

## Pigeon – Basic Care

- Pigeons are gregarious and operate in groups within which they form monogamous pairs.
- The average young research bird will likely be a white carneaux or a white king.
- Males are called cocks, females are called hens.
- Babies from 0-4 weeks are squabs, from 4-7 weeks are squeakers, and from 8 weeks onward are called youngsters.
- The breast muscles of pigeons are very well developed, and the meat is uniformly dark.
- Birds are easily frightened, everyone working around them should be aware that any sudden movement or loud noise may upset the entire flock. Dimming room lights may be of help.
- Males and females of a species of birds may differ in size feather confirmation and color pattern. There are also many species that do not exhibit sexual dimorphism.
- In most female birds, only the left ovary and oviduct are functional. The right ovary and oviduct eventually degenerate persisting only in rudimentary form.
- Birds do not possess accessory sex glands.
- Minimum cage sizes are specified in The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, exceptions must be approved by the IACUC.
- Cages should be large enough to permit normal physical activity and social interaction. Perches of varying diameters should be included in caging.
- Pigeon cages are hard to keep clean, pigeons are continually losing feathers shedding feather dust, and spilling grain and grit on the floor.
- Should be fed a high quality, commercially prepared, nutritionally complete pigeon chow or grain mixture. Pigeons also need granite grit for gizzard function and oyster shell for egg production ad libitum.
- Fresh water should be fed ad libitum.
- Pigeons are different from most birds by drinking with their head down all the time. Other birds take a sip and then raise their heads to let the water run down.
- Enrichment should be provided unless specified in the protocol and approved by the IACUC.
- Examples of enrichment:
  - Perches
  - Other pigeons
  - Food treats
- To hold a pigeon, put its legs between your index and second fingers and put your thumb over the lower back, holding the wing feathers firmly against the body.
- For more specific species information including physiologic data, husbandry and breeding requirements, or procedural information, please contact the Office of Laboratory Animal Care (865-974-5634).