

The homing ability of the pigeon has been utilized by man since biblical times. Ancient mariners would take pigeons on their boats. If they lost their way, the sailors would release the pigeons and then follow the flight path of the birds to the safety of the shore. It was perhaps in this tradition that Noah released the pigeon to determine if the waters of the great flood had receded. The first bird sent by Noah was the raven, but it failed to complete its mission and refused to venture forth from the ark. The raven is described in the Bible (Genesis 8:7) as being sent forth, in contrast to the pigeon which in the language of the Bible (Genesis 8:8) Noah "sent forth the pigeon from him." The implication of the verbiage is that the raven was merely one of the birds on the ark; the pigeon was dear to Noah and thus sent "from him" as one were to send one of his cherished possessions.

reasons other than consumption until the Second Temple Period. The Mishnah and the Talmud, written at the end of the Second Temple Period, are replete with admonitions against racing and gambling with pigeons. An interesting game, enjoyed in biblical times, involved challenging the homing and flocking inclinations of pigeons. Birds belonging to different people would be flown at the same time, with the flocks being encouraged to mingle. The owner of each flock would fly his birds is such a manner as

to entice the birds from the other flocks to join his own. The birds which

deserted their flock, were then collected and either sold or ransomed back to their owner.

The Bible does not distinguish between the breeds of pigeon, although **Talmudic** by times there were a half dozen recognized breeds. The breeds generally had descriptive names such as, baysos, house pigeons;

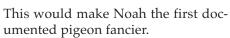
yonei aliyah, attic pigeons; and yonei shovach, dovecote pigeons. The different breeds were distinguished by their behavior, but it is unclear whether the behavior of the birds was the result of selective breeding or perhaps the condi-

tions under which the birds were raised.

One exceptional pigeon breed was the Herdosios pigeon, which was named after the infamous King Herod, who ruled Israel at the end of the Second Temple Period. It is unclear whether the breed was actually developed by Herod, or he merely imported the birds. Some speculate that the bird might have been imported from Rhodes and as a result King Herod merely manipulated the name from Hordosios to Herodosios. These birds could be distinguished from other birds by physical characteristics, most importantly their inability to forage. Indeed, these birds needed to be maintained exclusively in the home. It is unclear if the Herodosios pigeons still exist, but based on Talmudic as well as the description of Josephus, who lived shortly after the Herod's reign, the Herodosios pigeons were probably similar to the breeds now known as the Roman runts or the Hungarian house pigeons.

Although Talmudic law does distinguish between the breeds of pigeon, there is only limited discussion as to the definition of a pigeon. They were identified by a handful of physical characteristics as well as their lack of





Although it is clear that pigeons were extensively raised in biblical times, aside from Noah, there is no indication of the birds being raised for







LEFT, PIGEONS RESTING IN A TREE; ABOVE, A PIGEON IN FLIGHT; RIGHT, COLLARED DOVES.

any predatory tendencies (Hulin 59). The Talmud (Hulin 22) notes the distinction between doves and pigeons, but only so far as they can be compared and contrasted with each other. Interestingly enough, today pigeons are often derided as the rats of the sky. In the Talmudic times they were noted for their cleanliness, because unlike other birds which drank water which then dripped back from the mouth as the bird raised its head to swallow, the pigeon drank continuously from the water without any backwash.

In the two thousand years since the Talmud was codified, hundreds of pigeon breeds have been developed. Pigeons are raised in a rainbow of colors; the feathers have been manipulated to a dazzling array of patterns. Even the basic feather and bone structure of the breeds have been altered. The dominant scientific theory for the last three hundred years has been that all the domestic breeds of pigeon share an exclusively rock dove ancestry. There are dissenters who question the possibility that so many varied breeds could have been derived exclusively from the rock dove. The position of the Orthodox Union is that pigeons are kosher. The question which continuously arises is whether all breeds of pigeon are to be considered pigeon.

To research the pigeons, the OU has maintained a loft (that is, a pigeon coop), with a diverse selection of common meat pigeons as well as some of the more exotic breeds including owls, Brunner pouters, runts, frizzles, archangels and New York highfliers. Fantail pigeons were observed and kept in the loft of MD Laufer. The basic behavior of the pigeons was observed as well as their communi-

cation between other members of the respective breeds. With the exception of the runts, the birds were bred and eggs were produced. The breeds examined were observed to eat the same food and flock together, with the exception of the runts and the Brunner pouters, since the respective sizes required separate housing for these breeds. The shape, but not the size, of all the eggs observed was similar, as was the texture.

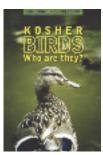
Pigeons tend to be monogamous and when not purchased as a pair, many of the birds seemed to disregard species classification when choosing a mate. Currently, the majority of the pigeon breeds raised for meat are the biblical pigeon (or some mutation) and are accepted as kosher by the Orthodox Union. The more exotic breeds are rarely raised for food, being slow to mature and extremely valuable. However, the research continues if nothing more than as a scholarly pursuit.

Rabbi Chaim Loike has served as OU Kosher rabbinic coordinator since 2007, administering egg, spice and

chemical companies. His BTUS Summer 2008 feature, "Birds of the Bible — Solving the Mystery of Which of the Species Are Kosher and Which Are



Not," as well as "The Partridge of the Prophet," BTUS winter 2009, have elicited much interest and positive feedback. Rabbi Loike co-stars with his exotic birds in the much acclaimed



classroom DVD, "Kosher Birds Who are They" (which can be ordered from S a f r a n e @ o u . org), part of OU Kosher's expanded educational outreach. Rabbi Loike received his BS and

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