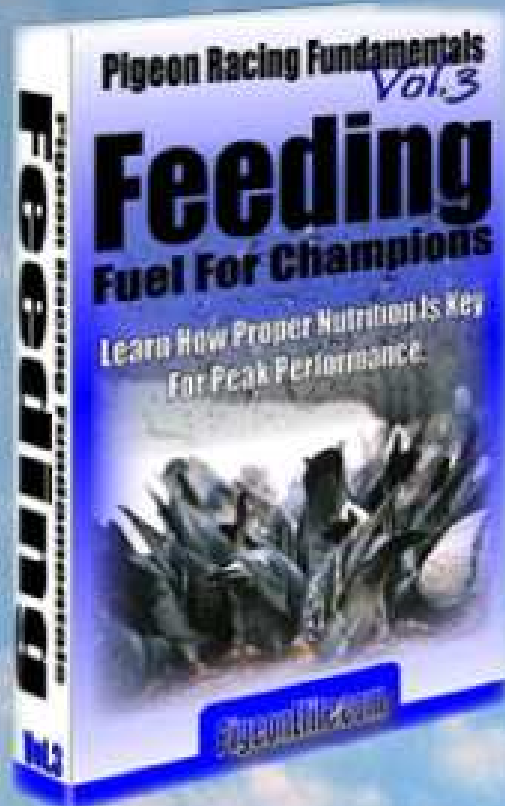


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PRESENTS



Pigeon Racing Fundamentals *Volume. 3*

Feeding Fuel For Champions

**Learn how proper nutrition is
key for peak performance**

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Nutrition Background

It doesn't matter which animal or species you are talking about nutrition is one of the most important variables in the overall care and health of that animal. Nutrition, genetics, breeding, health, conditioning and your own loft management skills will determine your lofts performance and without proper nutrition the other five mean nothing. Pigeons are grain and seed eaters and just like any species including humans they perform their best when provided with a balanced diet.

In order to determine the correct diet or feeding rations for any species, professional nutritionists start by identifying their needs and requirements throughout their life cycle. Different stages in a pigeon's life call for different requirements of nutrition as shown throughout this guide. Unfortunately there has been little scientific study devoted to the nutritional requirements of the pigeon. The reason for this is that there are simply not enough economic incentives for feed companies and universities to devote the necessary resources to an in depth study of pigeon nutritional requirements. Based on some studies from feed companies as well as knowledge from other related species and experience from pigeon fanciers around the world you can be confident that the pigeon feeds sold by reputable manufactures will do an excellent job for your team.



There are many different types of feed mixes available today.

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The Basics

The basic nutritional requirements of the pigeon are protein, energy (the best sources are fats and carbohydrates) minerals and vitamins. All of these nutrients are found in all of the grains used for pigeon feed but the difference is in the amounts used. The general rules are that pigeons have a higher protein requirement during breeding season; they have a higher energy requirement during work periods such as training or racing. You will find that commercial pigeon feed have a feed tag on the bag. This tag lists the percentages of protein, fat and fiber in that feed, the tag also should list in rank order the major ingredients of that particular mixture. The protein content has become a quick reference for choosing a feed mix, for example a 16% feed refers to one that has a crude protein content of 16%

You will sometimes see references to “heavy” feeds or to “light” feed mixtures. “Heavy” generally means that the feed mix is higher in energy, the “light” generally means lower in energy and higher in fiber. Some of the best energy sources are corn, milo, safflower and when used sparingly raw peanuts. For protein various varieties of peas have been found to be outstanding for use in pigeon feed mixes. Barley is a grain that is moderate in most nutrient levels but is high in fiber making it a great versatile feed ingredient as well as one of the most important grains for conditioning and performance in pigeons.

Fortunately North America has a wide variety of seeds and grains that are suitable for use in pigeon feeds, this is extremely important when it comes to giving your pigeons a balanced diet, a balanced diet is achieved by variety. Even though a mature pigeon could survive on a diet of nothing but wheat for example, it will thrive on a diet of assorted grains. This is extremely important in the high physical demands of training and racing as well as the rearing of young pigeons.

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Breeding Season



As your breeding pairs have been mated and the hatching of eggs comes closer you should have your pigeons on a high nutritional plane. Most experienced pigeon flyers like to feed their breeders a ration of protein in the range of 16-18%. If the mix available to you carries a protein level of 14% let's say then it is recommended to add supplemental peas to the ration. The levels fed would be approximately 1/5 peas and 4/5 mix in this example. The rapidly growing youngsters place huge

demands on the breeding pairs so it is important that they be on full feed, meaning they have access to feed at all times during the daylight hours.

When the youngsters reach about 18 to 21 days of age, many pigeon fanciers place small containers of breeding mix in the nestbox. This serves as a supplemental feed source for the parents and also eases some of the demand placed on them. Even more important this practice helps the young to learn to eat grain on their own, thus reducing the stress that weaning places on them.



Pellets, which are grain parts that are compressed, are a very popular option with many pigeon fanciers, especially for breeding. Feed manufactures are able to provide a

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balanced diet right out of the bag. This seems to have a greater payoff in the rapid development of young in the nest. The downside of using pellets is in looser droppings.

Your breeding pairs, as with all pigeons in your loft, must have access at all times to clean, fresh water and fresh grit. Pigeon grit contains additional supplements including calcium, oyster shell, salt and minerals. Pigeon grit also aids in the digestion of feed.

Moult & Off Season

The fall season is when the pigeon moults or loses its old plumage and trades it in for new. Moulting carries with it the need for a fairly high nutritional plane, but since the birds are not racing or training the energy requirement is reduced. Most pigeon fanciers feed a diet of 16% protein with barley being a significant ingredient in the range of 20-25% of the ration. The same approach to limited feeding, consumption in fifteen minutes and twice a day is preferred by most fanciers.

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Training/Racing



You will want to have the breeding mix readily available to youngsters in the first few days after weaning, this is not yet the time to limit feed. Also a four week old youngster though almost at it's mature size still has some developing and growing to do. As the young birds begin to fly around the loft remember never to feed before they are let out for exercise. As they complete their exercise and you call them in for feed (using whistle, feed can or other sound), put down some feed for them to find when they enter the trap. A

good rule of thumb is to only feed the amount that can be consumed in 15 minutes, dump any leftover feed. Exercised and fed mornings and evenings you will see this approach will give you the makings of a healthy, disciplined young bird team.

The young team basic ration is a commercial racing mix or one that runs approximately 14%-15% crude protein. As the youngsters begin to leave the loft for extended periods when exercised, this would be a great time to consider adding supplemental barley to the mix. This "lighter" ration should contain roughly 20% barley. You will find that your birds will eat the barley last, or reluctantly, persevere by adjusting the total amount of feed fed as barley is an excellent ingredient.

During heavy training and racing you should reduce the amount of barley in the feed. Fat pigeons cannot perform well but remember that heavy work burns a ton of energy (calories). In order to perform at peak performance your birds must have adequate reserves to meet the demands of a 200 or 300 mile race. This doesn't mean to put your birds on full feed but they should continue to feed twice a day and only what they can consume in 15 minutes. Road training is an excellent time to evaluate the body condition of your birds.

Old Birds

If you are comfortable with feeding both your breeding pairs and the youngsters, then you should find the old birds a breeze. The role of nutrition in the performance and health of the old bird team is every bit as important as it is with the youngsters. Controlled feeding is very important, do not overfeed your old birds and be sure not to cut them short as well you should adjust the diet to coincide with the workload.

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Conclusion

There are a few other things you should practice when it comes to feeding your team, your feed should be as clean and dust free as possible, make sure rodents never come in contact with the feed as well. Feed should be taken out of the loft at night and stored in rodent proof containers if possible. You should never give feed that is wet, damp or has been wet to your birds, damp feed is just as bad as a damp loft

Addition of supplemental vitamins and minerals via water has been a common practice among pigeon fanciers, and can help during times of stress and heavy demands on your birds, but moderation is recommended don't over do things. The pigeon receives most all of what it needs from it's diet, remember balance is key.

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