

"Flying Young Birds"

By

Florante Lim Bunag

Settling of young pigeons is still a tricky business for most of us. Settling starts day one from weaning young birds. Usually at the age of 28 days to 1 month old. Making sure they can eat and drink properly. In 2-3 days after weaning young birds in the YB section, you can check for young pigeons that repeatedly blinks their eyes. They haven't found the water just yet. Gently dip their beaks in the water fountain a couple of times and they will learn quickly. With some exceptions, at times you need to teach a young bird where the water is for the 2nd or 3rd time, patience is the cue. Vitamins (any locally available vitamins rich in vitamin b complex) can be given 2 x a week. At this point I will hold back any preventive medication and vaccination as i could. I rather have them built their natural immunity. The loft should be provided with a "sputnik trap" or a "California trap", both can be used for settling, trapping and as an aviary for the young bird team. In some cases a simple settling cage made of screen wire (heavy gauge wire preferable) measuring about 2" to 2 1/2" squares can be used as an alternative. I let the young birds get to know their loft and surrounding environment for a minimum of 3 days. At times i will guide them one by one to the entrance of the sputnik trap "one by one" to get accustomed to the sputnik's entrance. Although i have seen young birds that settled well in just one day. I wont take the risk if your loft is frequently visited by predators (falcons and cooper hawks) and the young bird is one of your "money bird" (auction race bird or a special race banded young bird). Once the young birds are spooked, a "flyaway" will be your agonizing factor. At day 3, I let the sputnik trap / California trap open for the young birds to get accustomed to their outside environment. It is advisable that you should make sure the young birds are hungry or has an empty crop. They can be immediately trained to be called in at the time of feeding. Some uses a "whistle", "shaking feed cans" or some simple words of getting them in fast. (They should know that the meaning of this sound is "chow time"). The young birds will be dashing to fly in the roof top and back to the landing board or roof of the loft then fly down the landing board of the trap. Some will be like "kamikazes" and will try to circle the loft a couple of times before crash landing in the landing board. Some might perch in a nearby electric wire. You have to be patient at this critical period. Once the young birds learned how to come back to it's home loft and their wings harden up. They will readily take to the air immediately as soon as you open the loft's release door or window at the same time in the morning and late afternoon. You have to set up a convenient workable timetable suitable for flying your young bird team. You have to be consistent in your loft management, almost the same time of cleaning, loft flying and feeding the young bird team and providing fresh clean water and grits every single day. The proper handling of young birds at this crucial period is a must. Treat them well and treat all of them equally as a "champion". If you can not bear the look or handling of a particular young bird in the team, now is the time to cull. Equal affection to all of the individual team member is a must to be a successful handler and absolutely no "favoritism".

In 3-4 weeks, the young bird team will be learning to fly like a squadron, you will start to see a tight maneuvering of their flight around and about the loft. At this point ,they will be starting to route for a few miles away from the home loft. This is also the time you might loss a bird or two, that breaks from the flock during flight and before the young bird realized that he had flown much further from the home loft, in most case it is too late for the young bird to fly back. The young bird had consumed all it's energy to safely fly back to it's home loft and most of the time they will seek refuge to another "sanctuary" (another fancier's loft). If the said fancier has a good heart, you have a great chance of reuniting with your "wonderer" (lost young bird). A good young bird flyer will harden up his heart and will continue to care for the remaining young birds in the team.

Once the remaining team is routing about 1-2 hrs non-stop around and about the loft ,I will start their training regiment. But prior to their training i will start their preventive medication

program and vaccination. Preventive treatment against upper respiratory infection, canker, coccidia and worms is vitally necessary. There's an array of different brands of antibiotics readily available in the local market for your individual choosing. There's even a so called "5 in one" for those who wanted a simpler way of doing things. But I personally prefer specific antibiotics for specific cases. Like the combination of Tylan and Aureomycin for upper respiratory (if really bad, I will give Amoxicillin). Sulmet or corid for coccidia, Emtryl or Ridzol for canker. Fresh grits should be provided fresh daily and should be taken out when giving preventive medications and at least 3 days before shipping the birds for training or racing. The reason for this is that I don't like my young birds coming home late from training or racing with mud in their feet, the bird just landed in the "delta" and drink before coming home. In some circumstances that in certain areas PMV and Paratyphoid is prevalent. Vaccination against PMV and Paratyphoid is given immediately at the time of weaning the young birds at 28 -30 days, just prior to transferring the young birds in the young bird section, to boost their immunity. A booster can be given when the team is 3 -4 months of age just prior to club training before the race. Don't forget to replenish your sky warrior's with probiotic after giving antibiotics to build up their friendly bacteria in their guts.

After resting them for about a week, I will bring them with me 14 miles south of their home loft which is the clinic's parking lot in San Mateo, Ca, where I work, every single day of the week. Safflower is waiting for them in the loft feeder and those that won't trap right away will definitely will have less food for the day, the next day they will learn fast and will trap right away to be able to eat enough food for the day. This is the time that they should work hard and fly home for food. This is the good part I gain by feeding once a day. The team will learn manners and won't be hanging around the roof tops upon their return from training and a good practice that will greatly benefit the fancier once the birds come home from the race. They should immediately come in the loft upon arrival.

After one week of training 14 miles, I will toss them across the bay, just after the San Mateo bridge. There is an office complex at the right side of the road by Clawitter exit, with a spacious parking lot. Sunday morning around 7 am is an excellent time to train the young birds. The parking lot is usually empty. I will wait about 5-10 minutes before releasing the birds. Upon the birds release from the baskets, I can view the birds flight if they will cross the bay immediately or not. I don't like to see the team flying in big circles as if they are hesitating to cross the bay. In the years of flying them, I would have a huge loses in the team even before the 1st race if they won't learn to cross the bay immediately and if they cross the bay immediately upon their release from the basket on their 1st toss, I knew I will have a great dependable young bird team for the season. And they will usually beat me in coming back home.

Right after this initial training toss I will not look back and train them 14 miles everyday of the week and train them further during the weekend about 30 miles across the bay (Lafayette, Ca. bart station, just a few blocks from my mom's younger brother, uncle tony), the next weekend they will go about 50 miles (Pittsburg, CA) and on the 3rd weekend I will cross the Sacramento river via Lodi bridge through highway 4 that is about (60-65 miles), in this toss they will experience the blowing winds in the Sacramento Valley and you can see the birds flying low to compensate from the turbulence in their flight. The next weekend I will make a big jump I will release them at about 100 miles (Placerville, Ca. up in highway 50) and maintain a 100 miles weekend toss alternating Placerville and Pollockpines, CA just before the Sierra Nevada Mt. which is about 12,000 ft., a grueling height for the pigeons to cross specially on headwinds, and not to mention countless predators waiting a top the mountain passes. They have learned through the years that at this time of the year young pigeons for their meal are passing by to cross the Sierra Nevada Mountain.

When the 1st race of the season starts all the birds that were not shipped to the races will be tossed 100 miles in the weekend. The returning trainers or racers will be given 100% safflower and gradually mixed with 25%, 50%, 75% barley as the days of the week goes by, returning to 100% safflower day of shipping the birds to the races. (The birds are given 1 oz. of safflower/barley mixture per day, take note that my family of birds responded to this kind of

feeding ,if your family of birds cannot easily convert food to muscles and fats, this feeding mixture is not applicable to your birds.) A naturally produced honey is given day of return from the races. I mixed 1 teaspoon to a gallon of water. Grits must be removed 3 days before basketing and should be removed when giving an antibiotic preventive medication, to prevent chemical reactions

to the antibiotics being given. Preventive medication for canker/cocci is alternated every week with preventive medication for upper respiratory. A regular bath is given a day after their return from the race, to relax their muscles. Don't forget to replenish their gut flora with friendly bacteria after each antibiotic treatment/prevention.

The key to success in young bird racing is consistency. The time of loft flying ,time of feeding, time of training and time of rest. Form will follow and can be held for a longer period during the race season by simply being consistent on your daily loft management. A lesser bird can beat a super bird that is not properly managed and taken cared for. The basket is the key for selecting super flyers. Not all super flyers are good breeders and not all good breeders are super flyers. A clean healthy loft with sufficient ventilation is also a key factor to achieve super form. Treat your young bird team as individual champion and they will do their best come race day. Be observant and immediately remove a bird or two in the race team that is not par to the rest of the team. Late comers should be examined immediately ,separated and observed in the next 24 hrs. If all is well the bird is back to his team. There should be no "favoritism" on your part in eliminating a bird in the race team. Treating individual bird equally will pay you big dividends come the final hour. You must always be 2 to 3 steps ahead of your competition. And don't pay attention to the negative remarks of your competitors. Always be a good hearted fancier. When your time comes, your competitors will pay respect to the new champion in the block. And they will be stunned to know that your real secret is just a "little common sense."