (Would you believe, over three pounds?). Some just have a musical, drumming voice. But all of them are "neat" to the people who raise them. These are the scores of breeds of Show Pigeons that have been preserved, promoted, propogated and perfected for hundreds of years – with pride and perseverance by their owners.

They have special names, like: Arch-angels, Bagdads, Carneaux, Damascenes, Elsterpurzlers, Fantails, Hungarians, Kings, Lahores, Modenas, Nuns, Pouters, Runts, Swallows, Trumpeters, and Zitterhalsen. Some have hundreds of fanciers. Some have very few. All are bred to a standard of perfection that is published by their particular national breed club or one that came from the Old Country. And all compete for honors at local and national shows, with help from the breeders, coming closer to "perfection" a bit more every year. This, too, is the kind of fun that challenges a competitor.

We are happy to have you share with us a bit of pigeon fun in this issue of "The Watchbird".

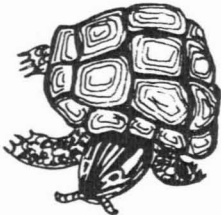
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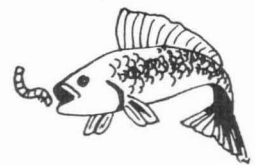
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