

PIGEON- HOLED

Birds of a feather do indeed flock together - or so it seems for Gerhard Kaniess of Appleton, who has been racing pigeons since he was 9 years old.

In fact, Kaniess's grandfather, William Orloff, flew pigeons in Chicago in 1900 and started the family's pigeon racing tradition. This is pretty remarkable considering flying pigeons only become popular in North America in the 1870s; just after the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads meet at Promontory Summit, Utah in 1869.

Today, Kaniess flies his pigeons with Valley Racing Pigeon Club of Kaukauna where 12 seasoned pigeon racers, or fanciers, get together to - you guessed it - race pigeons.

The Valley Racing Pigeon Club is very generous towards people interested in starting pigeon racing. Participants just starting out, known as new flyers, may receive free birds and valuable guidance from members.

Kaniess is very knowledgeable on the subject and quite an accomplished flyer; he even has to turn down trophies because his wife, Ruth Kaniess, won't let him keep any more.

Advice on pigeons is another thing Kaniess has in abundance. "Let's start at the beginning," Kaniess said, after determining just how little I knew about the sport before this interview.

"One way to go about pigeon husbandry is to breed females to a prepotent male," Kaniess said.

A prepotent male is a pigeon who has such a strong genetic influence on its offspring that the offspring consistently resemble the male parent. Racing pigeons with these strong pedigrees are valuable commodities: for example, a young bird with bloodlines from pigeon Super 73 is worth over \$10,000.

Kaniess's immaculately kept pigeon loft is a two-story building with multiple rooms. Females are kept in one section while males are kept in the other 3 sections.

Since they are separated by gender, "the birds will only look at each other until February," Kaniess said.

Kaniess will only mate the old birds, or birds not hatched within the current year, 70 days before the start of racing season. Once adults start mating they can breed up to 10 years.

"When mates are picked, they are put into a nest with a partition with the female on one side of the partition and the male other," Kaniess said. "Gradually the birds will be introduced to their nest."

Kaniess uses pine needles for his bird's nests to kill bugs that might bother the pigeons. The nests are located in nest bowls, which help contain nesting material inside the nest box, and make it easier for the parents to keep track of their eggs.

The female lays clutches of two eggs. "Females will lay an egg at 5:00 in the evening and then another one a day later at noon," Kaniess said.

Kaniess lets the parents lay two eggs and raise their young. The next two eggs the pigeons lay will be flyers and after that glass eggs are placed under the female, or hen, to prevent future egg laying.

"Incubation lasts 18-20 days, but in the winter it is longer," Kaniess said.

Newly hatched pigeons are no larger than your thumb. Young pigeons,

hobbies

Hawks are not the only danger to pigeons at the end of the season. The slow birds are killed to strengthen flock and sometimes turned into dinner.

"Squab is considered a delicacy because the 30 day old bird is very tender," Kaniess said.

Ruth Kaniess, among her other talents, happens to be an expert at cooking pigeon.

BRAISED PIGEONS

6 Pigeons giblets removed and reserved

2 oz. Bacon or salt pork

3 1/2 tbl. Butter

Salt to taste

Chicken broth

Kitchen Bouquet

Chopped fresh parsley

3 tbl. Flour

1 tbl. Red-currant jelly

1/2 cup Heavy cream

METHOD :

Truss birds and wrap breasts with bacon or salt pork. Brown birds and giblets in butter. Add a dash of salt, enough chicken broth to cover bottom of skillet, and enough Kitchen Bouquet to color lightly. Cover and simmer gently for about 1 hour, or until tender, adding more broth if necessary to prevent drying. Remove birds and keep warm; sprinkle birds with parsley. Measure cooking liquid and add enough more broth to make 2 cups; bring to a boil. Mix flour with a small amount of water until smooth, then add to boiling liquid and cook, stirring, until thickened. Add jelly and melt over low heat. Strain juices, discarding giblets. Add cream, adjust seasoning, and reheat to serving temperature.

Yields 6 servings.



Bethany Home Full

known as squabs, are taught by their female parent to feed and drink.

Squabs are fed from a special substance produced in the pigeon's crop called pigeon milk. This substance is high in fat and protein and low in carbohydrate which helped the young birds grow quickly.

"After 45 days, young pigeons start to fledge and can be let out," Kaniess said. "When the young birds are 60 days old, they start routing."

Routing is when the young racing pigeons are out flying, leaving the loft area and out of sight for an extended period of time. During this time the pigeons are getting settled, learning the countryside and how to find their way home.

"Before I start training, I get up in the morning and let the young birds fly in a 12 mile radius of the loft" Kaniess said. "Never feed them when you let them out, only when they return to the loft."

After this brief period, training can begin. The trick is to take the pigeons out just a few miles from the loft, then slowly work up to greater distances once the young birds build stamina and become better oriented with the location of their loft.

"When the birds are taken out, you should leave them on the ground for half an hour to orient them," Kaniess said. "They will go straight for home."

Though no one knows for sure how pigeons find their way home, Racing Pigeon Digest suggests that pigeons may have several biological resources that help pigeons find their way back to the loft. Some of the theories include: navigation by the sun, sense of smell, low frequency sounds, perception of the Earth's magnetic field, and also, navigation by landmarks.

Additionally, the sport of pigeon racing itself shows there is some kind of homing instinct at work on the birds because they are taken miles

into unfamiliar territory and then released to quickly navigate back to their loft. Training birds for this task requires multiple start locations and distances.

"To start out, I take the birds out seven miles, then 12, then 18, then 25" Kaniess said. "I stop at 40 miles and do this three times a week."

After the birds complete this training, they are ready to begin racing. There are two race seasons conducted every summer.

Pigeons are placed into baskets of 30 and then shipped by truck to the starting location of the race overnight. After the pigeons arrive to the designated starting point, they are allowed time to orient themselves to their new location before beginning the race.

The Pigeons will have been fitted with scanner bands that allow them to be timed as they pass the scanner clock when they arrive home to their lofts. Once the birds are released, some of them can reach speeds of about 60 miles per hour on the race home.

Young birds are raced in the last week in July to the first week in October. These races start from Tohmah, a 100-mile race, and extend out to Blue Earth, Minn., a 300-mile race.

The other season is from the last week in April to the first week in June, when the old birds, birds not hatched during the current year, fly. The old birds compete in more races and from further distances.

"There are three 100 mile races, two 200 mile races, two 300 mile races, two 400 mile races and three 500 mile races that the old birds compete in," Kaniess said. "The last 500 mile race is the Midwest race where we fly against Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio."

Each summer, there are five course races, where The Valley Racing Pigeon Club flies against



members of clubs in Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, Green Bay, Sheboygan, Two Rivers, and the Wolf River or Marinette and Menomonee, Mich.

Kaniess locks his pigeons up for the season in October because of Hawks that want to prey on the birds.

"There are two red tail hawks that have a nest in my territory to keep other hawks away," Kaniess said.

However, hawks are not the only danger to pigeons at the end of the season. The slow birds are killed to strengthen flock and sometimes turned into dinner.