

ANCIENT TUMBLERS: Short-faced Pigeons Can Feed Their Babies

by Gina Hartiens
Lafayette, Louisiana

Photos by Gina Hartiens



Young grey ancient tumbler pigeon.

Of course I did not intend to buy any birds. I was just planning to spend a pleasant afternoon with my family, attending the Gulf Coast Gamebird Breeders Bird Fair in Houston. And we did do just that. Looked at birds, talked with bird people and compared the relative merits of this bird and that. UNTIL I saw the black pigeons! Now I had never had *one* pigeon and really didn't have room for *three* — but there they were. Three lovely, glossy and funny-looking pigeons with short curved beaks, and feet with feathers at least an inch long covering the toes. I didn't know what they were but I wanted them anyway, so shortly we were on the way home with

Black ancient tumbler male pigeon.



a box full of pigeons and a bag full of one budgie purchased for my daughter.

My aim in life now was to raise more of these lovely black birds. During the quarantine period in my living room, I determined that I had one male and two hens and was scarcely able to wait to set them up with a nest box. I found that they would only eat small seeds, nothing bigger than milo or Purina Nutrablend, and dearly loved game bird starter. Since I had been told that short-beaked pigeons could not feed their own short-beaked babies, I called a friend with fantailed pigeons and arranged to swap eggs with her as soon as I had some. Our first clutch of black pigeon eggs were infertile but the fantail's babies — which my birds incubated — hatched out right on time. What a sight that was to see, those babies shove their long beaks into the tiny mouths of their foster parents. Those fantails grew into lovely, well-fed birds. A month later we were back with eggs again and this time I let my parents do their own incubating.

Eggshells in the cage! Our own short-beak baby! Now, would he survive or would I have to hand-feed? The next 24 hours were so long and I didn't want to interfere but when I finally did try to peek I was soundly flailed by wings and nipped by angry beaks until I succeeded in uncovering the sleeping baby to discover that his crop was full. Nest checks every other day revealed that the parents were not only feeding the infant but stuffing him. Within no time pinfeathers started appearing and the squab was an absolute blob. His parents continued to feed him on demand until he was fully feathered and I finally pulled him out to give them some relief. He is now a very spoiled bird due to all the attention I gave him during those early weeks. He will fly to my shoulder and eat out of my hand; however, he is *not* the lovely *black* pigeon I had dreamed of, but a two-tone *grey* version of his parents, including the very lovely feathered feet. Although it appears that the black color did not breed true, at least I do know that if you want to raise the short-beaked pigeons, they *can* feed their babies — if they want to. Just to prove it again, we have raised two other slightly darker grey babies who will probably be just as spoiled as their older sibling.

By the way, I finally found out what the pigeons are — ancient tumblers. Next I will try to see if they really will tumble!

