



ONE-LOFT RACE HEALTH PROTOCOL

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One of the challenges of running a one-loft race is the control of disease. Introduced birds can bring with them any disease agent that is present in their home loft. The stress of transport, establishing themselves in the new loft and their immaturity, all increase the pigeons' vulnerability to disease.

Control of parasites

Controlling introduced parasites is the best starting point. The parasites to control are worms, coccidia and lice and mites. Treating youngsters for parasites does them no harm and yet untreated, parasites quickly spread from one bird to another and in sufficient numbers will compromise the birds development and decrease their ability to resist disease. I suggest the following protocol:

1. Worms and mites - 'Moxidectin', 2 mg/ml, 5 ml/l, for 24 hours or 0.25 ml/bird orally as they arrive
2. Coccidia - 'Toltrazuril', 25 mg/ml, 3 ml/l, for 48 hours or 0.1 ml/bird daily for 2 days
3. Lice, feather flies, mosquitoes - 'Permethrin' concentrate, 400 mg/ml, dilute 10-20 ml/l into a spray bottle, spray birds across back, down the chest and through the flight feathers once.

Youngsters should be treated as they arrive at the loft.

'Eye colds' and canker

Once established in their new loft the two most common diseases that are likely to appear in the young pigeons are canker and Chlamydial respiratory infection. These diseases will cycle through the birds. Hopefully, with good care, most birds will not become unwell but with intermittent exposure, develop a tolerance and natural immunity to them. If treatment is required, if possible, individual birds only should be treated. If more than 5 -10% develop either of these problems, then only then should a flock treatment be considered. Individual birds with canker can be given one 'Spartrix' tablet or one 'Ronsec' tablet or 1/4 of a 'Flagyl' (same as 'Cank-R' tablet) daily until well. If a flock treatment for canker is required, 'Turbosole', one teaspoon to 2 litres, or 'Emtryl', one teaspoon to 6 litres, can be used. Monitor the birds for signs of respiratory infection namely eyecolds, dirty ceres, persistent sneezing or a

croaking sound while breathing. Individual birds can be treated with 'Doxyvet' tablets 1\4 tablet daily until well. If a flock treatment becomes necessary " Doxyvet" or 'Doxy-T', each one teaspoon to 2 litres, can be given for 4-7 days.

Viruses

Frustratingly, viral disease, in particular due to Circo virus, is becoming more and more commonly diagnosed in pigeons in Australia. Viruses often have long incubation times during which the virus infection is establishing in the birds but the birds still look well. Sometimes, infected birds never get sick themselves but are still capable of spreading the virus. Introducing birds that look normal but are carrying/shedding virus are the biggest health threat to one-loft racing. Individual birds can be tested for Circo virus infection, however, the test takes about 7 days to do and is prohibitively expensive (approximately \$50 per bird) making routine testing impractical. Although not perfect, a good plan is to isolate introduced birds as a batch for 7 - 10 days after they arrive at the loft. They should only be introduced in with the other birds at the end of this time if all birds remain well.

The onus is on participating fanciers not to send youngsters to a one-loft race if they have active pigeon pox virus infection in their loft. Birds infected with the virus develop symptoms within 7 to 10 days of catching the disease and therefore will be detectable during the 7-10 day quarantine period. During this time however they may have already spread the disease to others in their batch, meaning that the whole batch might need to be rejected. Once all youngsters have arrived at the one-loft race loft, and the youngest birds are over 6 weeks old, all birds should be vaccinated against pox.



Giving probiotics, e.g. 'Probac', in the water or on the food for the first few days to new birds until they have become established in the loft will help to decrease the incidence of disease.

Obviously, any bird that arrives at the loft visibly unwell should not be introduced and any bird that becomes unwell (except due to Chlamydia or canker) should be immediately isolated and an avian vet contacted for advice. Flock treatments of antibiotics should not be given without checking with an avian vet first.

Pigeons are naturally a very robust bird and providing a clean dry loft, nutritious food, adopting a sensible loft management routine, not overcrowding them and ensuring the loft is well ventilated will do much to decrease the incidence of disease. It is hoped that applying the above principles and guidelines will contribute to a robust healthy batch of birds lining up for the big race later in the year.

