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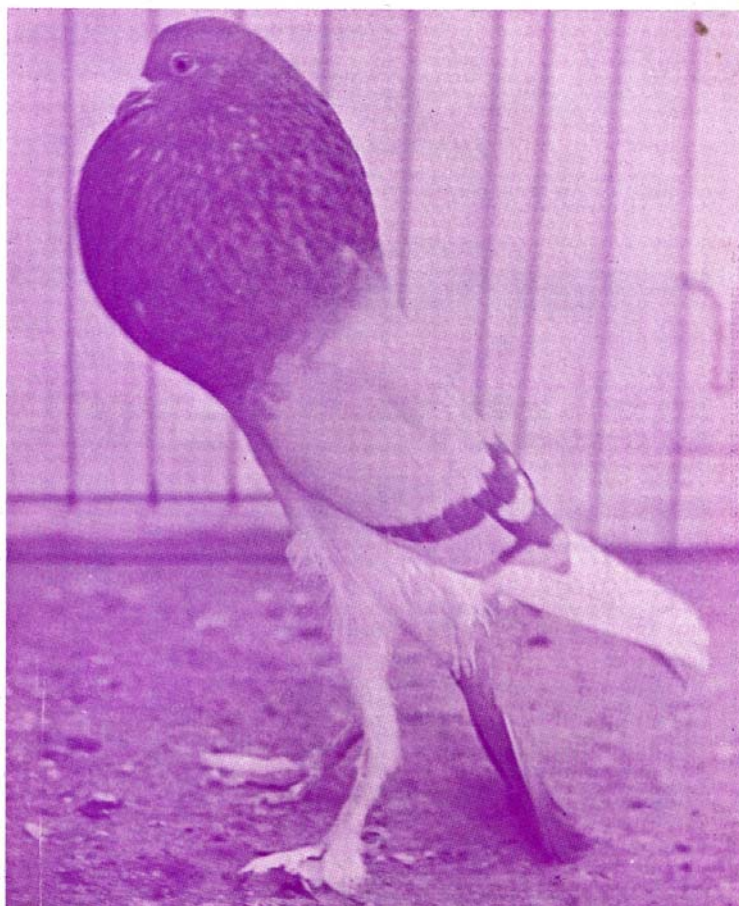
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Champion Pigmy Pouter

This Silver Pigmy Pouter, Band No. 2033, was the Best Silver, Best Old and Champion Pouter at the 1971 Utah Pigeon Club Winter Show held at Salt Lake City, Utah, with over 100 Pouters entered. Also Champion Pouter as a Young Bird in 1970. — Bred and owned by Leo A. Hansen, Salt Lake City, Utah.



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The Ringbeaters of the Low Countries

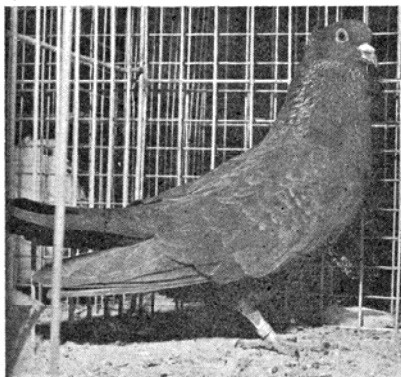
By MARVIN EMERY, St. Louis, Mo.

I can think of no more remarkable and unique group of domestic pigeons than the Ringbeaters (in French, Dutch and Flemish, Ringslagers). The four members of which are native only to the Low Countries. The Smiter, the Ringbeater, and the Speelderke, being Belgian, the Rhenish Ringbeater, Dutch. All have the general type of the field pigeon. The head is longish with high frontal, the beak medium length, and all have a peak crest with a mane descending towards the back. They are either clean legged or have the tarsus covered with short feathers to the toes.

When highly bred, the males are gay, nervous, turbulent, and have the curious habit more or less when courting of performing circular hovering flights immediately above their mates, while clapping their wings noisily, until by late summer the webs of the primary flights are much frayed and reduced to the quills. Such worn primaries are always an indication of a good wing clapper and an aid to the bird's hovering ability. I believe this hovering, turning flight of the male Ringbeater is a development of the courting ground display of all pigeons. You will note, the male pigeon when courting its mate or another pigeon, turns or pirouettes on its toes one or more times, and then often reverses itself and turns around the other way. In the Ringbeaters, the ardent male in its eagerness to pursue, overtake, and surround its mate, acquired an impetus to rise, hover, and turn above its hen, thus transferring the same turning motion of the ground display into an aerial one, frequently with right and left turns. We perhaps see a tendency to this in the leaping some breeds do, the courting maneuvers of common pigeons on roofs, the lively antics of Pouters, Tumblers, etc. I do not know if these aerial gymnastics entirely supplant the ground turning in these pigeons — probably not.

Smiter

The first of this group is the long-thought extinct Smiter (in Fr. Dut. and Flem., Smijter), the Finnikin of old authors, which I am happy to say



THE BLACK SMITER

The Black Smiter pigeon bred by L. Ardies. — Photo from Burgeon, Brussels, Belgium.

is not extinct and still can be found, and in practically the same state it was centuries ago. It is occasionally exhibited at the Belgian shows. Though not proper a Ringbeater, the Smiter does some turning. The male literally hurls itself towards its mate from a distance of several yards while clapping its wings loudly like two boards struck together, whence its name. The Smiter and the Belgian Ringbeater have a common ancestry going back 400 years. References to them can be found in Aldrovandi (1599), Jonstonius (1650), Charleton (1668), Willughby (1676), Moore (1735), Girton (1770), etc.

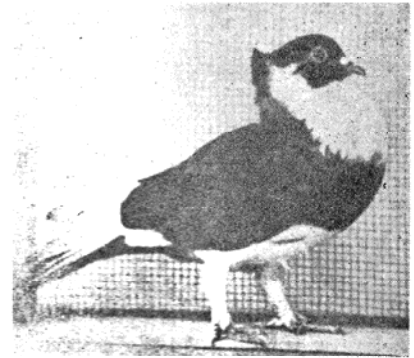
The Standard for the Smiter was adopted in 1911. The details briefly are: Large pigeon, total length about 14 inches; weight varies from 17 to 24 ounces. Native of Antwerp Province (N. Belgium). Carriage erect; head strong, frontal high, crest moderately pointed, forming a mane down to back; beak slender, black; wattles small; eye orange yellow; cere fine, dark gray; neck short; breast broad, well rounded; back broad at shoulders; wings and tail medium length; feet bright red, smooth or shortly feathered to toes. Colors: black self (dull), blue barred or checkered. Blacks are mostly found, an adaptive protective coloration on farms against birds of prey, which confuse them with crows. Faults are defective or shell crest, narrow breast, red eye cere, white in plumage (except rump in blues).

The Smiter was not always solid colored. Girton (1770) says they were blue or black pied. I suppose when the Smiter was standardized, it was specified to be solid colored to readily distinguish it from its close kin, the Belgian Ringbeater, which is always pied marked. There are only a few exhibitors of this breed at Belgian shows, but L. Ardies, of Malines, Belgium, who has bred the Smiter for many years, informs me that he has shipped pairs to many parts in Belgium. So this venerable breed may still be met. Good.

The Smiter's ancient Flemish name was "Fyncken" (Chaffinch), Finnikin in English, and were so called because they were gay in disposition like the Chaffinch. This common European finch and cage bird has a merry whistle. There is an expression in French: "Gai comme un pinson" (Gay as a finch), like we would say, Merry as a lark.

Belgian Ringbeater

Is of the general type and size of the Smiter, but the body should be carried horizontally and crest more pointed. It is pied marked like the English Pouter, except without any white on the shoulders. The legs are always feathered to the toes with short white feathers (stockings). The colored varieties are black, blue barred, blue checkered, mealy, red, and yellow. Reds and yellows have white tails, and sometimes go by the separate name of Ringslager d'Alost, (city,



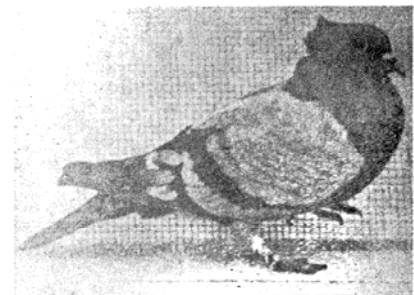
BELGIAN RINGBEATER

Photo from Keymeulen, Belgium.

W. cen. Belgium), and the other colors are then called Ringslager Brabancon (Brabant, province cen. Belgium). Eyes are yellow or orange red, but often broken because the white tips of the crescent running up to the eyes. Color of beak and eye cere according to plumage color. First standard promulgated in 1897.

Well-bred male Ringbeaters are very salacious and possessive of their mates. When he approaches her, he rises a little above her and while turning beats the wings together. To sustain this strenuous performance for the good size of the bird, the breast and wing muscles are strongly developed.

In the olden days before there were pigeon shows in Belgium, fanciers amused themselves by selecting and training their best birds for their turning ability, and held tournaments to judge the best performers. After the sexes were separated for a short time and perhaps fed some stimulating grains, the competitions began. The French author, R. Fontaine (1922), informs us that the inhabitants around the villages of Alost made use of this aptitude to pass the hours of a Sunday afternoon. They assembled in a tavern, formed a circle, and placed a female Ringbeater in the center. A male was released, afterwards another and the one that made the greatest number of circles around the female was proclaimed the winner. Naturally, this little game led the way to betting, and more than one simple landsman left the tavern with an empty pocket. In certain communities about Tremonde (NW cen. Belgium), the tournaments between a half dozen



THE SMITER (FINNIKIN)

A rare photo of a rare pigeon, the Smiter (Finnikin). — Photo from Keymeulen, Belgium.

fanciers were organized. The pigeons were carried in a sack. The affair took place on a public square. The female was placed in a basket for all to see. The male was released and the one, who abandoned its female was not considered worth anything, he was excluded. There have been Ringbeaters that made five to ten turns before resting on the basket.

These early crescent and primarily flighted birds were known in Paris since 1754 (see, *Les Tournants*, 1754, *Instruction Sur Pigeons: Commentary* by Dresse, 1930, *Le Sol Belge*, No. 59, p. 9.)

The early French name for these pigeons "tounant" (turn, turning) has long since been returned to their native Flemish name Ringslagers. The old French breeders did not care for these birds, they being too quarrelsome.

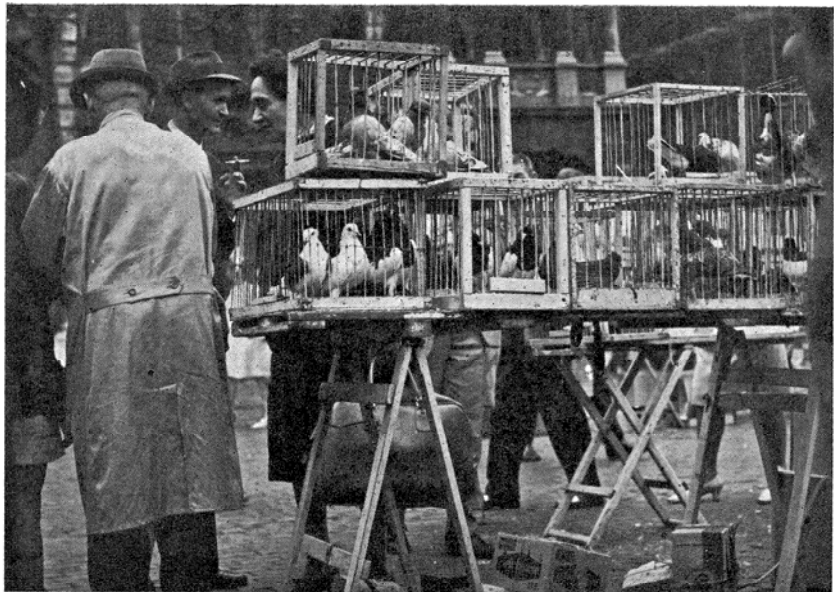
Speelderke

Is the miniature of the Belgian Ringbeater, it having the same general type, carriage, and similar design, but occurs only in blue, with the feet smooth or only a few feathers. Height is about eight inches and weight about 12 ounces. They are blue black barred, and have the crescent, 7 to 10 primaries, several feathers near the wing butts, rump and lower breast to vent, white, rest colored. Some specimens also have a white spot over the wattles and a patch of white in the form of a heart between the shoulders or a triangle at base of the hindneck. They are fine boned, and said to carry more flesh on their frame in proportion to their size than any other pigeons.

The Speelderke is native to Flanders, and its name translated means "Little Player". They are lively and tame, and generally I believed considered the best performers of all the Ringbeaters. The Belgian Standard states the male approaches his mate by short leaps and turns above her, making four or five circles, and then recommences the same maneuver while turning. Fontaine, said they can turn 12 or more times, but usually it makes three turns to the right and three turns to the left. Like its larger relatives, competitions were held in the old days. The female was placed on the ground and the male set free. At certain meetings the owner kept the female in the hand, the male released, and he made three or four circles around his mate, sometimes more, and then rested on the arm of the owner. Similar exhibitions were seen at fairs. The merchant took a male bird from the basket in which was its mate, and after doing its tricks the bird rested on the basket. The breed must be very old, as its likeness can be found in the paintings of the old Dutch and Flemish masters, see, van Veen (1550-1630) and Rubens (1577-1640). First standard established 1905. Only a few exhibitors noted.

Rhenish Ringbeater

Originated in Utrecht province, Holland, but bred for its show qualities in Germany, is thought by its white-head markings, according to the Belgian author, O. Dresse (1959), to have descended from crossing of the Belgian Ringbeater and the old French



Brussels Bird Market

Part of the Bird Market held every Sunday morning in the Grand Place, Brussels. — Photo by Burgeon, Brussels, Belgium.

peak-crested farm pigeon, the Manotte, which had nearly the same design as the Rhenish Ringbeater. The Manotte now seems to have disappeared, as I find it no longer mentioned in French works. The Rhenish Ringbeater seems to have been of more recent origin, Furer, 1858, first describing them. The peak-crested Aachen Pouter apparently also has a relationship with the Belgian Ringbeater, both having nearly the same pied design. Besides, this basic Belgian bird is thought to be a connecting link with the Dutch Slenkens, another race of clapping pigeons, especially through the presumed extinct Geldersche Slenken, which was coarser than the present-day Groningen Slenken, and had a white heart-shape mark on the crop region.

The only breed close to the Ringbeaters in design and disposition seems to be the Pouters. Their connection however may be nearly four hundred years ago.

As to their proper training: L. Ardies, of Malines, Belgium, suggests giving them free flight, yet fully isolate some choice pairs completely in a very dark room, and after some time suddenly release them into the

broad daylight, when one may expect some good performance, providing the birds are not over-bred for show qualities.

Breeding Maltese In Canada

By MARTIN RENDL, Toronto, Ont., Canada

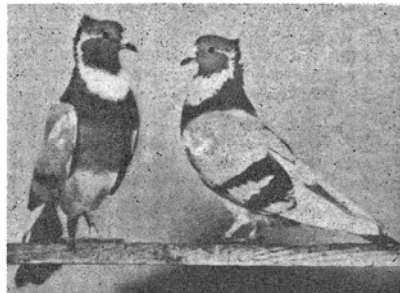
After 24 years I started again with the aristocrat Maltese pigeon. In Jugoslavia I had over 20 different breeds of pigeons, including the Maltese however, in 1944 I lost everything. Since 1951 I visited many shows in Canada but I did not see any Maltese pigeons. In 1968 I built a pigeon house and I was a member of a pigeon club but still no pigeons in my house.

One day through my work I met a pigeon man and told him my trouble. The next day he brought me an old 1962 issue of the *American Pigeon Journal* and therein I found some addresses of Maltese breeders. In 1968 I imported six pair from the USA and two years later in 1970 I again imported nine pairs, so I got a beginner breeding stock from Wm. Hetzel.

In Canada we now have around 200 Maltese. In my pigeon house alone I breed over 100 young birds and most of them go to the Province of Quebec where I sold over 50 pigeons in the past three years. I am a member of five pigeon clubs and get five pigeon papers but the *American Pigeon Journal* is the best of all. I received it since 1968.

I wanted to import some Maltese from Europe but I cannot get an Import Permit in Canada. I feel very sorry for my pigeons that I cannot get new blood in the old blood from Europe.

We Maltese breeders hope that some more pigeon breeders will start breeding Maltese pigeons in Canada and after that join our club, the National Maltese Club. Write to Wm. Hetzel, Sec.-Treas., 2639 Conventry Drive, Parma, Ohio, 44134. Ducs \$2 a year.



PAIR OF SPEELDERKES

A well marked pair of Speelderkes. — Photo courtesy of H. Versteeg, Brussels, Belgium.