

# Catalonian Tumblers

*Written by: Ramón Amenós i Cos. (with thanks to Thomas Hellmann)*

*Ramón was the President of El Francolí, d'Aus de Raça from Valls/Tarragona between 1989 and 2011.  
He passed away on Friday September 23rd 2011, aged 56 .*

*This article is a testament to his untiring efforts in the promotion of the Catalonian Tumbler and the  
Spanish Small Animal hobby.*

*This article is published with the permission of his widow.*

*Dear Nico,*

*You can publish the article without problems.*

*We are proud that the events and work about which Ramón wrote, are to be published.*

*Salutacions! M<sup>a</sup> Pilar Pujol Cartañá.*



*In the above photo, left to right: Ramón Amenós, Raphael Buche Brage and José Antonin during a  
'technical' pigeon conference, held in 1994 at the University of Valls (Tarragona).*

*Photo: Archives Aviculture-Europe.*



**Left:**

**Catalonian Tumbler,**

**Yellow,  
with whitetail and frill.  
Plumage with a deep  
sheen is desired.**

**Photo: Ramón Amenós.**

**Right:**  
**Catalonian Tumbler, whitecap, (Cap-de-Frere)**  
**darkcoloured, whitebar.**  
**Owner: Ramón Amenós.**  
**Photo: Archives Aviculture-Europe.**

### **History**

Talking about the Catalonian Tumbler (basically the name "Catalonian Flying Pigeon" would be more appropriate) means talking about a breed of Oriental origin that was introduced to the Iberian Peninsula via the Mediterranean in the 14th century. Over many years the breeders in the region crossed them with other breeds in order to make them fly in large flocks and create the maximum amount of new colours and markings in an extremely creative way of breeding.

The Catalonian Tumbler is a rather small breed, with a weight between 8.8 and 11.2 ounces. Its station is rather upright, with a flattened head and medium long beak. There used to be an infinite number of patterns and colours which basically could be broken up in two large groups: first of all birds mainly white with coloured markings in the head, the wings, the tail and the breast followed by the mainly coloured birds with white markings.



The heyday of the breed was at the beginning of the 20th century in the province of Barcelona. Its downfall began with the end of the Spanish Civil War and its tremendous repercussions in all aspects of life.

**Left: Catalonian Tumblers, whitecap, bronze spangled. At the Valls Expo in 1992.**  
**Photo: Archives Aviculture-Europe.**

As well contributing to the decay of the breed were the unbearable regulations to protect the Picas, the modern Spanish Thief Pouters issued by government authorities. These regulations not only put an end to many lofts but obliged the breeders also to keep their birds locked up - something impossible in time when feed grains were so hard to come by.

### **Project rescue**

Once the existence of some forgotten loft on the Balearic Islands had been detected, the club "Associació de Criadors d'Aus El Francolí" from Valls/Tarragona set out for the rescue of the breed with a vengeance. We need to mention that this rescue project was carried out 'in extremis' because the majority of the breeders of the breed were already very elderly gentlemen. It was nearly a normal and frustrating event to reach the destination, close in on the loft just to find out that all birds had been given to the local butchery two days prior since the breeder had passed away.



**Right: Catalanian Tumbler, whitecap,  
(Cap-de-Frere) black, silver shield  
spangled.**

**Painting made by: Emilio Blasco 1995.**

The breeders Joan Vidal, Pere Prats and Damia Vinent from Menorca and Marti Ferrer from Mallorca really stood out when it came to localizing lofts. Their work was decisive since they contacted the breeders in Catalonia who visited them to regain a piece of their recent history.

These forgotten lofts were found in the most unsuspected areas and were a last sanctuary where the Catalanian Tumblers prevailed. In most cases they had come to the Balearic Islands through the animal shops of Barcelona's Rambla with the intention to cross them with the local Balearic Pintas, a breed with a certain resemblance to the Catalonians, in order to obtain new colours and markings.



If we take into consideration that in the beginning 1990's there were nearly no shows in Spain and the number of breeders was very small, it was an enormous effort to find breeders who were willing to take on the breeding of these genetic pearls in order to conserve them. This work proved fruitful for some of the varieties like the Friar's Cap (Cap de Frare), the Monks (Mongi), the Nun (Mongi Girat) and the Whitetails (Cua Blanca) because of diligent breeders, however from some of the varieties the effort remained fruitless.



**Left: Catalanian Tumblers, moorhead in  
blue and red, at Ramón Amenós.  
Moorhead is the variety with coloured  
head and tail (Cap-I-Cua).**

**Photo: Archives Aviculture-Europe.**

In Catalonia, the country of origin of the breed, there were nearly no quality specimens left and there was also little contribution to the rescue project of the Catalanian Tumbler. One of the few varieties that was still available was smaller in size, with an extremely lustrous plumage and always with a breast frill. Their breeder had them as self-bronze birds and as whitetails in black, copper, red and yellow but never wanted to let go of any of his birds despite the numerous inquiries he had from countless breeders.





Finally the variety Cap-I-Bec (Head and beak) faced extinction and I don't think there are any birds left.

*Left:*

*Catalonian Tumblers, selfs in black bronze shield chequer, but also in sulphur shield.*

*These pigeons are photographed at Ramón Amenós. The colour is possibly "kite".*

*Photo: Archives Aviculture Europe.*

### ***Process of consolidation and writing the standard***

In January 1991, Frank Barrachina and Pedro Toro judged the show of the club El Francolí. Both of them are of Spanish descent but live abroad, Barrachina in the USA, Toro in Germany. During the show Dr. Josep Antonín Cuatrecasas introduced himself and we learnt about his enormous passion for the birds and his knowledge which put new energy and ambition into the process of the recuperation of the breed.

It was he who took on the task of giving directions to interested breeders and who also took care of securing important genetic resources within the breed that happened to be discovered every now and then. As an urgent measure, he wrote the first official standard of the breed of the second era. This standard was finally approved on September 10th 1992 by the AEAA in Madrid and is still the valid standard for the breed. Even if the complicated description of the different colours and markings found within the breed has proved difficult, the standard served without any doubt to promote the breed and defined that all varieties of the Catalan Tumbler have to share the same general type.

***Below: Catalan Tumbler, Monk pigeon (Mongi), black. With (common) frill, white tail, white wings and white cap. Painting by Emilio Blasco.***







**Left:**  
*Catalonian Tumblers, black and bronze (Kite). With White wings and white cap. Photographed at the Valls Expo in 1992. Photo: Archives Aviculture Europe.*

Basically at the same time there was another group of people that actively promoted Spanish breeds and which had a number of Catalanian Tumblers, especially the variety Friar's Cap (Cap de Frare). This group was the French Club for Iberian Breeds, founded and presided by Charles Quiros, who has accomplished a tremendous job with his promotion of Spanish pigeon breeds.

However, when it comes to the Catalanian Tumblers, all breeders from Catalonia and Mallorca disapprove of his actions because he ignored any of their recommendations and wrote his own standard, contrary to the Spanish standard. He claims for example that the variety Friar's Cap (Cap de Frare) has originated in Mallorca despite all contrary advice issued by breeders, clubs, pigeon historians and even official entities, both from Catalonia and the Balearic Islands.

**Right:**  
*Flying Catalanian Tumblers, The Nun Pigeon (Mongi-Girat) in black. Painting by Emilio Blasco.*



### **The situation at present**

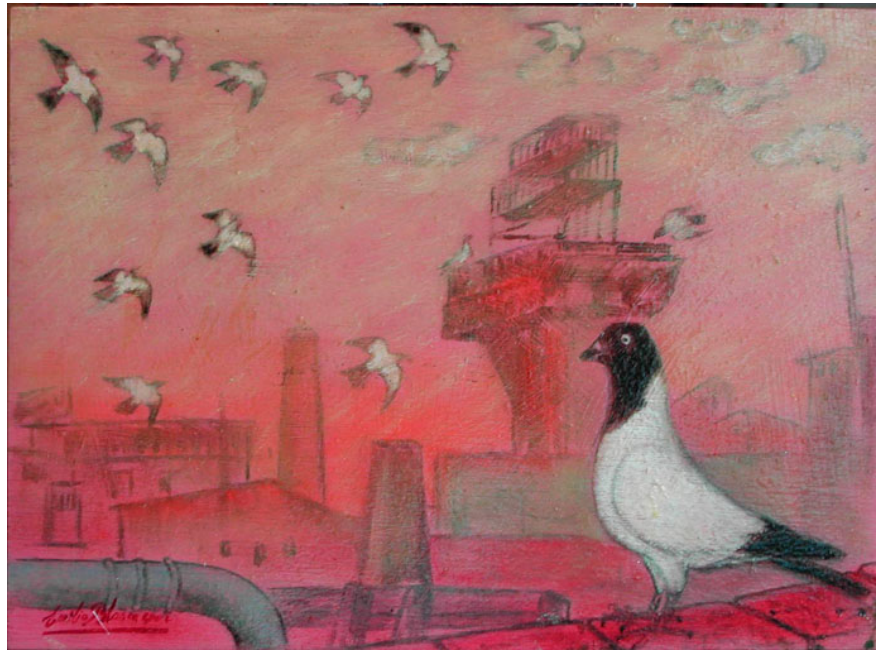
If we look at the evolution of the breed in the last decade we have to state that the breed is still endangered. The enthusiasm of the beginning 1990s has subsided a bit and though we have not reached the original low again, some of the varieties have been lost for good. The number of breeders willing to work with a breed that can offer a lot of joy and satisfaction is comparatively low and the breeders most often breed only one specific marking in a small number of colours.

The future hopes for consolidation of the breed have increased however with foreign breeders discovering the Catalanian Tumbler. We have to mention especially French, Dutch and German breeders who discovered the breeds and its diversity for themselves. A more than useful event was the foundation of the German Club for Catalanian Tumblers that really performs an important job together with some breeders of the German Club for Marchenero Pouters in breeding the Catalanians. At first, they had limited only to the Friar's Caps in a small number of colours but luckily they also took on the breeding of other varieties and colours.

The Friar's Caps (Cap de Frare) are at the moment by far the most popular variety. They are basically a coloured pigeon with only a white cap on the skull. Their eyes have to be bull and any other eye colour is considered a fault.

**Right: Flying Catalanian Tumblers, the Nun pigeon (Mongi-Girat) in black. Painting by Emilio Blasco. In the background a fly box.**

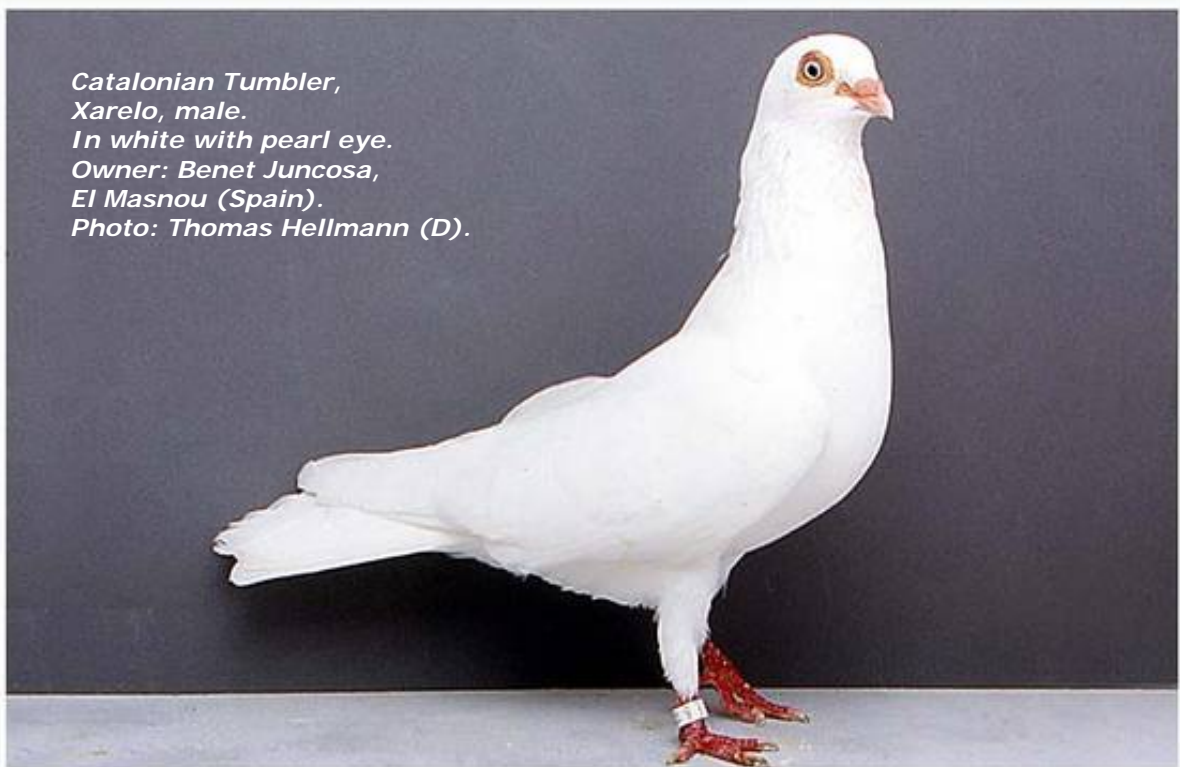
The most appreciated and classic colour of the Friar's Caps are the silver spangles called 'suavo' that come either in black, blue and red. The suavos are followed by bronze and black birds. Yellow, red and blue with white or bronze bars still exist but they are scarcely seen. The main faults found in the Friar's Caps are birds that are too big, colour in the white skull cap, occasional white flights and the beak surpassing its allowed length.



We have to keep in mind however that the old breeders were always delighted about any new and strange colour that emerged from their constant crossings, always given the fact that the new colour pleased the eye. This open-minded thinking still prevails in its country of origin and collides sometimes with the strict definition of colours found elsewhere in Europe and it's this state of mind that is possibly putting a damper on the breed's development.

The second well-established variety are the nun-marked birds called "Mongi Girat" in Catalonia. They share the marking of, for example, the Nun or the German Nun. The Mongi Girat comes mainly in black. There are a few birds in dun and some people want to establish recessive red and yellow in the breed. Where marking is concerned, the Monks (called "Mongi" in Catalanian) are the complete opposite of the Mongi Girat. Their body is coloured with only the head and a bib, flights and tail being white. The inheritance of their marking is quite stable and there are a few good specimens around, however they fail to capture the breeders' fancy. All the progress achieved in the Mongi has been brought about by two breeders. One of them is Joan Vidal from Menorca who has been breeding Mongis for decades, the other one is Toni Vidal from the Barcelona area who has not only been breeding them for years but who has also refined them a great deal.

*Catalonian Tumbler,  
Xarelo, male.  
In white with pearl eye.  
Owner: Benet Juncosa,  
El Masnou (Spain).  
Photo: Thomas Hellmann (D).*







**Left:**  
*Catalonian Tumbler, magpie (Garca) in black and red. Photographed at the Valls Expo in 1992.*  
*Photo: Archives Aviculture Europe.*

The main colours found are blue bar, silver bar, black, red, yellow and dun. The birds being too big is one of the main problems, as well we see tails that are too wide in the Mongi and an excess of white. The eyes have to be pearl, yet sometimes we see birds with yellow eyes.

One variety of the Catalan Tumbler that has decreased enormously in numbers is the white tail and it's increasingly difficult to see good birds at shows.

They are in no way threatened with extinction because there are still lofts

scattered around in which you can find them. Their breeders however do nothing to promote them among people that might have an interest in the variety. The colours found are black, red, yellow, bronze, silver spangle (suavo) and ice-coloured. Contrary to the other varieties of the breed, the white tailed Catalan normally does not show deficiencies found in other markings of the breed. Their size is appropriate, head and beak are correct and also the brilliant and lustrous colours are present. The only problem is coloured tail feathers that appear every now and then in the tail.

**Right: Catalan Tumbler, whitecap (Cap-de-Frere) bronzebar grizzle.**  
*Owner: Ramón Amenós.*  
*Photo: Ramón Amenós.*



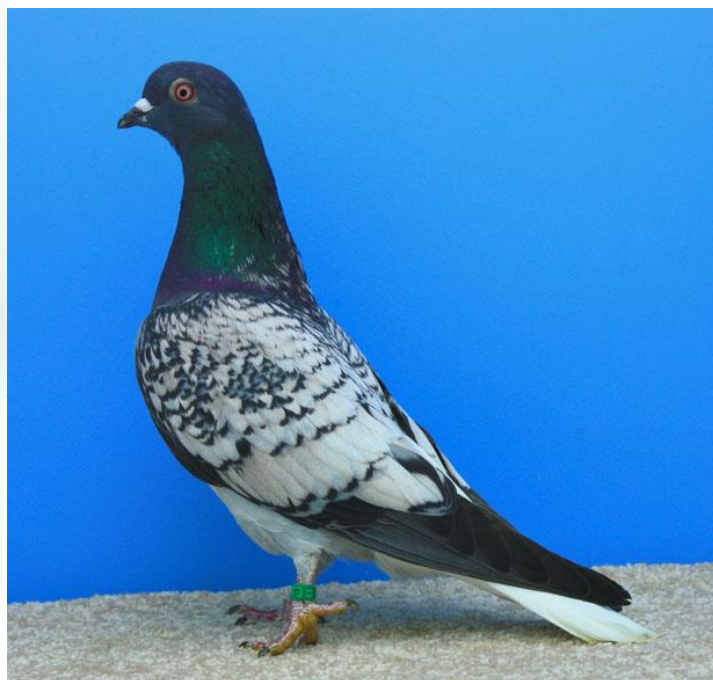
Let us finally mention the rare colours that still exist but who are on the brink of extinction because of the lacking popularity among the breeders and above all by the extremely low number of birds found. The variety Xarelo (white with pearl eye) can be included in this group, so can be the self-birds ('Enter' in Catalan) that were to be found in huge numbers in black, blue, bronze and silver-spangle (suavo) until some years ago but which have decreased vastly in number. The moorheads with their coloured head and tail ('Cap-I-Cua' in Catalan, meaning 'Head and Tail') come only in black if they appear at all. The same holds true for the tailmarks called "Cua Blanca" in Catalonia - at the beginning of the 1990s you could see hundreds of them in all colours, these days we only see them in black and most often they are of inferior characteristics. The naked-necked variety called "Coll Nu" in Catalan is practically extinct. They reappeared in a remote loft some years ago but their only breeder is not breeding them sincerely.

Reading the 'Encyclopedia of Pigeon Breeds' by W.M. Levi we can see that there used to be many more markings in the breed, some of them had already disappeared when the project of rescue was initiated. Some of these varieties have disappeared because the breeders they were entrusted to prove unable to fulfill the requirements needed to keep them alive by promoting them. We have to include the white tails in silver bar, blue check, ash red bar and cream bar in this group, just like the magpie marked birds called "Garsa", the pied bird that were called "Peda(os)", blacks with white flights and whites with black flights etc.

Whereas other countries after the Second World War soon started regaining their national identities and symbols, Spain under Franco's dictatorship remained frozen. Any symbol of national identification that had not been decreed by the government was disregarded and neglected. That way, many of the domestic breeds of poultry, pigeons and other animals disappeared and their genes were lost. The only animals that were respected by the authorities were the high-yielding hybrid varieties for egg and meat production. However, with Spain opening up to the world again, things changed and Spain set out to become a modern country. Fortunately we can say that there are many provinces that support actively their own breeds of poultry and pigeons and the national breeds regain strength. We welcome breeders from all over the world who are willing to take part in the active breeding, thus securing the future of our breeds.



*Left: Catalan Tumbler,  
Nun pigeon (Mongi-Girat) in black.  
Owner: Ramón Amenós Valls/Spain.  
Photo: Thomas Hellmann (D).*



*Right:  
Catalan Tumbler, white tail,  
White shield bluespangled, female.  
96 Points.  
Owner: Ricardo Torrejan Castellano.  
At the Valls Expo (Tarragona) 2014.  
Photo: Alain Debord.*

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