The title of this article is a bit misleading, yes thousands of birds have died, that is a fact, but as to WHY?, I do not know. I am writing this at the end of December, so hopefully by the time this article gets to you, the answer is in hand, but don't bet on it. This mystery disease has been hitting pigeons in North America for a number of months, and is still going strong. The reports from the hundreds of pigeon fanciers, that I have received, have no general symptoms, one day they either look fine, or a little fluffed up, and the next day they are dead. There are a lot of rumors, speculation, guesses from fanciers and answers from vets and so on. I have been working with a leading institution for the last few months, and no institution has solved the problem, at least that I know of. Some of the suggestions as to what it is are all over the board. Wild birds somehow infecting the pigeons, it's PMV, its paratyphoid, a brand new disease, a new strain of PMV, a new strain of Paratyphoid or a new strain of Adeno virus. Some have reported that it is only killing hens, it is only killing young birds, it happened when I came home from a show, could it be caused by a dirty loft, the droppings are very loose, the droppings are green the droppings are brown. Well I guess that this point, there is no commonality, the symptoms are all over the place.

What to do?, what to do? That is the question, and the answer is that I do not know. Pigeons that have never been shown are getting it, lofts that have had no new birds added are getting it, pigeons returning to a show are getting it, pigeons that were in a race or pigeons that have never flown are getting it. I clean the loft every day, why did I get it? This disease, in my humble opinion, is a virus, but I could be wrong. I had it a couple of months ago but now it has run its course and everything is back to normal. As the owner of Foy's. I have just about every medication, and believe me, I tried a bunch, and so have others, but none ever worked. I have talked to many people and on at least three occasions, the pigeons were opened up and they were full of round worms! I worm my birds, what the heck happened? Many fanciers have vaccinated their pigeons, but that did not stop it.

I can offer a few suggestions, but they are not cures, in my mind, it must run it's course, like any virus. Heck a common cold is a virus, and after spending billions of dollars trying to find something that will cure it, they still have not been able to come up with a cure, the only thing science can offer is different medications to treat the symptoms. The meds treat the head aches, stuffy noses, fevers, coughs and chills can be addressed, but the actual virus must run its course.

WHAT TO DO! Here is what I suggest. Always use the same drinkers in each section. All of my drinkers are numbered so that I do not accidently mix them up. Keep your loft clean. Keep the pigeons in semi darkness, if possible, and reduce stress such as showing and racing until your birds are normal. Vaccinate all your birds with a PMV shot, this will drastically increases the immune system, and it may prevent some birds from getting this horrible disease. Clean your whole loft, including the aviary with common bleach, 1 cup to a gallon. Better yet, use Oxine which is much better. Don't forget to clean the feeders and drinkers. Clean all the perches with Oxine or bleach and also spray all the cracks and crevices, including the floor. There is a brand new product on the market that I know will help as a preventative, and I would use it every day or at least three times a week. The product, Dr. Pigeons Health Show Water, fights the viruses and is not an antibiotic so you can use it as often as you like, but in all cases, change the water every day. If you are going to put your birds in a show or a race, use it 2-3 days before you basket them to take them to the event, during the show and after the show or race. It may be mixed with vitamins and probiotics, in fact, I suggest you do combine it with something like UltraPro or another product that combines vitamins and probiotics. You may also want to include electrolytes that will make the droppings more normal. Another product is Adeno Zap. Again it is not an antibiotic, but treats symptoms.

As I write this article, I got a call from a friend and is also an avian vet. We had a long conversation about the problem and he wanted me to add a few suggestions. Worm all of your pigeons with a product that treats roundworms, clean the loft the next day after treating. The drugs are not meant to kill roundworms, but to paralyze them so that they release in the pigeons. They are then passed out in the birds droppings. If you do not clean the floor after the medication, your birds may pick them up again.

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SALMONELLA
An Old Bacteria That Is Still Very Hot
By: Pascal Lanneau, Veterinarian - Belgium

Salmonella or paratyphus, most fancier think this is only present in lofts that are very dirty, where there is no hygiene, the fancier doesn’t take care of his pigeons, and plenty fanciers think that this can’t be a problem in their own loft.

I have to say, if you think so, you are quite wrong. Nowadays, during my daily practice I see plenty of problems related to the Salmonella bacteria. Especially during the moulting and breeding period, but also during racing season etc, you can have Salmonella related problems.

Therefore I think it is useful to say in this article something more concerning this sometimes “hidden” disease.

A vet from the USA claims that there is Salmonella present in all lofts. All lofts is may be too much but I am convinced that the Salmonella bacteria is more present in plenty different lofts than is assumed.

All pigeons look very healthy, they are not thin, they don’t show any sign of illness, but…

The symptoms of pigeons infected with Salmonella can be very different like:

- Swollen articulations:

- Legs: The pigeons will limb (see photo)

- Wings: The pigeons will drop a wing

- Less appetite
- Becoming thin (see photo below)
- Sudden death
- Clear eggs
- Dark Eggs
- Unilateral ophtalmie
- Abscesses at the head
- Opistothonus

So pay attention if a pigeon cannot fly anymore to their nestbox, or a pigeon that starts to limb. Also too much clear (not fertilised) or dark eggs (embryo died in the egg, wasn’t able to come out of the egg) (see photo below.)

Don’t think your loft is not vulnerable for Salmonella infections, it is not only in dirty lofts that this will occur.

Fluffed up pigeons, and becoming thin…

A Lack of good performances during the racing season can also be caused by Salmonella.

Always keep in mind that all these symptoms can be due to Salmonella.

We see a lot of carrier pigeons with Salmonella, these are those healthy looking pigeons but in their body there are small abscesses from Salmonella. When everything goes like it should be, the bacteria stays inside the body, but in cases of stress, the sleeping bacteria comes awake and there is excretion of the bacteria and the pigeons can become ill. The abscesses can be located in the lungs (cfr picture), ovaria, testikels etc, what explain also sometimes (temporary) infertility in those pigeons.

Stress situations for a pigeon can be very various, such as moving the bird into another loft, or during moulting, breeding, races etc, Every time the pigeon becomes a bit tired, exhausted, it has less immunity and at that moment it is possible that there is excretion of the bacteria to other pigeons who become ill.
**TRANSMISSION**
The infection with Salmonella can be horizontal (transferred by the food, the water, the droppings, etc) and vertical (when the Salmonella is located in the gonads).

This means that a youngster can be infected already in the egg!!!

**DIAGNOSE**
Salmonella can infect very fast a whole loft, so it is very important to make a quick and efficient diagnose, not only for the pigeons that are ill, but also for the other ones that seems to be healthy at that moment.

1) **Bloodsamples**, searching for antibodies

Bloodsampling is a good and fast method to have a diagnose, but there are much false negative, because the antibodies are not yet in or already out of the blood of the pigeon. When positive you can be quite sure, when negative, you can’t be sure at all.

2) **Dropping samples**

   - **Quick test**: Is possible to do but not always reliable
   - **Culture**: This is the best method to diagnose, but the excretion of the Salmonella bacteria is not every time high enough to detect it by a culture.

Therefore collect always 5 days dropping samples in order to be sure of the diagnosis.

Certainly for screening the lofts, gather 5 days droppings, from all the different pigeons, mix it very well and if it is very hot mix some water in it so it is not very dry.

Make sure the lab examines specific the Salmonella strain of the pigeons, *Salmonella Typhimurium* var. *Copenhaegen*. type II

When it was possible to grow a culture of the Salmonella strain, the lab will make an antibiogram, so you will know what kind of antibiotics will be most convenient to treat your specific strain of Salmonella.

Some labs have also the possibility to make an auto-vaccine, this means a vaccine specific based on your “home” Salmonella strain.

**TREATMENT**

Once the diagnosis of Salmonella is sure, you have to treat first of all.

The antibiogram will tell you what kind of antibiotics you use the best, in order to treat the Salmonella. Some antibiotics will be better than other ones to try to “cure” the carriers, such as medication based on fluoroquinolones. Others won’t have that much power to treat and “clean” the carriers.

Don’t forget to give after an antibiotic treatment probiotics in order to rebuild the intestinal flora.

Next to the antibiotics sanitary measurements are also very important.

**Hygiène** is one of the most important, cleaning, disinfecting with Javel, dettol, using the flame eliminating rats and mice.

**Screening on diseases, vaccinating programs, etc., are the NEW NORMAL in the Pigeon Sport.**

Make use of a *quarantaine* place for:

- Sick pigeons, new pigeons before introducing into the loft, and pigeons after a race that entered very late.

Stop the stress factor, this means:

- Avoid overcrowding and stop breeding.

Sometimes *euthanasia* of some very ill pigeons is necessary when they don’t react to the treatment as it should be. This is sometimes the only possibility to eradicate the Salmonella completely out of the loft.

Regular screening after all this is highly recommended.

**PREVENTION**

All these *management* factors mentioned as a part of the treatment are things to keep in mind for prevention of this disease.

Also regular screening by taking 5 days dropping samples and ask the vet to make a culture of this, so you can treat immediately when this is positive.

And… *vaccination***!!!

Some vets/fanciers are pro, others are contra, but I am surely pro.

Vaccinating against salmonella will not only give more immunity against the Salmonella itself, but I am convinced that the pigeon will be stronger to beat any other disease. This doesn't mean that they won't become ill at all, but, there is certainly a positive effect on the health of the pigeon in general.

Here in Belgium we use attenuated living vaccines, these give a very good immunity and it is only necessary to inject once a year.

When you use living vaccines after an antibiotic treatment, it is better to wait minimum 5 days between the vaccination and the treatment, so there is no interference.

You can also use an auto vaccine, based on the Salmonella strain in your loft, that can be made in certain labs after they could isolate the Salmonella out of the 5 days dropping samples.

If you want to vaccinate against Salmonella, without having seen troubles before and having screened your loft, it is sometimes better to treat before the vaccination, because of the possibility of the presence of the bacteria. But… screening before is the best.

I have seen already much cases of Salmonella during the years, and it is a very difficult disease, it is sometimes very hard to get rid of it completely, but I saw that when a fancier treats like it should be, keeps in mind the sanitary measurements and the screenings and vaccinations, it is certainly possible to make sure your pigeons become healthy and clean of Salmonella afterwards.
Like I wrote in the article of last year, also these things like screenings, vaccination programs etc become more and more the New Normal in pigeon sports.

Salmonella is/maybe a very old bacteria and disease in the pigeon sport, but it stays a very important disease!!!

Keep in mind that a healthy pigeon loft is 1 of the 3 important topics to achieve the best performances, but nowadays we have plenty more possibilities to screen and check our birds, make use of it!!!

THE NEW NORMAL in pigeon sports is there in every different aspects related to the pigeon sport and is more and more common, also concerning the medical, scientific part.

- Medical supervising
- Screenings
- Vaccination programs
- Regularly visits of a vet
- DNA
- Parentage verification
- Quality genes
- LDHA
- DRD4
- Artificial Insemination

Don't hesitate to contact me for more information about any topic.

Mr. Pixley will answer any of my questions without hesitation. I have yet to ask a question that he could not answer. Mr. Pixley has raised a couple of white homers for me, to help me and bring new blood into my loft. Because of my limited knowledge of training, I thought I did not have homing pigeons. (It was me, not the birds.)

I was struggling trying to find somewhere to purchase feed at a cheaper price, then what I was paying. One day, I was talking to another pigeon lover about the price of feed, she told me about a man that she gets her feed from and gave me the phone number of a gentleman by the name of Sam Pixley. I was only feeding pellets. I had no clue conditioning feed, even existed.

Mr. Pixley has helped me on a monthly basis delivering quality feed, grit and corn-cob bedding. When and if I have questions about pigeons, and their needs, I will call Mr. Pixley and he offers recommendations that have worked for me.

Mr. Pixley has been nothing short of a blessing to me and my new fascination with pigeons. I am grateful for Mr. Pixley and if I could cast a vote, Mr. Pixley would get my vote, he has definitely lived up to his title, Help-A-Beginner.

Thank you!
Roberta N. Jackson
Dovely Moments