

Roundabout the pigeon Fancy

with HARRY WHEELER

TO MY many inquiring friends, I am sorry to write it was my opponent who got the three years and I was released until I appear—if ever again—before the electorate. The headlines in the local evening paper read 'Harry Wheeler's World trembles'. Someone forgot I have interests in other worlds. My pigeons, for example, are always a relaxation to me.

A query

My mail recently contained a letter forwarded by John Trevisick which he received from America with a request to him for porcelain enamelled bronze or brass leg bands (pigeon rings to the reader). The letter states they were manufactured by Joseph Fray Ltd of Birmingham, pre-war, but the letter did not state which war. Will any reader who has any news of same, please let me know. My memory tells me that I was a boy when I last saw them!

Standard anomalies

I have had the pleasure, and it was indeed a pleasure, to receive a copy of the 'Fancy Pigeon Book of Standards' sponsored by the National Pigeon Association and drawn up by Mr H H Shives. To me it is a remarkable book because it is the first attempt to get all known British standards and as many others as possible under one cover. There are eighty-four standards and seventy-six illustrations. My collection of standards played a small part.

Of course there will be criticisms of the contents but let them be constructive. If there is anything amiss in the standards, it is up to the specialist clubs at their annual general meeting to amend same, for the next edition of the standards.

In my early scanning through the standards, I noticed there are at least five upon which I wish to comment.

The Frillback standard does not mention that the flight and tail feathers should be wavy, yet this is considered a must by many judges.

In the standard for the crossing Pouter—always judged mainly on crop and foot-feathers which must be long—there is no mention of foot-feathers.

For the Cauchois Mondain, the standard states 'also white-flighted'. I have never seen one either in Britain or on the Continent.

Plarmigan—'Shell crest extra 15 points'. This must make it nearly impossible for a clean head to win.

Chinese Owls—A modern standard was, was it not, drawn up in 1968? The beak setting to be set at 120 degrees angle, with fore part of head'. Surely this could have been described with better words. I for one will not be carrying a protractor in my show bag. The standard also fails to mention the cravat under the paragraph 'Neck and breast frill.'

Visits

I have made no visits since my last notes, but during the next two months my pigeon commitments include a trip to Royal Cornwall, the Royal show and the Great Yorkshire—the last named two for the first time, and my first time judging in Yorkshire where I spent three years of my service life. During that time I visited the NPA show held in Leeds.

New fashion

I have, during the last three months, had requests for pigeons to ornate gardens, using the dove-cote method of housing same. No less than six people have asked for tumbler pigeons. When questioned further they meant pigeons to roll. Two persons settled for Nuns. The reasons are obvious: they are ornamental, they fly and are something different from ordinary street pigeons to the public. I wonder whether this is going to create a new fashion for the gardens. If so besides the Nun, several bi-colour pigeons will be in demand. I can see the Kormorner coming into its own. This Continental Tumbler surprised me in not having a much larger following, after its re-introduction to this country.

A lesson

Somewhere, there is a lesson to be learned from the story behind 'The Racing Pigeon' and the prize money to be paid out by the Royal Dairy Association for the racing homer classes at the Dairy. The subsidy that is likely to be paid out by 'The Racing Pigeon' is heavy and the circulation figures for 'The Racing Pigeon' must warrant such confidence.

PIGEON KEEPING FOR NOVICES. By W Watmough. Chapters on selecting birds, housing, loft furniture, purchasing stock, food and feeding, general management, breeding season, etc. Price 5s 10d post paid. From Book Dept, FUR AND FEATHER, Ltd, Bradford, Yorks.

THE EXHIBITION MOUSE

WHO WILL ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF PUBLICISING THE FANCY?

MARY DOBSON

IN ANSWER to Alf Horne's question in FUR AND FEATHER of May 8, no, no-one has taken up my challenge. Tim Heath has told me I cannot put mice in perspex cages without hay, but apart from this I haven't heard a whisper either personally, or through the pages of FUR AND FEATHER.

At the risk of flogging a dead if not actually decomposing, horse, I will try to answer Mr Horne's criticism. Of course, I don't feel a display alone will influence a prospective fancier. It must be good; it must be manned constantly by enthusiastic and well informed, and preferably, attractive female fanciers. I'm sure you will agree with me there, Mr Horne? Seriously, the display would not be intended to convert non-mouse-ites into fervent fanciers at one blow. It is intended as an aid and, at the big shows, as a source of reliable information.

I still maintain that prospective fanciers frequently lose interest when they find they cannot see what is in the Maxeys, and if they can see it, they don't know what it is, and there never seems to be anyone about whom one can ask. So another would-be fancier drifts off into the crowd, and is lost to the Fancy.

According to my year book Mr Horne you have only one year's seniority in membership over me so, on the strength of this, I will have the nerve to venture an opinion on varieties which I do not keep, namely Siamese and Himalayan. I agree that at present there does not seem to be any real distinction. I was under the impression, quite possibly wrongly, that the Siamese had shadings on a light beige ground and the Himalayan shadings on a white ground. Well, the only way one judge can tell which is which is to compare it to a PE White; if the ground colour matches, it's a Himalayan, if it doesn't, it's a Siamese, or is it a grubby Himalayan? If they're both AOV Marked, they can't be sent off for being in the wrong class, so even the owner doesn't have to commit himself.

Now, Mr Horne what have you got against rats? They're only large scale mice after all. If I remember rightly, when I first joined the National Mouse Club (at the age of twelve, only to drop out in a matter of months as my mother wouldn't allow me to keep more than two does), it was then the National Mouse and Rat Club. Has the title ever been changed officially? If not, surely the club is still committed to catering for the rat. I agree that 'small livestock society' is much too vague and open to abuse, but 'mouse and rat' is fairly specific and could, if necessary, be stretched to include gerbil, ie, 'desert rat'.

To return to Mr Horne's original point, I am not averse to making a display stand. I do the decorating at home, and have made my own mouse boxes—I still have the scars to prove it! How much support would I get with it, though. I only have at present two very

similar varieties of Tan (silvers and doves) Broken and Fawns. Due to all my stock having secret access to the pill, I only have seventeen mice in all. If I put the lot in, it would hardly make a display. Materials for the stand would have to be purchased out of the already over-stressed housekeeping. I don't think perspex is cheap, glass is certainly impractical; and one can't scrounge decent timber from his 'friendly neighbourhood greengrocer' nowadays.

The stand could only be collapsible to a limited extent, especially with mice in it. I have no transport, and have difficulty persuading the conductor to let me on the bus with a couple of Maxeys. I have a large, young family and a husband in the printing trade, which means he works completely unpredictable hours including weekends. Will you baby-sit, Mr Horne, while I gallivant across the country with my travelling side-show? Even my 'local' LSCMC shows frequently involve me in an hour's walk pushing a very battered pram full of Maxeys, mice and children.

If I do manage to get to a show further afield, it is entirely due to the kindness of fancier friends.

Don't get the wrong idea; I'm not complaining, just explaining. I get a lot of fun out of my hobby, though I do wish the varnints would breed. I have made a lot of friends through the mouse and rabbit fancies; friends I hope I would keep even if I were no longer able to take an active interest. Keep up the good work Mr Horne; let's have more 'space between the Maxeys'.

★ ★ ★

AS publicity officer for the Central England Mouse Club I think it is high time I attempted to straighten out some of the twisted rumours which keep coming back to me via various sources.

Firstly, the club's membership (which now stands at eighty) is not made up mainly of young children with pet mice.

Secondly, the club does not have a large proportion of non-exhibiting members. The club welcomes and values juvenile members as they are the fanciers of tomorrow; some twelve-year-olds know a lot more than the old hands, thanks to the modern methods of science teaching and a background of animal life in the home.

I agree with what Mrs Dobson (February 27) wrote and hope to put on some form of display myself at some shows in Knowle. The local public has shown great interest but thanks to fanciers cramming Maxeys with hay the mouse still remains no more than a fleeting glimpse of head or tail.

I close leaving one thought to all the stick in the muds: Go mad, experiment, advertise the Fancy and above all let others find out and share the joys of competition. ALLAN W SUTHERAN (publicity officer).

Jack Hartley on current topics

DURING the past few months the mouse columns in FUR AND FEATHER have been used by fanciers to air their views on various subjects. This policy is always very good when constructive criticism is given. In this article I will try to settle three items of comment.

THE BROKEN (Sire, Eric Kitchen out of Yorkshire Dale): Mr Heath is quite right, Broken have been going round about this Broken having even spots on its ears. These were probably started by other mice who wanted to share it around.

There are some fanciers who do believe it has even ear spots, but I feel the true point has been missed. It is how it is seen on the show bench and how, according to the rules, that it is judged. This is what really matters.

When judging any mouse (the Broken included) any judge must start with the impossible. I speak of perfection. Each fault must be noted, and, give a point or two, the mouse with the least faults must nearly always win. I say nearly because no judge sets himself up as God, and one judge may slightly vary his opinion say on condition.

This Broken, as far as I can see, has only one fault and it isn't its ear spots. The rule states 'uniformity of spots.' These vary a little, so little in fact I would blush to put it down the table because of them.

Can this mouse be beaten by unbiased judging. I would say yes. It is now over twelve months old and is losing a little on condition. Recent judging of this mouse has been the

same by all judges, including myself. It will still win more classes than it will lose. Fanciers, idle chatter will not beat it; champions only lose their title in the ring, sorry Maxey!

Incidentally Mr Heath, you did see this mouse when I judged it in London last year. You may have just forgotten all about it. I wish I could!

HOUSING—If any fancier wishes to keep his mice in an old tin shed with a gale blowing through it, and as long as he and his mice appreciate it, well that's all that matters. Both animals and people can acclimatise themselves to any conditions, or so I'm told.

For myself, this is no use whatsoever. I keep my mice in a nice, warm shed for my benefit. I like to spend time feeding and watching my mice. After all, why try to get a mouse in wonderful condition to show and then have it die of pneumonia before you get it there. In this case I would say Ernie Higgs was right; get the right conditions for both mice and men.

SILVER GREYS—As I did the judging of the Silver Greys at the recent Carlisle show, I think it only fitting that I reply to Alf Horne in this matter. I did discuss this with him at this show, so I will again render my own interpretation of this standard.

As Alf Horne stated (May 8) as per standard, rich blue black undercolour is correct. Where Mr Horne is wrong is that it doesn't state what depth of blue black. How could, say, a light Silver Grey have the same

undercolour as a dark Silver Grey. If it had, then the top colour would be different, making the mouse either a medium or dark Silver Grey.

All proper Silver Greys have blue black skin of a various nature; no standard mentions to what depth this must be.

Mr Horne is assuming all Silver Greys should be the same colour at the base. In fact, the same as his own dark Silver Greys. Who is to state what depth of rich blue black these should be?

BE PREPARED

Some points to watch for in the summer months

WITH THE advent of the warmer months the keeping and breeding of mice becomes a little easier. The stock breed more freely and the young seem to grow faster, bigger and better. One has to watch that the mousery does not become too hot and stuffy and adequate ventilation is a must. Ventilation, not only in the mousery but also the boxes, must have an adequate influx of fresh air. Is it Jude in The Fancy Mouse who says perforated zinc is quite inadequate in this respect and that nothing less than wires with 3/8 in gaps between will allow adequate ventilation.

I am of the opinion that wires are desirable if only because the mouse breeder can see into the boxes and perhaps spend a quiet half-hour watching the mice run around.

The late Percy Ashley, probably one of the greatest breeders and exhibitors this club has ever had, was dead against wire bars on breeding boxes. He maintained that should a wild mouse 'take lodgings' in a mousery then the uninvited guest would attack the fancy mice through the bars or even mate through the bars.

All in all, I think one should not be too dogmatic about breeding box construction but remember mice must breathe.

If you are new to the mouse Fancy you might discover something new this summer too. You might see little red specks on your mice. These specks are slightly smaller than a pin head and are lice. We in the Fancy are very polite and usually refer to them as mites. I very much doubt that they are the same or a related creature to the one that will live in the crack of a poultry house and travel along the perch and take a supper of blood while the hen is sleeping. Still, parasites they are, and serve no useful purpose in the mousery. They are easily cleared from the mice. DDT powder will do the trick on adult mice; but I like to use the less toxic pyrethrum powder on baby mice to clear them of mites, alias fleas, alias lice.

Baby mice can take a battering from these blood sucking parasites. I have heard the theory that hay breeds these fleas or at least encourages them, whereas paper shavings discourages them or inhibits their spreading.

The obvious connection between hay and lice is the wild mouse. A hayrick or barn is usually riddled with wild mice. Wild mice, in fact most wild animals, have their quota of body parasites. There must be lice eggs in the hay, and these must get transferred to your fancy mice if you use hay as bedding.

If you eradicate fleas from your mice with DDT/pyrethrum and eggs from your boxes with ammonia disinfectant, the easiest way to get another infestation is to go out and buy another bale of hay.

During the warmer months with higher temperatures, food will quickly go stale in the boxes, soft food will dry out quickly and milk put in the wet bread will go sour in a matter of hours. Soft food should be made wetter now and cut out the milk. A little dandelion leaf or flower, will be appreciated, or perhaps a piece of carrot. The mice will receive vitamins as well as extra moisture this way. TONY SHEPPARD

Books on Mice

THE FANCY MOUSE. By A C Jude. This book by a former president of the National Mouse Club is the standard work on mice. Every aspect of breeding, showing, management, colour inheritance and simple genetics is fully covered. Price 8s 4d post paid (full cloth).

MICE FOR THE HOBBYIST, EXHIBITOR AND SCIENTIST. By J Wood. A practical guide to their breeding, general management and exhibiting. Price 2s 10d post paid.

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