

# Getting Young Birds Ready



*Some of Nino's second round youngsters*

We all look forward to a nice team of young birds and doing some real flying in terms of time from them. For those that are more experienced in flying, getting them ready for those flies this will be old news, but hopefully for others they will find it useful.

Like all athletes, pigeons must have certain criteria if they are to be winners. They must be of sound genetic breeding, have a will to fly, be in top health, and be in top condition. These are the reasons for winners, not so much a name. Now after saying this, one must remember that every kit is different and every year can also be different in terms of weather, so one must factor these equations into their understanding of the process of conditioning. Along with the above, one must have a good understanding of what provides the substance that enables this conditioning to take place and that is their nutritional requirements.

To help in this area, why not break down their feed into two areas, one that is based on protein, those seeds that are the building blocks for sound growth, feather development, and muscle repair after long and rigorous flying, most of which are peas, beans, vetch - all grains that are high in protein will fill this spot. The other part of this equation are the energy grains. These are the grains that give the birds their staying power, speed when required like outflying some types of hawks and help keep their weight up. Some, but not all are cereal grains such as corn, wheat, niger, canola, safflower, peanuts, and a host of others. These are the tools one needs to provide and more importantly understand what they do for the pigeon in terms of its ability to achieve their flying requirements.



**Top** - black youngster, a Fenton Bugeja cross.

**Bottom** - Nino's favourite 2008 youngster which he lost to overfly.

Now that we have a good understanding of their nutritional requirements we can move to bringing these birds into condition for many hours of flying. We all know of dehydratives, a combination of different grains used in the training of birds to help keep them in a strong but light body weight but not necessarily in condition. Most dehydratives have a large percentage of barley but barley alone will not bring young birds into the type of condition they require for long flying. Yes I know we have all flown quite a few hours on some type of barley mix as a dehydrative but let's look at a scenario for a moment.

Say we have a kit of young birds coming along nicely and we ask them for say 8hrs training every second day. What do you think will happen to them on a small ration of this mix doing these types of workouts? Instead of the birds getting into better condition, they will slowly waste away all their muscle and body weight.

When young birds are doing these times, they are using up energy and as I am a diabetic, I know something about blood sugars going low, I can tell you that is exactly what is happening to these young birds. So, their bodies start to mobilize their stored energy such as fat. When that is depleted the system starts to use up pectoral muscle bulk.

Boom. There go the young birds the wrong way in terms of conditioning. So what does this tell us? One should go back to the feed program and see what are the energy grains and that should tell you if you want to help maintain their body weight, they need some of those grains that provide energy - cereal grains rather than just a dehydrative. It will also help replenish their blood sugars very fast, an important factor

in terms of maintaining good form. So as the time goes up so does the quality of their feed. As all birds are different and they should never be thrown into the same basket in terms of feed quantity. There is a balance to be found of feed versus time flown and what stage of condition they are in. Also, all birds do not handle the same in terms of condition. One must observe their stock closely to assess properly.

The other important factor in the conditioning of young birds is the weather. Yes the weather in terms of feeding. In warmer weather and when they are flying relative long hours, their feed ration may need changing to accommodate the warmer weather. All these conditions are part in parcel of how often they are being tossed, as it does not take long for them to get a bit heavy if they are not getting regular tosses or not watching what and how much feed ration they are giving. Conditioning young birds is a bit of a challenge but for those that use common sense and handle their birds every two or three days to see how they are progressing, keep them healthy and let them fly for the joy of flying will find this info rewarding.

Nino has made many good points. This should help more than just the novice for sure. I will expand further on two. First, handle your birds. Do not assume they should be in condition just because you say so. Each is different and each takes on mass, muscle, fat and condition at a different rate.....the opposite holds true as well. If you're not sure what to look for then just pick a bird that is to your satisfaction before and after a training fly...you will quickly learn the difference. Now balancing the lot is a tricky prospect but to an experienced flier no big deal. I have to say the only way you become experienced is to fly the buggers. No surprise there.



*Luka's 2008 kit of young hens in the middle of their moult.*

Second, since feed is so important not only in training but also maintaining a healthy body I would encourage every Tippler fancier to get better knowledge of grains...cereals, seeds and legumes. I truly believe with our sport the knowledge of proteins, carbohydrates and fats is more important than in any other fancy, including racing homers. I spent an entire winter reading, researching and actually creating my own breeding mix, moulting mix and winter mix. I can honestly tell you I also ended up killing a bird because of my ignorance but quickly learned my lesson. I remember early on asking Oskar why the birds didn't do so well and he would tell me the reason..."it was too cold you should have given them some corn"....or "it was too hot you shouldn't have given them corn". At the time it seemed so confusing until I read up on all the grains and got a better understanding on what each does. I quickly learned nobody can give you the exact recipe....no secret tonics as Harry Shannon has said many a times. The

condition of the birds, rest time, weather, temperature and the time you want to fly all had to be taken into consideration....and from all those variables you had to mix a concoction to compliment the desired goal. At the time it seemed so difficult but it was really not once you understood the basics.

Here is an example of knowing your feeds.

### **Training Mix A**

**75% Barley**  
**20% Wheat**  
**5% Milo**

Approx. Protein content = 12%  
Approx. Fat content = 2%  
Approx. Carbohydrate content = 68%

### **Training Mix B**

**60% Barley**  
**20% Wheat**  
**10% Milo**  
**8% Safflower**  
**2% Linseed**

Approx. Protein content = 14%  
Approx. Fat content = 5%  
Approx. Carbohydrate content = 63%

As you can see there is some difference in these two training feeds. The big difference is the fat content in the second mix...2.5 times as much as the A mix. I believe it was Douglas Prud'homme (former NA young bird record holder, 1955) once wrote that barley is like a break on a tippler. It does not allow the bird to hit full speed, so to speak. Once we start lowering the barley amount in a mix we start to ease up on the break. If you replace carb content with fat content, as we did in this example, we're adding much more energy to the system.

In B Training mix the Safflower amount was the main cause for the increase of fat because Safflower has about 35% fat content. And we know that fat has twice the amount of energy as carbs do. Linseed also has a high fat content but as you can see we only have 2% of it in our mix. So when we add a pinch of this and a pinch of that, it may seem like nothing, BUT, we are changing the mix considerably depending on the amount we are pinching. By the way, 5% fat content in a mix is usually found in moulting and breeding mixes. A little high in my opinion. I would cut the safflower amount in half and perhaps even lower if I want the birds to drop without problems or go over on me. This would also lower the protein content which is also a little high at 14% to about 13%.

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