

THE DARK SYSTEM EXPLAINED

The Dark System manipulates the length of the day artificially to cause the young birds to moult their body feathers very rapidly while not moulting the flight or wing feathers. This system tricks the pigeon's biological clock to think winter is coming.

When a pigeon is on a short day length it will only drop the body feathers, which includes the head, neck and shield and not the wing flight primary and secondary feathers. This gives the pigeon the best possible chance of surviving through a harsh winter with a full wing and a fully feathered mature body. The pigeon grows and matures during the body moult. This big burst in size, strength and maturity is nature's way to best protect the pigeon. Like reptiles that grow during shedding of skin, pigeons grow very rapidly during the body moult.

Here are a few reasons that make the Dark System such an advantage for racing young birds.

1. The young birds are sexually mature.
2. The young are adults in every way except they do not have the adult flight feathers.
3. The young birds have adult pigeon immunity and are not effected as readily by respiratory, Adeno virus etc.
4. The young can be raced on a double widowhood system.
5. The young have a full wing and are not stressed by racing during the body moult.
6. The young pigeons are ready every week unless the race is a real disaster.

Here are the disadvantages to racing young birds on the Dark System.

1. The young will reach maturity so fast; they may be too old physically and mentally when training begins. Losses could be great.
2. Lack of ventilation during the darkness period could lead to many health problems.
3. Problems with pigeons going into the old bird season with several baby flights still on the wing.
4. The young tend to begin to moult the body and wing feathers six to eight weeks into the young bird season.

Here are the misconceptions about the dark system.

1. You do not have to mate right after Halloween. The pigeons finish the moult in 9 weeks, so if a round is weaned in April and then another in May there is still time to finish the body moult before the young bird season.
2. The pigeons fly terrible as old birds. Some fanciers report this others have no problems. This could be due to the young being pushed too hard or not finishing the wing moult before the spring old bird season. My suggestion would be, to only race the hens as young birds on the dark system and let the cocks remain on natural light. Use the cocks as widowers during old birds.

3. The pigeons can suffer health problems during the darkened stage if the birds are crowded and the ventilation is poor. Install exhaust fans in the roof of the loft that run at all times to draw stale air out. Cut some openings in the floor for the airflow to come from the bottom of the loft without light coming in.

4. The loft does not have to be totally dark. As long as it gets dark at the same time every day the birds will moult fine. My pigeons can still go down and drink when the loft is closed up.

I will explain how the system works followed by how to prevent the problems that may come about.

Dark System Procedures

Wean the young into a section that has been designed to allow ventilation but can be darkened to somewhat darker than dusk.

1. Let the sun come up in the morning and darken the loft 9.5 hours later. By doing this the pigeons have the sunrise to adjust their biological clock. Remember you must open the loft at night for it to get light in the morning. If this is not possible you must adapt the system to your schedule. In this case open the loft up and close it up leaving the light for 9.5 hours. You must do this at the same time every day. The strict timing is very important for the pigeons to adjust to the dark system. Letting the sunrise naturally for the babies is the best system but I have used both with success.

2. Feed a high protein grain and give vitamins, mineral and grit regularly. Feed very heavy because the moult will be rapid.

3. Use garlic in the water four or five days per week as a natural antibiotic.

4. Let the pigeons out as much as possible and start them flying young.

5. Start short tosses as soon as they are flocking. Begin across the yard and down the street and go in very short increments. The young must be trained very young for them to be able to learn. Once they are trained out to 25 miles you do not have to worry but losing them very easily. The dark system pushes the young bird through its learning phase very quickly. On the dark the young become adults at 13 weeks of age instead of five to six months when not darkened.

6. Once the young are trained out to 25 miles several times, stop them until training restarts again for young bird racing.

7. Two weeks before you begin the second phase of training for the young bird season, put the pigeons on natural day length. After two weeks start your training the same as you start for every young bird season. The pigeons were already trained out 25 miles earlier in the year, but start slow again unless the pigeons are routing real well.

8. If possible separate the sexes. You must determine if you want to excel early or late. Leave the sexes together for the first couple weeks of racing if there are many young bird specials at the end of the season. If you want to dominate early separate the sexes two weeks before the first race.

9. If you do not have the space leave the sexes together the entire season.

What to do during the Race Season?

1. If the sexes are separated allow them to spend 30 minutes together before shipping.
2. After returning from the race leave the sexes together for two hours.
3. The separated sexes must be trained and exercised separately during the week.
4. After week two of the race season add three hours of day length (by turning on the lights) everyday for the rest of the season. This causes the young to believe it is mid summer when the wing moult is so very slow. The young will begin to drop the first few flights but the season will be over before the young reach the third or fourth flight.
5. Race and win!

What to do After the Race season?

1. After the race season return to normal day length for one month. This will cause the pigeons to begin the moult really fast. The pigeons will start another body moult followed by the completion of the wing moult.
2. When the month is complete run the lights 24 hours per day until the wing moult is finished.
3. If you did not race the young cocks on the system there is no need to run lights after the month. The young hens will finish the moult the following year. This does not matter if they are not raced as old birds.
4. Feed high protein with plenty of vitamins and minerals until the body moult is finished.