

Visit to Willem van Zijl

By Nico van Bente

On arrival we decided to see the pigeons first and talk later.

Before we entered the lofts Willem let his pigeons out to 'free fly' and slyly remarked: "You must have known I only painted my pigeon loft the other day"



His loft did indeed look superb, the inside all neat and clean and plenty of space, no overcrowding, so less stress for the birds. Willem breeds with 6 pair of Oriental Frills, Blondinettes, a breed for the specialist due to the demanding 'breed points' required in a good specimen; the Blondinette must combine form, colour and structure, a well constructed body, the exceptional head shape, the correct colour and markings and off-course the chest frill or 'Jabot' - that is common to all 'Owl' breeds - and foot feathering. The head form is the most difficult to breed correctly, the shape and substance needs only to vary in a minute degree, to lack harmony and make the difference between an excellent and poor specimen.

You must have known I only painted my pigeon loft the other day, was his remark. Willem was enjoying his holidays, and not only invited me over to restore his internet connection, but to see his pigeons as well.

Breeding needs a portion of luck as well as good foundation stock and experience, but first comes the 'foundation' stock, a 'feel' for the breed and off-course the percentage of luck! Some is 'trail and error'; you match two birds together that you think 'match', the result?, not wonderful. Another pair, seemingly not quite so well matched and they produce



He never bred two blacklaced Blondinettes, with already such a beautiful lacing at only 25 days old

excellent specimens! This is where good foundation stock is important and the experience of 'knowing' your birds and having a set 'Goal'.

After 6 years of breeding, last year Willem was able to exhibit a perfect Brown Laced Blondinette, the one and only that he kept from 25 youngsters, but this year he seems to have exceeded even that bird with a superb Black Laced Blondinette, a real beauty!

Below: A promising young Blondinet, 12 days old, with a lot of substance in the front head and a stout beak. Willem likes that a lot.



Willem is 50 years of age and well known in the Pigeon Fancy, having become a member of the Society Loosduinen & Omstreken nearly 30 Years ago, you could almost say that Willem was nurtured 'from mothers milk' onwards into the Pigeon Hobby! as his mother was breeding Pouters and several uncles, still well known in the hobby, were breeders as well. Willem is well inform about the hobby today and no-one could say he is 'bowling from the sidelines' on the contrary, he is always willing to 'stick his neck-out' for things he believes and gives his full co-operation in.

As a Member of the Committee that manages the Kleindierencentrum in Zuiderpark (Meeting centre for Pigeon- and other small animals breeders) in a Municipal Park in the Hague, you will find Willem 'doing his bit' every Saturday doing odd-jobs, repairing or making cages for the Pigeon Society EZHSV, of which he is the Chairman, in-fact he is always busy and takes it to heart when he is left alone to do all the many small jobs needed to present the pigeon hobby to the public, he finds it inconceivable that so few are willing to 'volunteer' for the good of the hobby. Luckily there are also pleasant jobs to do! The Committee is already organising a big party for the 75th Jubilee of the Pigeon Society EZHSV, which will be held during the November Show in the Hague.

Right:

Breeder of this brownlaced Satinet female is Mr. Jacobs, living in St. Niklaas, Belgium. A female with a beautiful type, a nice colour and with fine facing. May be the head may have some more length and substance in the front.



With all this, '**solidarity**' is the keyword for Willem; he did not take long to decide, when the Limburgse Sierduiven Vereniging (Fancy Pigeon Society) invited the EZHSV to be part of their one-day Show. With a tourer, 12 EZHSV members and some judges set-out for what turned-out to be a remarkable day! The reception was overwhelming and they all stayed until late after the Show was finished, everyone had a great time together, visitors and hosts. In Willems opinion, such events are the highlights of the hobby, this and visiting foreign Shows to expand and improve communications within a hobby that is loosing more fanciers than it is gaining; the 'social' aspect is supremely important.

More Board Functions.....

We have already mentioned some of the ways that Willem is involved in this hobby but there are more! Willem is Chairman of the 'Pigeon Judge Association' as-well, not an 'easy' position with so many 'critical' fellow Judges. He is of-course a Judge himself and judging by the number of invitations he gets, both in the Netherlands and abroad, a popular one! Unfortunately he cannot comply with all, as his work as an Interior Designer takes a lot of time and energy, he has still found time to take-up the Chairmanship of the 'Meeuwenclub' (Owl Club) and even the position as Show Director of the 'Royal Dutch Avicultura Exhibition'. This last function is very 'dear to his heart', as are the many contacts and friends he has within the organisation. Is it not strange? That whenever a search is made, with the ever diminishing resource, of those 'who can', 'or will?' take on these positions, how often the same names keep coming forward! Luckily someone always seems to 'step forward' and there is hopefully always someone to step forward at short notice!, although at times things do seem to 'almost' turn-out differently.



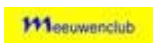
The Royal Dutch Association Avicultura. At this show, Willem was the most important man of the pigeon department for years and years. Today he is Member of Honour and as yet responsible as Show Manager.



As the President of the Pigeon Judge Association, he developed the idea of a badge with the NBS-logo.



President of the EZHSV, one of the largest pigeon fanciers clubs, which is celebrating her 75-years Jubilee.



President of the Frillclub, an important Breeder Club for specialists.



Willem is President of Honour of the VVF, the Dutch Valenciana Pouter Fanciers Club.

Is there a Future for the Pigeon Hobby?

Willem is of the opinion that the Hobby will never die, despite a loss each year of 3% of NPS (Netherlands Pigeon Society)registered pigeon breeders. The decrease seems likely for the near future, but a stabile core of around 1.000 breeders in Holland will remain. In the meantime, something does need to be done, he bubbles with ideas! Despite a Show Diary that is chock-full, the escalating cost of staging the Shows, exhibiting, travelling, the constant telephoning, checking entries and forms for days on end, moreover three big Union Championship Shows all in the same month, everyone fishing in the same

lake! and no guarantee whatsoever who will go where and more and more Shows in the month of January. In his opinion, Willem sees no need for the Union Pigeon Show to occur in January; in Germany the VDT Show (the main Pigeon Show in Germany) takes place in late November/early December, when pigeons are at their best condition.

A full Show Diary

Another useful idea, is to adjust the District Shows within the Union; if they were all planned in the same weekend, the Championship Diploma, which has to be gained by three different Judges awarding a Certificate each to the one bird, would become much more valuable. Also the distribution of leg rings(bands) two months later, may relieve some pressure. As many pigeon breeders experience, the best young's are mostly hatched in May, Willem says.

Finally

Willem has one other long time 'wish', to facilitate the recognition of all colours at all breeds. Less rules and less strictly organised, so that breeders are encouraged rather than discouraged from creating new breeds or colours. That would be in keeping with 'modern' pigeon breeding, giving the breeders an opportunity to create something 'new', the judges deciding the 'worth' of the creation and adding more interest to the hobby.

One of the first pigeonbreeds which Willem was successfully keeping for many years, was the Valenciana Pouter.



This painting, made from a photograph by one of his colleagues, is a perfect and expressive rendering of a champion pigeon from Willem's loft. Unfortunately, his colleague became handicapped and can not paint anymore. Up to now, everyone will agree that the pigeon on this painting still represents a real champion, even after so many years. A real pleasure to look at, for every pouterbreeder.