

## Homing Pigeon Thoughts and Facts Through the Ages

- 1) The Ancient Greeks used the Homing or Racing Pigeon for delivering messages more than 5000 years ago.
- 2) Today there are around 5 races held each year with prize money worth 1 Million Dollars.
- 3) Today there are estimated to be more than a million pigeon fanciers' worldwide who between them keep approximately 4 million birds.
- 4) Pigeons have been known to see very well over a 60 klm distance.
- 5) Scientists believe that pigeons may hear wind blowing over mountains from hundreds of kilometres away.
- 6) In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, King George 1 of England decreed all pigeon droppings to be the property of the Crown. All lofts were policed to enforce the law as pigeon manure was used in the making of gunpowder.
- 7) A pigeon beats its wings up to ten times per second, while maintaining a heart rate of 600 beats per minute and can maintain this for up to 16 hours without a rest.
- 8) Advanced studies at the University of Montana in the USA conclude that kilo for kilo the homing pigeon is one of the smartest, most physically adept creatures in the animal kingdom.
- 9) Pigeons have the ability to hear sounds 11 octaves below middle C allowing pigeons to detect earthquakes and electrical storms.
- 10) Pigeons have been used in many wars, including WW1 and WW2 and in doing so have saved countless lives.
- 11) Pigeons achieved a 98% success rate in the missions flown in WW2 despite enemy fire, and often with mortal injuries to themselves.
- 12) During the war years pilots carried pigeons onboard their planes in case they had to ditch their aircraft releasing the bird to gain help as to their whereabouts. Many pilots owe their lives to a pigeon.
- 13) The "Dicken Medal", the animal equivalent of the "Victoria Cross", (awarded for bravery) has been awarded to pigeons for gallantry on 32 occasions, in fact 32 out of 54 awarded to animals during WW2 have been awarded to pigeons, two of these were awarded to Aussie pigeons.
- 14) During 1942-43 a total of 13,500 birds were donated by fanciers to the Australian Armed Forces to be used as messenger pigeons.
- 15) A little known fact that has never been portrayed in movies covering the D-day landings at Normandy during WW2, was that complete radio silence was required

for 48 hrs prior to the invasion by allied troops. The only communication between units and Operational Command across the English Channel was by pigeon. Hundreds of birds were used in a continuous shuttle service with the loss of only 3 messages out of a total of some 33,000 carried.

16) Today a Military Pigeon Service is still operated by the French, Swiss, Israeli, Iraqi and Chinese Armies.

The above 16 facts, besides being interesting, bring me to the point of this article on our beloved birds. To day with all our technology, communication wizardry, satellites, infrared monitoring and listening devices it still seems that we cannot capture or locate Osama Bin Laden. He always seems to be one step ahead; the same can be said of many other wanted terrorist leaders.

Its very interesting to note, that with all the technology and expertise that those looking for Osama and other terrorist leaders use, they never seem to be getting any closer.

About two years ago I was watching the channel 7 news where a reporter was speaking from a village in Afghanistan. This reporter was highlighting the plight of the Afghan people as at the time the country was in drought and the people had little to eat. At the time she appeared to be standing in the middle of the street giving her report and as a "bird man" I couldn't help but notice that in the distance flying around one of the houses was a flock of birds and by their wing action I took them for pigeons.

I made comment to my wife that if the country was in drought and that the people had little to eat, and if what I thought were pigeons flying around what would they be feeding them, why and who was watering them in a drought. If anything I would have thought you would be killing them and feeding them to the children and the hungry.

My over active mind then began to think that maybe the Al-Qaeda and Osama sympathisers are using pigeons to relay messages to nearby villages reporting on the movements of allied troops. Of course as we know the pigeons would go undetected, totally oblivious to modern technology, delivering their messages right under their very noses.

Countries in the Middle East and in this part of the world have successfully used pigeons as messengers for many hundreds of years. As pigeon fanciers we all know that pigeons need very little in housing and with a little good management are more than capable of flying short distances in very fast times.

In today's modern world it's easy for those in high places to forget past events and maybe they are not even aware of the deeds that can be performed by pigeons. We all live with digital technology and the thought of two "jam tins" being held tightly by a piece of string enabling us to talk to each other as kids has been greatly forgotten.

It's sad to think that the great western nations – the UK, America and Australia, who relied so much on the pigeon service during WW1 and WW2 have forsaken the importance that pigeons can provide even in this modern era, especially in the light of the fact that the French, Swiss and Chinese can still see a role for such a service.

I hope we never have to contemplate wars on the scale of WW1 and WW2 ever again, but it never hurts to be prepared. In the event that such a need is required whom will the governments of the day turn to? Of course it will be the Pigeon Fanciers of the day, if there are any of us left, with the way that green groups, councils and to some extent the general public perceive the keeping of pigeons. Since the days of Noah pigeons have been in the service of man, all around the world, both friend and foe. Let's hope that there can be a resurgence and interest in the keeping of pigeons. It's up to us to educate, where possible those who under estimate and under value "*Columba livia*" the Pigeon.

Until next time, "May your skies be clear and your returns good".