

# How do you settle the young?

*By Luka Kapac*

Most club members know of my poor settling percentages over the years when it comes to young birds. For those of you that do not, let me remind you that I settle on average only 25 to 35% of my youngsters each season. The main reason for such poor results is the area that I live in. A suburban concrete jungle with one house on top of the other being the main reason for such results, I believe. The photo below gives you a good idea what my youngsters have to deal with when trying to home. But this year the numbers have improved drastically. So much so that I thought to write a few words for the benefit of those that may be experiencing the same problem.



The following is my regular routine when preparing youngsters for settling for over 16 years now: I prefer to take them away at 4 weeks old as they start to become a nuisance to the parents and the next set of eggs.

The youngsters are placed in YB section with some placid droppers and given the breeding mix. The hopper is left on the floor throughout the day. This "free for all" will last about 6-7 days until I am satisfied the youngsters know how to eat and drink. I will check on their health and condition daily just in case some may have trouble feeding themselves. Once I am satisfied the youngsters are doing well the feed is only given in the evening. Now the training starts (about 5 weeks old) with the feed and the call to feed. I will scrape the floor just before feeding them by hand... for about 15 minutes whenever possible. During this time I will whistle a familiar note to which they will associate feeding time and throw seeds on the floor so they get accustomed to picking them. The rest of the feed is then given in a hopper while I sit and wait for them to finish. This routine sets up 3 things: 1. Feeding off the floor, which they will then do off the roof, 2. Gain confidence and

tameness with handler, and 3. Recognize the whistle as a time to come in and feed.

Only then will I let them out of the trap. But I will change the feed to a depurative and cut the amount. At this time they will not strike up so quick but will flutter up and down. I leave them out for a couple of hours while I watch their every move. If they are not trained to these stimuli how else can you get a dozen birds off the roof and into the trap...only through their stomach? Once they have taken a few spins here and there I whistle them back into the trap by throwing the seeds closer to the trap and eventually inside the trap. When they have all entered I lower the trap door and go inside the loft to the YB section. With a whistle I call them all into the YB section and within seconds all are scurrying on the floor looking for the seeds. This I repeat for several outings until they are familiar with the area and the loft.

This year the settling average has soared to over 80%. So what is new? Why such a difference? Well, I changed the following: In the past I would lose an entire team of youngsters (9-12) in one shot by liberating them as a group. They would strike up and slowly the wind would caress them completely out of sight. This year however I settled each bird individually. They never gained enough height and as soon as they started ascending or raking too far I would move the droppers on the roof. The youngster was only too glad to see the droppers and the rest of his buddy's scurrying for food inside the trap. Of course the droppers worked outside the trap while the remaining youngsters worked inside the trap. The lone Tippler would literally boomerang back and land without hesitation.

The second and as equally important is the feed that I tried. I mixed the following mixture: 50% peas and 50% barley with a very small amount of oil seeds to keep them in good weight. The peas were made of green peas and trapper peas. This is what I had left in the feed bin at the time. I would imagine other types of peas would do just as well. I found that this sort of mixture kept them in good condition but did not give them that burst of energy I noticed when on barley alone. By giving the protein in the form of peas the carbohydrates were lowered and the birds did not seem as anxious to fly as before. Once I was sure they were settled I let them out as a kit and changed the feed to a depurative. The results have been so drastic and encouraging for me that I would recommend it to others if having my type of problem. But I do understand one year's success does not guarantee a complete cure going forward. So try it if you like. What do you have to lose? Hopefully, one less bird!