

# Pigeon Breeding — An International Market

JOYCE BUYP

York County Correspondent  
NEW FREEDOM (York Co.)

—Cradling a small, plump bird in his hands, Marvin Angle chuckles that he has heard every pigeon joke there is.

The New Freedom pigeon breeder makes that observation with a good-natured laugh, while showing obvious pride in his loft filled with cooing, nesting prizewinners.

Angle, a third-generation pigeon breeder, specializes in exhibition birds. His bloodlines, breeding, and show knowledge have won him national acclaim and continuing judging invitations across the U.S. and in Canada. In recent years, he has exported numerous prize-winning birds to buyers in Kuwait and Malaysia.

Birds that Angle and nearly 900 other members of the National Pigeon Association breed, show, and sell are a far cry from those in flocks of wild pigeons common to farms across the country. Like any prized breeding species, these exhibition pigeons are carefully mated for enhancement of desirable characteristics, identification tagged, have recorded pedigrees, and are health-certified for show and sale.

"There are 238 color combinations in the breed, from solid white to reds, yellows, bronzes," said Angle, pointing out desirable colors and type conformation traits on his prize-winning Gazzi pigeons. When several colors combine in a mottled, multicolor blend, their coloration is called "grizzles."

Gazzis are a type of Modena pigeons, a species of round, plump-breasted bird more resembling a small chicken than the familiar shape of a wild pigeon. Angle breeds five species of pigeons, including the heavier Hunarian types. He also breeds and raises homing pigeons, not for racing competition but because of their excellent parenting skills and ability to raise chicks of other pigeons. Some of the offspring of the racers he donates to inner-city youngsters getting started in the hobby of pigeon breeding and racing.

"My grandfather was a 'squab man' who raised and dressed young pigeons for restaurants in Chicago and New York," Angle said. His own father, who later became a poultry producer, began saving some of the best of the lines and became interested in exhibiting them.

When Angle was six, he contracted polio. After he temporarily lost his eyesight and use of his legs from the disease, his father got him pigeons as pets, which he could hear during his recuperation.

Angle won his first trophy at age 8, for a Hungarian silver cock. It was the start of this lifelong hobby, which his own son, Kevin, now also enjoys as a fourth-generation pigeon breeder. Father and son exhibit their pigeons as near to home as the York Fair and as far away as national shows on the West Coast.

The Angle lofts house between 300 and 400 pigeons at various ages, from thumb-size, day-old hatchlings to full-grown, two-pound adults of the larger breeds. While a pair of pigeons will mate for life, Angle prefers to cross various bloodlines. Selective inbreeding is also used in matings to enhance desirable show and type characteristics.

Pigeons reach breeding maturity at about six months. Both hen and cock care for the two eggs, which she will lay during a 48-hour period, taking turns at 12-hour nesting shifts. The chicks hatch 19 days after the first egg is laid.

For the first week of their lives, the young birds are fed "pigeon milk," a nutritious liquid produced



Top awards at National Pigeon Association shows are often in the form of beautifully handcarved breed reproductions such as the one held by Marvin Angle. A display case behind him holds many more of his awards accumulated over the years.

## Homestead Notes

by the pigeons for their tiny, featherless infants. Then, they progress to being fed by their parents the same feed that the adults consume, reprocessing in their digestive systems for the babies.

When a pigeon chick is about one week old, the small, metal identification tag is slipped over one foot and will remain there for the bird's lifetime. Different colors are used for different years, and tiny number codes identify the individual birds and its owner. Angle's coding includes the letter "A."

Pigeon shows are highly competitive, often with thousands of entries from across the country. The birds are judged on a point system based on selective traits such as tail lift, straightness of head, position of legs, and richness of feather coloration. Judges handle each bird, spreading the wings to examine their coloring, checking the body condition of the

bird, and examining the keel, or breastbone.

"I try to work with and handle the birds several hours each day," Angle said of accustoming his pigeons to the hands-on judging. "The more you handle them, the better they are about it."

Even the toenails of a pigeon are examined in judging, since each breed should have certain coloration on the feet and toenails. The Gazzi breed, one of the most competitive in numbers, should have black toenails.

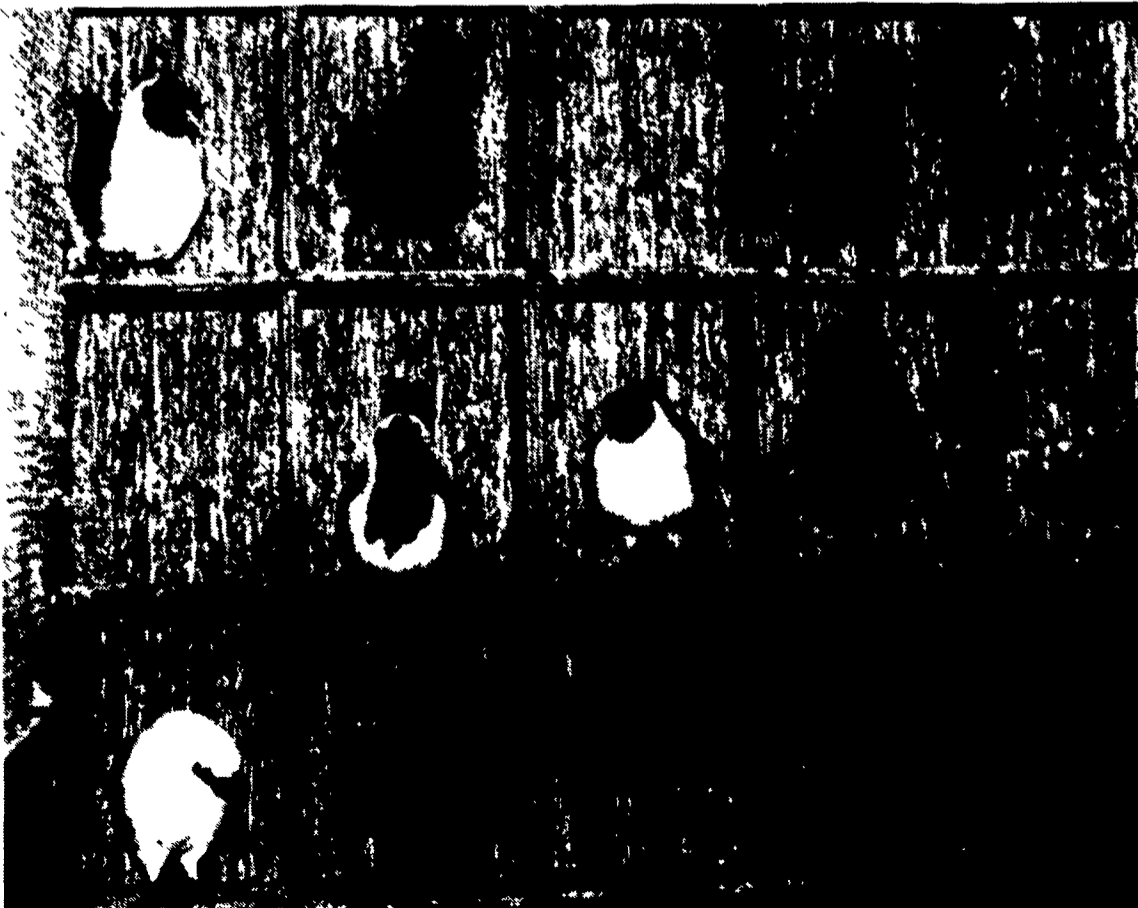
"That's why you'll always see Gazzi breeders carrying a black marker pen around at shows," said this veteran show judge. Often accompanying Angle to shows is his brother, Gerald, a Maryland resident, who is also an official for the NPA shows.

Angle's show expertise has put him in demand for "trimming" seminars for pigeon show enthu-

(Turn to Page B3)



A favorite pigeon of Marvin Angle's is this Bronze Gazzi, which has won best of show honors.



Marvin Angle's loft is designed so that individual pigeons and pairs have their own nesting or perching areas.



A pair of 10-day-old Gazzi pigeon chicks can easily be cradled in Marvin Angle's hand.