



Newsletter

Term: **Winter** | Issue **10** | August 2023

Common **External Parasites**

Lice

Our most common external parasite.

Birds are infected by being in very close contact with other infected pigeons but, very interestingly, more commonly infected from lice transported by the pigeon fly. The lice acts as a “jockey” riding on the “jockey”.

The whole life cycle is spent on the pigeon. There is no free-living stage. It is either on the pigeon or on the pigeon fly.

The female, after mating, lays up to 9 eggs a day. These eggs are sticky and adhere to the feathers of, mainly the inside of the wing, where it is warmest. (Between wing and body.)

The eggs hatch in 3-5 days. The larvae go through a few stages of development to eventually become adults.

The mature larvae, called nymphs, are smaller and lighter-brown in colour than the adults. This difference can be seen if you examine the parasite closely.

These nymphs and adults feed on feather scales and bloom, causing little irritation.

Many eggs are removed when a bird preens itself. Fewer lice are seen in a healthy pigeon in comparison with an ill pigeon, who is less inclined to preen itself.

Pigeon fly

Also seen commonly called a “Jockey”.

The interesting life cycle starts with the female producing an egg that stays in the abdomen. It hatches inside the fly, producing larvae that progress through three stages of development. These larvae feed on milk glands in the abdomen of the fly. They feed on the female before they are passed out as, firstly a light-coloured soft pupa which later becomes a harder brown-coloured pupa. Remarkably, these pupa that are passed are the same size as the female.

The pupa roll off the pigeon, landing anywhere in the loft or environment. The most common site being the nest bowl.

The fly is best controlled at this stage. If lofts and nest pans are cleaned regularly, and the droppings buried or burned, the life cycle would be broken at this stage without having to use insecticides.

The fly would be controlled in your own loft.

The only other source of infection would be from other pigeons. In most cases this would be in the race baskets.

Quill mite

Not as common as lice and pigeon fly.

The whole life cycle is spent on the bird.

The mite is seen close to the shaft of the wing feathers. It feeds on feather scales and lymph from the shaft, causing irritation.

Treatment of these conditions

- Avian insect liquidator.
- Scatt
- Moxyvet-Plus

Scatt and Moxyvet-Plus would be the best to use for the quill mite.

The active ingredient of both of them, Moxidectin, needs to be absorbed into the bloodstream of the pigeon in order to kill the mite, which can be deep-seated in the feather quill.

Topical insecticides may not be as effective.

Insecticides in the bath water

Insecticidal sprays are registered for use as a **spray**.

Many fanciers use some of these products in the bath water.

The problem we have here is....

- Whatever the active ingredient – if it is given at too strong a dilution, regardless of the active ingredient being supposedly relatively safe, it is going to be toxic. Toxicity symptoms may not be obvious (subclinical).
- If too weak a dilution, it will be ineffective.
- Pigeons always drink their bath water before bathing. A certain amount of insecticide would be absorbed into the system.

When we work with insecticide the instructions tell us not to eat, drink or smoke while working with the insecticide. Wear gloves and wash hands immediately etc. etc.

BUT... we add it to their bath water so that they can drink it!

This is surely not a good idea.

- Some insecticides (especially Fipronil) when absorbed, are stored in the fat of the pigeon. If this pigeon were to lose weight at any stage, the insecticide would be released into the blood stream possibly causing subclinical symptoms a second time (first when it was taken in originally and secondly when it is released into the system again).
- Many fanciers use a product that contains Fipronil and Imidocloprid. This is a product registered for use in dogs and cats. It is **NOT** registered for use in birds.

There is an unregistered product that is exactly the same as the one registered for use in dogs and cats. This one is used very commonly.

Products containing these two actives would be relatively safe to use **as a spray**. They are popular and effective if the necessary precautions were taken but adding them to the water is **NOT** advisable because...

- Fipronil does **not mix** very well with water. The active ingredient would possibly sink to the bottom of the bath making it ineffective as an insecticide anyway.
- Imidocloprid is listed as being **very toxic** for pigeons. It would be relatively safe as a spray but not in a product added to the bath water.
- Symptoms of **toxicity** to both of these products in humans are listed as headache, tremors, dizziness, weakness, seizures and tiredness.

We are not going to **see** these symptoms in pigeons but are they perhaps not subclinical? Fortunately, most fanciers bath their pigeons on Sundays allowing them a long time to recover from any deleterious effects.

What happens when we bath them on the day of basketing?

How are we to know if the birds are not suffering from symptoms similar but milder than those shown in man? Would it not affect homing ability???

Some may feel that all of what is discussed above is to a certain extent speculative, but certainly food for thought.

Permethrin products are generally considered to be the safest but again only used as prescribed - **as a spray**.

We hear many reports of Permethrin and related products being used in bath water. Although less toxic than the actives described above, the same conditions apply – making the concentration too strong is toxic and if given too weak it would be ineffective.

The common sprays that are used are **Medpet's Avian Insect liquidator** containing Permethrin, Piperonyl Butoxide which acts synergistically with the Permethrin and Methoprene, an insect growth regulator.

This product is registered for use in birds as a **spray**.

Insecticides that CAN be used in the drinking or bath water.

Moxidectin products can be used in this way.

Moxivet-Plus is used in the drinking water as a remedy for external and internal parasites.

It would be safe to use in bath water generally given as half strength.

In closing....

There are many mainly Permethrin family products used in agriculture. Please remember that these are used for spraying crops.

They do not contain any “buffers” for use in animals. They would cause irritation when used in mammals and birds.