

My Life in Pigeons: Ongoing Nostalgic Event from My Childhood

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Abstract

Moragacha village is under Khoksa upazila of Bangladesh. When I was 10 years, I saw my father's last one pair tumbler pigeons. Before this he had lots of Local, Tumbler, and Lotan pigeon. This study was conducted from my parents' conjugal life 1967 to date. I am the second child of my parents and was born in 1974. From the present days information that last two pigeons were 'Pakistani Highflyer' male and 'Turkish Highflyer' female. Moreover, I saw that pigeons when it used to fly in the sky, only two black dots were visible and flying endurance was 4 - 5 hours. Now this Moragacha village is totally devoid of those types of tumbler pigeons. A big market which was organized every Saturday in Kumarkhali thana of Bangladesh but now I do not find a good-graded tumbler pigeon. Huge non-selective crosses (inbreeding and outbreeding) lose the purity of the extant tumbler pigeons. Now in Bangladesh, flying tumblers are considered on its flying endurance not on the great height.

Keywords: *Khoksa Upazila; Highflyer Pigeon; Pigeon Tumbling; Racing Pigeon Club*

Introduction

Khoksa Upazila is under Kushtia district with an area of 99.17 sq km, is bounded by Kumarkhali upazila on the North, Shaillkupa on the South, Pangsha on the East, and Kumarkhali on the West. Main river is Gorai. The area of Khoksa town is 3.13 sq km. It has a population of 6192; male 51.24%, female 48.76%; density of population is 1978 per sq km. Literacy rate among the town is 44.5%. Khoksa thana was turned into an upazila in 1983. It consists of 3 union parishads, 79 mouzas and 92 villages. The percentage of Muslim, Hindu and others are 83.88, 16.08 and 0.04. Here colleges are 4, high schools 13, government primary schools 42, primary schools 27, madrasas 7; mostly notable of which is Khoksa Janipur Pilot High School (1900) where the writer of this paper studied upto two months in class six. Main occupations are in agriculture 33.58%, weaving 11.72%, agricultural labourers 21.77%, wage labourers 3.98%, transport 1.86%, construction 1.21%, service 5.01%, commerce 13.18%, industry 1.39%, others 6.6%. Main crops are paddy, wheat, jute, potato and sugarcane. Extinct and nearly extinct crops are indigo, barley and corn. Main markets are Khoksa, Samaypur, Gofgram, Moragacha, Chandat, Ektarpur, Ganeshpur and Kali Mela. There is no remarkable market held in Khoksa so that people go to Kumarkhali market for buying or selling everything as well as pigeons in every Saturday (Md. Kamruzzaman; map of Khoksa upazila).

Performances of pigeons have been developed over a much longer period of 6 or 7 centuries [1]. Rollers, tumblers and highfliers are closely related birds have come from common stock. They have been bred for their ability to fly at height and perform gyrating aerial acrobatics. Highfliers are divided into endurance breeds such Tippler and Donek (Turkish Tumbler) that fly at a great height. There are several tumbler breeds which do not tumble. Most of which did at one time perform but through non-selective breeding this ability was out from them. Where from the first tumblers came this is unknown because some of the breeds are so ancient they started before history was being written and recorded. Iranian and Tehrani highflying tumblers are all about the endurance fliers of Iran. Experience

with performing pigeons in USA started since 1983, in addition to the 60's and early 70's. In 1928, the Domestic Flight was bred for show purposes alone and no longer flown. In 1936, ten clubs were combined into the Metropolitan Pigeon Association, which issued over 12,000 bands during the first half of 1937. 1915 was one of the first outstanding breeders of the American Domestic Flight Pigeon [2].



Figure 1: Map of Khoksa.

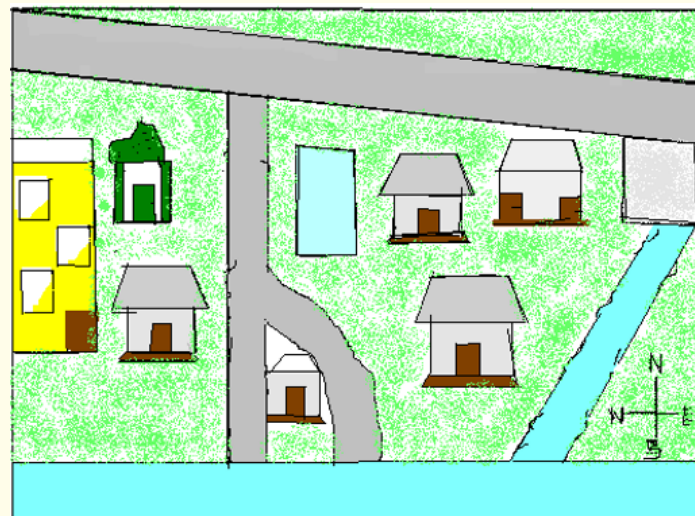


Figure 2: Moragacha village depicted by author's daughter 'Tusty'.

Materials and Methods

Pakistani highflyer: Tipplers are endurance high-flying pigeons that have been selectively bred to fly at very high altitudes for extended periods of time (the world record is 19 - 20 hours non-stop flying). Highfliers (Tipplers and Doneks) ascend to such great heights that they appear as dots in the sky. Tipplers are flown with 3 - 5 bird groups. Tipplers in Australia generally fly for around 6 hours.



Figure 3: Pakistani Highflyer (dobaaz).



Figure 4: Pakistani Highflyer in Dhaka.

Turkish highflyer: This pigeon performs by spiraling downward and vertically from great heights at high speeds until they reach close to the ground. Their speed is so fast that an atmospheric plume is sometimes seen streaming behind them.



Figure 5: Turkish Highflyer.



Figure 6: Muffed tumbler in Kushtia.

Other colour patterns: From the Pakistani and Turkish Highflyer Blue Rock, muffed, ash-red, blue-bar pied, checker pied, mealy pied were formed. That time red crested Lotan was available with these tumblers. I saw the above colour variation in Kumarkhali pigeon market in my childhood.



Figure 7: Squab of that last pair.



Figure 8: Blue.



Figure 9: Blue-bar pied.



Figure 10: Chequer-bar pied.



Figure 11: Mealy-pied.



Figure 12: Red Lotan.

Flying performance

Flying performance since a young age is remarkable. Young pigeons should fly early in the morning when there is little wind of each month from May to November (World Cup 20 Bird Rules, adopted fall 1995, revised January 1999). All birds must be released at the same time. Also, birds that have landed must not be allowed to take into the air again. Good birds should not be flown every day. The lazy birds should be flown every day. The key is repetition to increase their stamina and develop strong muscles. They should carry very small amount of body fat. Their feathers must be in perfect condition with correct diet. The birds are given 2 or 3 days rest before the race. Pakistani/Hindi/English Tipplers with their Tehrani birds to enhance the endurance level of their birds [3]. Duration of flight is determined by training, feeding and most important of all its bloodline. Some highfliers have lost their ability to getting back its home due to strong wind. Need to select these birds for performing on apple-shaped body and straight keel. Pigeon performs best when it is hungry. When it flew within a few minutes it was out of vision. Just two black dots (if parents are black) were found in the sky. Most of the juveniles were lost at the first stages of flying. From my memory, probably I have lost 7 - 8 pairs of those highfliers juveniles in my life.



Figure 13: This is that sky where the author enjoyed pigeon flying in 1984 of Moragacha village.

Breeding: From the last pair (male Pakistani Highflyer x female Turkish Highflyer) all squabs were same as parents. After some generations suddenly only one squab was silver black-barred wing.

Feeding: Feed for these pigeons were wheat, paddy, rice, mustard, and small pieces of bread. Rearing was open and they were moved freely in the yard.



Figure 14: Author with his cousin (Masud, sky-coloured guarangy).



Figure 15: Now our residence.

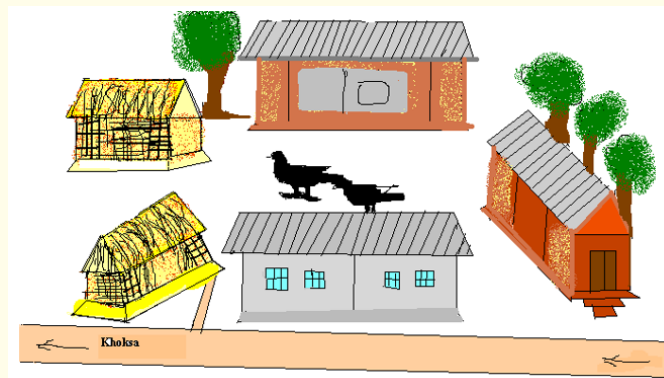


Figure 16: Inside our joint family in Moragacha village.



Figure 17: Present day pigeons in village (1984) depicted by 'Tusty' (age 10).



Figure 18: Outside of our family in 1984 (Milon, 2014).

Loft: Only one loft with two chambers which I saw. One side the resting place and in another it laid eggs. At night only upper wooden cover was used to protect from predators mainly cats.

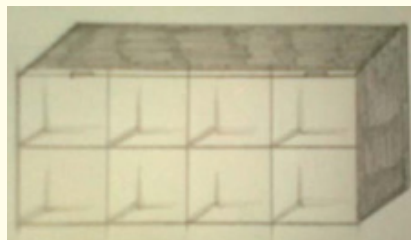


Figure 19: Loft (1967).

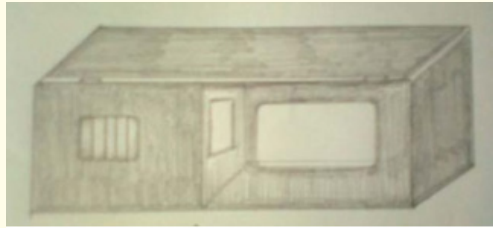


Figure 20: Loft (1984).



Figure 21: Hypothetical sketch at the present day (Milon, 2014).

Results

Our family background: Author is cordially thankful to his father Md. Jahangir Kabir who habituated to rear pigeon. He reared a lot of tumbler and lotan pigeons in his childhood. Author saw at the age of 10 only two Pakistani and Turkish Highflyer Tumbler pair. Author's father collected this pigeon from Ghaskhal village under Kumarkhali upazila, Kushtia district of Bangladesh. Author went in his father's pigeons' collected village but now that village is totally devoid of those types of pigeons. Author's mother Most. Fatema Khatun said that her husband had huge different coloured pigeons. But she didn't know the types or varieties of those pigeons. Writer's grandfather Md. Abdul Hamid saw his son's (Md. Jahangir Kabir) Lotan Pigeon (red coloured). From the personal communication to author's grandfather it seemed that this was Dasti type Lotan (continuous rolls on the ground). In that village this Lotan pigeon was called 'matibaz' in Bangla. Md. Shahjahan Kabir who is the favourite uncle of the author now is living that Moragacha village where those pigeons used to fly. He always supervised those pigeons and brought the squab for the author's demand ordered by Md. Jahangir Kabir. Finally, author is giving congratulations to his elder brother Md. Alamgir Kabir (Milon) who is four years senior than the author. From his memory he saw his father's some Wild Rock type (blue barred) tumbler pigeon in Moragacha village yard. My younger brother Md. Akramul Kabir (Sujan) who was our house photographer used the digital camera DSLR (Canon eos 600D) to snap some nice tumbler pigeons from Kumarkhali, Kushtia which were very helpful to identify various tumbler pigeons.

From my grandfather Md. Abdul Hamid and grandmother Mst. Momena Khatun they had three sons and four daughters. Only sons' were associated to pigeon rearing. My grandparents first son is Md. Humayun Kabir, second or mid born Md. Jahangir Kabir (author's father) and third Md. Shahjahan Kabir. We are three brothers. My elder brother is Md. Alamgir Kabir (Milon, businessman), I myself Dr. Md.

Ashraful Kabir (Lecturer, Zoology and writer of this paper) and my younger brother Md. Akramul Kabir (Sujan), Group Product Manager of UniMed and UniHealth Mfg. Ltd. I have only one sister 'Sheuly'. My elder brother who reared pigeons (local pigeons) but his favourite animal was Guinea Pig. My younger brother (Sujan) and sister (Sheuly) is totally devoid to rear any animals as well as pigeons.

Tumbler varieties: In Dhaka, Bangladesh there are now huge Pakistani highfliers. It has elongated body with long head and beak. Flying capability is good. Muffed tumblers are rare in entire tumbler group. I have found some in Rajshahi and Kushtia district. Blue bar pied and chequer pied is mostly common in all tumbler groups. Mealy or mealy pied colour combination is not common in Bangladesh. Firstly, Lotan Pigeon was found white in colour, then self red then blue-black chequered, black, and red patches on white ground.

Inbreeding and outbreeding: From the Wild Rock Pigeon through natural mutation the tumblers came out. Within this variety some were expert for returning home. On the other hand Lotan (shaking tumbler) also performed tumble by shaking within the fingers of the hand. Lotan (Persian word lotna means roll/tumble) is one kind of sub-bred in the tumbler variety. Some are highfliers and lost into the sky which is called cumulet (cloud). Huge tumbling variety is called house/mad/roller but scientifically tumbler is the appropriate word in case of pigeons tumbling. Selective breeding (inbreeding and outbreeding) among various tumbler pigeons including lotans all other fancy items have originated.

Causes of tumbling: Tumbling of pigeons either it performs during flying or shaking is a physiological or pathological stimulus (in a good sense) or irritability (bad senses which denotes irritation). This performance controlled by external stimuli which is associated with pain. After shaking the Lotan pigeons then release on ground and at the end of tumbling when catches this pigeons show as injurious or painful neck tremours which is really a scene of becoming death. Flying tumblers are like that. This is also an unconditional (instinct behaviour) conditional (need practice for perfection tumbles) reflex of tumbler family. It is not sure but low blood glucose level may cause this tumbling capability in pigeons. After tumbling it showed excess heartbeat and in Lotan pigeons its anxiety is common. Both are the common symptoms of low glucose level in blood. Such type of tumbling behaviours are absent in other birds. Only in pigeons from the Wild Rock first mutation occurred on this strange or peculiar characteristic.

Bangladesh Racing Pigeons Entrepreneur Ltd. (BRPEL): The history of racing pigeon in Bangladesh can be traced back to the endeavor of few racing pigeon enthusiasts who got together in 2003 and thus Bangladesh Racing Pigeon Association was born. The members who founded the club are, Rezaur Rahman Sinha, A. M. Maqsood Ahmed (Sonnet), Md. Sikender Ali, Alauddin Shopon, and Manzur Hasan Rizon. In the next few years the club reached the landmark of two hundred members within six years. Before the formation of the club there were some birds with some pigeon fanciers in the country. The first racing birds that were brought officially for the purpose were brought by A. M. Maqsood Ahmed in 2003 from UK. He brought 12 birds from London and in the same year he also brought 30 birds from Belgium. That was the beginning and today Bangladesh has approximately 20,000 racing pigeons. In the following years, Rezaur Rahman Sinha, Sikender Ali, Alauddin Shopon, and a few other members imported top grade pigeons from Netherlands, Belgium, and Great Britain. The main success of BRPEL is in its organizing capability by providing management and medical support to the members. In the recent past, renowned names in the racing pigeons' world such as Eijerkamp, Marcel Sangers, Vredeveld came to Bangladesh with their birds. It is a great honour for a country with only a few years of pigeon racing history behind it (www.brpel.com).

Discussion

In Mughal pastime emperor Akbar reared a lot of pigeons including tumblers and that time it was a great hobby to fly those pigeons regularly [4]. Darwin mentioned in his life time in 1859 [5] through 'Origin of Species' that tumblers are originated from the Wild Rock. Variation under domestication a lot of other pigeons as well as tumbler varieties have come [6]. Genetic investigation of roller and tumbler by selective breeding [7], tumbling behaviour of pigeons [8], tumblers availability with the other fancy pigeons or bird shop in Bangladesh [9], common tumbler breeds in Bangladesh [10], grading system of common ten fancy pigeons including tumblers [11] and management

and breeding of Lotan Pigeons [12] these were huge task on tumbler pigeons which were great helpful during this study. First scientific study and compilation of all tumbler pigeons were completed by Levi in 1941 [13] in his book 'The Pigeon'. Various tumblers depending on their flying endurance and special colour pattern were remarkable [14]. Scientific name of the tumbler pigeon (*Columba revolvens*) first mentioned by Eaton in 1858 [15] with other types barred, blue, baldhead, and mottle. Tegetmeier [16] described Short-faced Tumbler and Lotan/Ground Tumbler in India in his book and common tumblers such as exhibition tumbler, tippler, roller and some foreign tumblers noted by Lyell in 1981 [17]. Due to the import of fancy pigeons in Bangladesh our native (Indian) tumblers are crossed with exotic ones so that huge colour combinations are found at present and flying practice is less that is why pigeons are becoming bulky and cannot fly well. As Bangladesh is the stock of tumbler pigeon we could reorganize tumbler pigeons club and through training we can flourish our pigeons. In Bangladesh we have remarkable pigeon fancier organizations but research is not available. Selective or judicious breeding is a must for stabilizing this breed. But in Bangladesh it is a great alarming that haphazard crosses between and among breeds we are losing such pure or semi-pure parent day by day.

Conclusion

From the very beginning in Bangladesh, pigeon flying amusement especially tumbler pigeons were kept. It is very obvious that Wild Rock Pigeon is the leading for all fancy pigeons and after this incident lots of tumbler pigeons were used for producing the extant many fancy breeds. In this case, selective breeding by the fanciers played an effective role. In fact, some unconscious pigeon keepers could not maintain the pure breed for lacking adequate knowledge of fancy pigeons. Though in Bangladesh we have lots of tumbler pigeon in most pet shops but need to know the real markings of those exotic breeds. With this tumbler pigeon so called lotan (one type of tumbler pigeon) was very common in Bangladesh. Depending on the colour pattern, flying endurance, tumbling pattern as well as physical fitness ensures the real value of these pigeons. In tumbler group all types of pattern like bar, chequer, black, pied, mealy, bald-headed, short-faced, and mottle are available. Due to the non-selective breeding of tumbler group with other fancy breeds we face some problems in pigeons. It shows some irregular markings on feather, lack of real physique, lack of flying capability, and bulkiness. Bangladesh is the home of tumbler pigeons and it is surely possible to establish many effective pigeon clubs and genetics lab for the higher studies.

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