

Famous People Who Were or are Pigeon Fanciers

By Paul Gibbs

Ever wondered what if any famous people ever kept pigeons? Have any of your friends, family or neighbours ever ask you the question? Well here is a list, which is by no means conclusive, which probably will surprise many of them.

Whenever you feel you have to justify the keeping of what a lot of people refer to as “rodents with wings” or to win an argument, you will be able to refer them to this list.

Noah – Probably the most well known biblical pigeon keeper, although the biblical teachings tell us it was a dove. The term dove is given to pigeons in most of the Middle-eastern as well as many countries of Europe eg in The Netherlands they refer to them as “Duiffs”.

King George the V of the UK

Queen Elizabeth II – The Royal Lofts are still maintained today, located on the Sandringham Estate in the UK. The Royal Lofts house some 240 birds including Breeding Stock. The Queen is Patron of a number of pigeon racing societies, most notably the Racing Association and the National Flying Association.

Elvis Presley – The King of Rock and Roll

Roy Rogers – The singing Cowboy and star of his own TV show in the 50 and 60’s

Mike Tyson – The former World Heavy Weight Boxing Champion

Yul Bryner – Famous American Movie Star

Marlin Brandon – Another movie star famous for being the “Godfather” in the movie of the same name.

Tony Curtis – Another of Hollywood’s great Movie Stars

Charles Darwin – Famous Scientist, Author and Theorist. Author of “On the Origin of Species” and “The Descent of Man”. Famous for his theories on “Evolution”. Darwin kept many breeds of pigeons and showed us that all breeds can be traced back to Columba livia. The Rock Dove.

Walt Disney – Famous for his white birds bred down of some of the original Belgian Pletinckx birds of the early sixties. They are reported to be a very attractive bird, very fast, and cross well with other the famous Belgian strains including Stassarts, Devriendts and Janssens. The lofts are still maintained at Disney World in California.

George Foreman – Former World Heavy Weight Boxing Champion was reported as being very interested in pigeon racing

Willi Brandt – Former German Chancellor was a keen pigeon fancier. After WW2 he became the Mayor of Berlin and ultimately the first Social Democrat Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Michael Landon – Famous for his TV roles as “Little Joe” from the western “Bonanza”. Also starring in “Little House on the Prairie”. Michael was also keen on pigeons having also starred with Art Carney in the movie “Where Pigeons go to Die”. Michael also narrated the Jim Jenner pigeon movie “Marathon in the Sky”.

Alan Jordan – Manager of the South African Cricket Team.

Lee Marvin - Another one of Hollywood’s great actors who was involved with pigeons

Monet – One of the world’s greatest artist is also recorded as being a keen pigeon fancier

Wayne Newton – Well know American entertainer, singer and actor. So well-known as a Las Vegas entertainer that his is referred to as “Mr Las Vegas”. Wayne Newton is reported to have kept homers, rollers, tumblers and high flyers.

Pablo Picasso – Another world famous artist who kept Fantails. Picasso loved pigeons so much that he named his daughter “Paloma” which means pigeon in Spanish.

Johnny Otis – A Jazz and Blues musician from California, who along with other musicians of his era are accredited with developing the beginnings of rock n’ roll. At age 70 he continued to breed Saxon Fairy Swallows (a breed of pigeon) and has strong ties with the Southern California Colour Pigeon Society

Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward – were both interested in “showing” pigeons with Joanne Woodward being very interested in pigeon racing completion. Unfortunately their notoriety at pigeon events where they would be swamped by fans turned them off continuing their involvement with pigeons

Gary Portelli – Race horse trainer, successful trainer of many Group 1 race horses including “Rebel Dane” and the Golden Slipper winner “She Will Reign”. Gary races his pigeons in the Liverpool Club in Sydney.

John Shore – Well known Melbourne pigeon fancier honoured in the 2019 Australian Day Awards with an OAM for his long term voluntary charity work, having raised many thousands of dollars for a wide range of charities both in Australia and overseas.

Well there you it. A list that you can impress people with if you need to, if not, at least you might be able to win a bet with.

Scott Baio – U.S. Actor who played in the TV show “Happy Days” along with many other series over the years kept pigeon with his father in Brooklyn

Maurizo Gucci – Famous Italian fashion designer. His products being sold in most of the “high end” fashion houses around the world. He is also a fancier of show pigeons who is on record as paying more than \$10,000 US for an American bird.

Jimmy Smits – Yet another American actor who is a pigeon fancier. Jimmy made an appearance in the NPA National racing his birds. He also narrated Jim Jenner’s second pigeon DVD “Our Oldest Feathered Friends”

Bill Lawry – Needs no introduction to cricket fans around the world. Former Australian Cricket Captain who today is one of the world’s top cricket commentators. Bill still races his pigeons in Melbourne, Victoria.

Bob Giltinan Jnr – An Australian Davis Cup tennis player who continues his father’s interest in pigeon racing. The Giltinan family of birds are sought after worldwide. Several years ago, one of their birds produced the Champion Bird of Taiwan

The King of Belgium (and his family) – are very keen and astute pigeon fanciers

Jeff Fenech – World Champion Boxer. Former IBF Bantamweight Champion, Former WBC Super Bantamweight Champion and Former WBC Featherweight Champion acquired Rollers from the Sydney Performing Roller Club

Senator Hilaire La Haye – Secretary to the Belgium Government. He named his birds after prominent members of the Belgium parliament.

John Scadden – Former Premier of the state of Western Australia was a pigeon fancier.

Harry Wells – Former Australian International Rugby League player who represented Australia in 21 test Matches between 1952-60 along with representing Australia in 8 World Cup matches during the period 1954-60 having played against teams from Great Britain, France and New Zealand. In 2008 Harry was named in the Australian Top 100 Rugby League Players of all time. Harry raced pigeons for many years having recently retired from the sport.

Lew Hoad – Famous Australian champion tennis player of the 50’s who won 5 Wimbledon titles who raced pigeons in Balmain NSW prior to relocating to Spain to set up a tennis camp but unfortunately passed away due to a heart attack aged only 59.