



CUMULET, HAGENAAR AND MORE – LEFT AND RIGHT OF THE ENGLISH CHANNEL

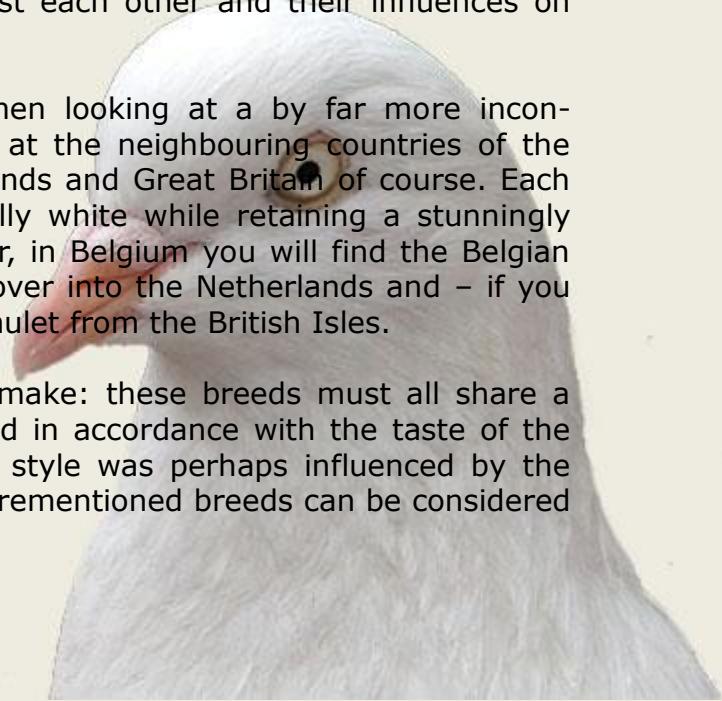
Above: Cumulets. Drawing by J.W. Ludlow, 1908.

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When taking a look at the current representatives of the breeds in question, it is hard to believe that they share in fact much more than only a distant relationship. It may be even more surprising to read that Old Dutch Tumblers and English Long Faced Muffed Tumblers have not always been so vastly different as they look today. The shared markings apart, please bear in mind that the style and type of an English Long Faced Muffed Tumbler has undergone enormous changes in the last 100 years. And guess what? Brent in his 1858 book states clearly that heavily muffed Tumblers had been imported to England. The purpose of this little excursion serves to make people think about the relationships of breeds amongst each other and their influences on their respective development.

You can also speak of connected relations when looking at a by far more inconspicuous group of pigeon breeds. Take a look at the neighbouring countries of the English Channel: France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Great Britain of course. Each of these countries boasts a breed that is totally white while retaining a stunningly clear pearl eye: France has the French Highflier, in Belgium you will find the Belgian Highflier, over to the Hageraar when crossing over into the Netherlands and – if you please to consider it an English breed – the Cumulet from the British Isles.

The following conclusion is not really hard to make: these breeds must all share a common ancestry which later on was developed in accordance with the taste of the the breeders of the individual countries. Their style was perhaps influenced by the taste of an era gone by because none of the aforementioned breeds can be considered



a "global player" compared to some big breeds of our times, much to the contrary: all four breeds can be considered minority breeds, even in their native countries.



Above: French Highflier. Photo: Thomas Hellmann.

French Highflier

Let's start our little breed review with the French Highflier as southernmost representative of this group. However, bear in mind that the French Highflier for years has been teetering on the brink of oblivion, to the point that an outcross to related breeds was inevitable. In order to regain the characteristics of the genuine French Highflier with all relevant points attributed to it in pigeon books, careful selection has been applied ever since. To this day, the numbers of breeders in France working with French Highfliers is very small, and its existence is only due to the work of some die-hard breeders. The French Highflier is a breed of Northern France, the border region with its neighbour Belgium. Boitard & Corbie in their 1824 book speak of a breed they call "Pigeon Volant Cou-Rouge" (*Columba tabellaria collo rubicundo*), a highflying pigeon with a red neck, clearly mentioning the red feathers in the juvenile plumage of pearl-eyed white pigeons. With today's knowledge we can state that these birds are homozygous grizzles. However, they already mention that the origin of this breed was to be sought around the Belgian city of Liège. It was only in 1922 that the well-known legendary French author Robert Fontaine gave them the name "Haut Volant François" - French Highflier. Just like the French Tumbler, the French Highflier lived its heyday before the ascent of the Racing Pigeon. In its looks it is evident that we are talking about a seemingly "simple" pigeon – given that its original purpose was flying long and high, aerodynamics and being streamlined were paramount, any additional feather structure would have foiled the purpose.

Belgian Highflier

As you have already read, the original differences between the Belgian and the French Highflier were minimal. An 1895 chromolithograph published in the magazine "Mentor Agricole et Acclimatation illustrée Réunis" shows a group of 4 more or less white birds with the following denominations: one of them is called "Volant à Cou Plaqué (Race

Belge)” [Highflier with speckled neck (Belgian Breed)], the other one, identical in body albeit totally white as “*Volant (Race de Paris)*” [Highflier (Parisian Breed)].



Above: Belgian Highflier. Photo: Thomas Hellmann.

However, it's pretty much senseless to reduce the differences to only their colour. Emile Carpiaux (1927) called the birds with the speckled neck “*Schuimhals*” (Foam Neck) and mentions that such birds would be found in both the Belgian and the French Highflier – not really an astonishing discovery, isn't it? The French pigeon literature of the beginning 20th century underlines the great similarities between these two breeds. Many sources state that the sole difference between the Belgian and the French Highflier would be the shape of their head (amongst other Fontaine in 1925 and in 1928 an anonymous author in the French magazine “*Vie à la Campagne*”). When scrutinizing these breeds up close, you will notice more differences apart from the head that set the Belgian Highflier apart from its French counterpart. In the head, the Belgian Highflier is to have a slightly flat top skull whereas the French Highflier is to have an even, unbroken curve. Also on the body the Belgian Highflier is quite a bit sturdier, lower on the legs and gives consequently the impression of being overall longer. In closing, it's worth mentioning that compared to the French Highflier, the Belgian Highflier is even more minoritarian than its French cousin.

The Hageraar

Despite the fact that the word “Hageraar” describes the inhabitants of Den Haag, the Hageraar in pigeons comes from the area around Amsterdam and Groningen. As to the reasons why this is so, even the most well-informed scholars of pigeon history are at a loss. The year 1600 is frequently mentioned when Dutch sailors supposedly brought the original birds with them to the Netherlands which later became known as Hageraar. Sometimes, the legends stress the Indian origin of breeds a bit too insistently (and including at times without proper foundation for this claim), but in the legend of a pearl-eyed white pigeon there is more than only a small grain of truth to the story. The Netherlands of the 17th century was amongst the most influential

seafaring nations. There were Dutch trading contors in both Americas and far into Asia, with today's Indonesia as the centre of the Dutch East Indies. That's why it is far from surprising to find an article of an English army captain by the name of Morgan in a 1921 issue of the defunct "American Pigeon Journal". In this article Captain Morgan reports about the pigeon breeds he saw in India during his deployment there. He mentions especially a breed which he calls "Asmani", in his eyes a breed from Northern India. Being English, he underlines of course the similarities of these Asmani with the Cumulets found in England. This report serves however to prove that there have always been pearl-eyed white highflying pigeons in India. W.M. Levi (1965), drawing on the insights gained from his Indian contacts, mentions that such birds had already been bred in India since the Moghul times (1526-1858).



Above: Hageraar. Photo: Nico van Benten.

But let's return to the Netherlands and the Hageraar. Just like with many other Dutch breeds, a great deal of importance is laid on their style with a horizontal back, while overall retaining a compact body. The head also enjoys significant importance in the Hageraar, with its profile running in an elegantly elongated curve from its frontal to the neck. The profile tells a story that gets its confirmation when you take a look at the head of the Hageraar from above: the frontal is very pronounced, its highest and widest point is in front of the eyes. The Hageraar has always been known in white – of course with a stunningly white pearl eye with a small black pupil. There has also been the talk of red Hageraars which occasionally can be seen at shows. However, also the Hageraar cannot reverse the trend found in its cousin breeds – its number of breeders remains extremely small.

The Cumulet

The Cumulet is often called an English breed, however its roots have to be sought in mainland Europe. In Fulton & Lumley's "Illustrated Book of Pigeons" you can read that

the author had its first encounter with the breed in the Belgian city of Malines and also many other English authors of the era confirm the continental origin of the Cumulet. Its name is said to stem from the cumulus clouds and is of course an allusion to how high the birds can fly. Cumulus clouds can be found in the sky between 600-2000 metres of height, one of the lower "floors" in the sky, if you wish. The English breeders however welcomed the continental newcomer with open arms and readily sought outcrosses with it with other breeds, amongst them the Show Homer, Tippler and even Racing Homers. The hype for Cumulets in England was enormous, the 1912 Manchester Show with 19 classes and 224 birds speak a clear language. And back then, the birds still knew how to use their wings. In 1915 there is a documented flight of Cumulets from the lofts of T.J. Fox in Portsmouth that clocked with 11 hours and 32 minutes of flying time. These were the times when the breed was broken into a "Show Cumulet" and a "Flying Cumulet"- the show type showing a clear resemblance to the look of our modern long-beaked breeds of Tumblers. In the 1930s however the first signs of the demise of the Cumulet became noteworthy, up until the 1920s there had been a Cumulet Club in England which had been dissolved already by the 1930s. There were still breeders and interest in the Cumulet, and as late as the 1960s you can still read about breeders and demand from abroad for the breed. The late Bertil Harrison from Sweden, long time editor of the Swedish pigeon magazine and eminent book collector on pigeons, had also Cumulets next to his Swedish Tumblers and descendants of these Harrison Cumulets can today be still found in Denmark. The English NPA lists of course a standard for the Cumulet, but it is a sad reality that the Cumulet is exceedingly rare these days in England.



Above: Cumulet. Photo: Thomas Hellmann.

Perhaps it is true what I wrote in the beginning of this article: all of these breeds correspond to the taste of an era gone by, not quite in touch with what today's breeders are looking for. I would consider it however a big pity and tragedy to the pigeon culture as a whole if we should fail to safeguard these breeds for posterity.

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