

# Wet Canker is a Race Season Disease - Born in the Breeding Season

by Dr Rob Marshall, Pigeon Veterinarian

**W**et Canker may appear in the breeding bird, the young bird or the race bird whenever "stress" is present. There are flocks which do not get wet canker and the aim of every fancier must be to develop a flock which is naturally resistant to canker. Natural resistance to canker takes time, effort and most importantly the correct family of birds. The English imports and some inbred Australian families are very susceptible to canker, but with careful breeding and the wise use of canker medicines your families can develop a good natural resistance against canker.

The most important fact about canker is that total eradication requires the wise use of the appropriate medicines plus the correct pairing of pigeons. This two pronged attack is designed to produce a flock of breeding pigeons which is totally resistant to canker without requiring the use of any medicines. This is a tall order and takes years of selective breeding and microscopic testing, but it is achievable.

Many fanciers have heard of wet canker, but few understand the real nature and importance of this illness in regard to racing performance. The difficulty for the fancier is that wet canker is very difficult to recognise without the aid of a microscopic examination of a crop wash. However, the fancier can learn the signs of wet canker and develop a health program to suit his or her needs.

*So, how do you tell if there is wet canker in your loft?*

The main indication of a potential wet canker problem during the race season is the presence of "dry" canker in the loft. The fancier who has experienced "dry" canker in babies or in adult birds at any time during the year will have wet canker in the race team. The wet canker may remain dormant and not cause any illness. However, under the stress of racing, the wet canker may become active and cause illness. Wet canker will depress the form of the fit racing pigeon and predispose it to other secondary diseases such as "Respiratory", E.coli, coccidiosis, Herpesvirus, Thrush and even Pox. These secondary diseases invade racing pigeons within one week of becoming ill with wet canker and for this reason the early detection of wet canker is necessary to protect the race team from serious illness and long term loss of form.

First of all, the fancier needs to ascertain if there is a wet canker problem in the loft. If you have canker in the adults or babies at any time in the previous 3 years then you have a potential wet canker problem in the race team and it is necessary for you to learn the signs of wet canker.

## WET CANKER CAUSES:

1. Green and watery droppings.
2. Poor race results with good returns.
3. Decrease in powder down feathers in the loft.
4. Loss of buoyancy.
5. Feathers harsh, dry with decreased bloom.
6. Lazy loft flying, poor tossing times.
7. Crop falls to empty overnight.
8. Birds eat more.
9. Occasional vomiting.

Wet Canker will cause a decreased performance when racing as well as predisposing the race bird to other more serious illnesses including "Respiratory" and Coccidiosis.

The fancier is alerted to the possibility of a wet canker problem

when the following signs are noticed.

1. Dry canker in squeakers soon after "coming across" from the breeding loft to the flying loft.
2. Dry canker in yearlings at the end of the racing season.
3. Dry feather associated with watery droppings, green discoloration of the droppings, increased thirst, poor body condition, poor race results without heavy losses.
4. Mouth signs of tonsillitis, dirty throat and bubbles at the back of the mouth.
5. A rapid response to 2-5 days treatment using TBSL given at ½ teaspoon per litre of water made fresh daily.

The following facts are important for the fancier to improve his/her understanding of wet canker. I would like to comment a little more on each of the following statements.

*"All birds are susceptible to wet canker in the watered race basket".* Your race team is exposed to 'wet' canker whilst drinking water in the race baskets. Under the 'stress' of training and racing, the chances are that your pigeons will succumb to 'wet' canker at one or many times during the season.

However, lofts which do not experience canker in the babies or young birds during the breeding season are unlikely to develop wet canker during the racing season until the drinkers are used in the race baskets. Canker medicines are only given to protect the returning race birds from race basket water transmitted infection and should not be used at any other time. By following this rule the canker free loft will develop and maintain a strong resistance to wet canker and therefore not require canker medicines except as a preventative medicine for the returning race birds.

*"Diagnosis of Wet Canker is by microscopic examination of a crop wash or by the rapid response to treatment with TBSL".* Wet canker is one of the major causes of loss of form in the race loft and it is for this reason I recommend that the fancier with wet canker in the race flock learn the use of the microscope. The detection of wet canker via the microscope is the very best way for the fancier to manage his race team, but there are other very good methods the fancier can use to control wet canker.

The use of the microscope can help the wet canker loft enormously, because it allows the fancier to detect and medicate early in the course of the disease of wet canker before other diseases complicate the health of the race flock. However, the observant fancier can also learn the early signs of wet canker in the loft and incorporate a wet canker preventative program into the loft's health program. The important thing for the fancier to remember is that he must be sure there is in fact a wet canker problem in the loft and that he manages the problem in a way that promotes rather than depresses health and fitness.

WET CANKER IS DIFFICULT TO DETECT AND IS BEST DIAGNOSED VIA THE MICROSCOPIC EXAMINATION OF THE CROP CONTENTS VIA A CROP WASH.

"Resident" wet canker is best managed via the use of the microscope. In this way the flock is treated only when it is certain the wet canker germ is present. There are other less exacting methods of managing wet canker that can be successfully utilised by the observant fancier. There are typical symptoms of wet canker that the fancier can learn to recognize.

A preventative program is designed around the appearance of

the symptoms of wet canker as outlined above. At the first signs of the wet canker treat with TBSL. The date of treatment is noted and then the date of recurrence of wet canker is noted. The preventative medicine program is then designed around the interval between treatment and reinfection. Some fanciers race successfully on a one day a week program during racing and others prefer 2-3 day treatments each 3 weeks. This method of prevention protects the flock with "resident" canker from loss of form.

Others treat only when signs of wet canker are noted. However, this system of prevention means the flock has already lost form by the time treatment is given. The continual treatment with anticanker medicines during the race season is not advised unless there is a real wet canker problem or unless there is race basket wet canker risk.

"The day following treatment you will see the feathers become silky, the bloom return and loft activity increase". The use of the correct canker medicine will bring about an immediate response which is evident by an increased vitality and wellness. This fact can be used to the race team's advantage by medicating at the correct time to 'lift' the birds' form on the day of the race. This technique can only be used in those lofts with a "resident" wet canker problem. In lofts without wet canker this technique actually depresses form.

"Early recognition of wet canker is essential in order to prevent 'Respiratory' entering the flock". Wet canker is the most common cause of "Respiratory" disease in the race loft. A major part of "Respiratory" cure in many lofts is the correct management of wet canker.

TBSL is the best medicine for canker because it is very active against canker but does not affect form. The canker medicine TBSL has a two fold action: firstly, it eliminates any wet canker picked up in the basket and prevents it from spreading to the loft and secondly, because it is based on glucose it provides the tired race bird with immediate energy, thereby accelerating recovery.

In rare instances, TBSL may not appear to control wet canker. When this occurs it is best to phone me for advice, as it may indicate a very strong strain of canker which must then be controlled in the breeding loft or it may mean that the wet canker is secondary to another disease such as moulding disease or other "Respiratory" diseases. In these cases it is best to stop all anti-canker medicines and analyse the whole problem.

The fancier must understand the following facts concerning the management and treatment of wet canker:

- FACT 1: Do not use anti-canker medicines such as TBSL on healthy birds not exposed to canker.
- FACT 2: The preventative use of TBSL will protect the race team from race basket wet canker and will not affect the fitness or form of this race team.
- FACT 3: The use of curative doses of anti-canker medicines on the race team with no wet canker will depress the health and fitness of this team.
- FACT 4: The use of curative doses of anti-canker medicines will lift the health and fitness of the race team with wet canker and protect this team from secondary diseases such as "Respiratory".

LOFTS WITH CANKER DURING THE BREEDING SEASON WILL EXPERIENCE WET CANKER AT SOME TIME DURING THE RACING SEASON. SUCH FLOCKS REQUIRE A PREVENTATIVE PROGRAM INVOLVING THE USE OF TBSL.

To be continued next issue

## MINUTES OF MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Held at Boulderstone Road on Monday 3rd July 1995 at 7.30pm.

Present: Messrs L Mayne, I Wareing, S Carpenter, R Fewings, O Bischoff, R Chapman, K Pridham, J Jarzabek & S Mayne.

Mr C Moukas of the Craigmores Club and Mr S Paterson attended the first part of the meeting.

An inquiry was held into the selling of three pigeons for \$50 to Mr S Paterson by Mr C Moukas. The evidence from Mr C Moukas showed that the alleged pigeons were purchased from the Gawler Market, bearing other fanciers ring numbers.

The Management Committee has given Mr C Moukas the benefit of the doubt and will be further notified on this matter, as this practise is not in the best interest in the sport for the fostering of new members into the sport of Racing Pigeons in South Australia.

Minutes of previous meeting, read and confirmed.

Correspondence:

1. Convoyers Reports for Carrieton No 1, Pinnaroo No 2, Parachilna No 1 and Mittyack No 1, read and received.
2. From the South Suburban club showing concern about the programmed east line and recommending the Management Committee to change race points.
3. From Mr J Haggerty informing the Management Committee of his resignation from the Craigmores Club.
4. From Mr G Hodgins of the Payneham Club regarding the Rule concerning the racing of young birds in the Derbies rung with Overseas rings. Refer to Management Committee meeting minutes dated the 5th June 1995 under General Business, Item 2, Foreign Rings (Overseas). This Rule will apply from 1996 and for this year 1994 Overseas rings will not be eligible for the 1995 Young Bird Derby Events.
5. From Mr W Moyle of the South Suburban Club with suggestions for the 1996 Race Programme.
6. From Ray & Lyn Starick advising the Management Committee that they have resigned from the Barossa Angaston Club and wish to fly their birds in their newly formed Country Club called Teetaka Pigeon Club. *Approved.*
7. From the Southern Districts Club seeking permission to conduct their Club's Sires Produce race in conjunction with the Boorooban SAD. *Approved.*
8. From Mr S Paterson advising the Management Committee with his resignation from the Craigmores Club.
9. From the Mid Week Racing Sub-Committee with a discussion paper for the sponsorship for their races.
10. A discussion paper formulated by the Racing Pigeon Federation of WA Inc and the Independent Racing Federation Inc for the inclusion in the new Animal Welfare Act of WA. Hoping to formulate a similar code of practises in all states of Australia for the keeping of racing Pigeons.
11. From the Central Districts Club concerning Mr C Moukas of the Craigmores Club.
12. From the Nyunga Club concerning Mr C Moukas of the Craigmores Club.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

1. 1995 Life Rings shall be 40 cents each. The enclosed Ring Order form must be completed in DUPLICATE and returned to the SAHPA RING SECRETARY by no later than