



# THE AUSTRALIAN PIGEON CENTRE

*“Where Passion takes Flight”*

## **The Feathered Spies: How Pablo Escobar Utilised Homing Pigeons to Elude Electronic Surveillance.**

By Barry Trewin

**Introduction:** In the annals of criminal history, few figures have left as indelible a mark as Pablo Escobar, the notorious Colombian drug lord. Escobar's drug empire, known as the Medellín Cartel, reached unprecedented levels of power and influence. However, what sets Escobar apart from his contemporaries is his ingenious use of homing pigeons to outsmart modern electronic surveillance. This article explores how Escobar harnessed the unique capabilities of these birds to operate his illicit activities under the radar.

**The Rise of the Homing Pigeons:** During the 1980s and early 1990s, Escobar's Medellín Cartel was at the height of its power. Operating in a time when electronic surveillance was becoming increasingly sophisticated, Escobar recognised the need for alternative methods to communicate with his associates and transport valuable information securely. He turned to homing pigeons—an age-old practice that dates back to ancient times.

**The Pigeon Couriers:** Escobar established a network of pigeon couriers that became a crucial part of his operations. Trained from an early age, these pigeons were specifically bred to possess an exceptional sense of direction and an unwavering commitment to return to their roosts. With the cartel's headquarters as their home, the pigeons were entrusted with carrying vital messages and microfilm photographs across vast distances.

**Bypassing Electronic Surveillance:** One of the primary reasons Escobar turned to homing pigeons was their ability to evade electronic surveillance. The cartel's rivals, as well as the Colombian authorities and foreign intelligence agencies, heavily relied on electronic intercepts to gather evidence and gather intelligence. However, they were ill-prepared to counter the use of pigeons as a means of communication.

The pigeons served as a highly effective courier service, as they could navigate undetected through vast jungles, mountain ranges, and urban environments. Escobar exploited their remarkable homing instincts, making it nearly impossible for authorities to track the precise locations where the messages were being sent or received.

**Stealthy Communication Channels:** Escobar's ingenious approach to communication involved attaching small canisters to the legs of the pigeons. These canisters contained messages written on microfilm, a technique commonly used by intelligence agencies during that era. Microfilm allowed for the storage of vast amounts of information in a compact format, ensuring secure transmission.

By utilising pigeons as messengers, Escobar created a clandestine communication network that was impervious to electronic eavesdropping. The cartel's messages were encoded and written in a way that made them virtually indecipherable to anyone who intercepted them. This covert operation enabled Escobar and his associates to orchestrate their illegal activities with relative impunity.

The Legacy of Escobar's Pigeons: Pablo Escobar's use of homing pigeons represented an astonishing fusion of ancient and modern techniques. By exploiting the innate navigational skills of these remarkable birds, he bypassed the cutting-edge electronic surveillance systems of his time.

While Escobar's reign eventually came to an end with his death in 1993, the legacy of his pigeons lives on. The use of homing pigeons as a means of communication has captivated the imagination of people worldwide and served as a reminder of the lengths to which criminals can go to elude modern technologies.

Conclusion: Pablo Escobar's strategic utilisation of homing pigeons remains one of the most intriguing aspects of his criminal enterprise. The cunning drug lord harnessed the unique capabilities of these feathered spies to outsmart electronic surveillance systems, ensuring the smooth operation of his drug empire. The story of Escobar's pigeons stands as a testament

## **Who looked after Pablo Escobar's Homing Pigeons?**

The responsibility of caring for Pablo Escobar's homing pigeons fell upon a dedicated group of individuals within his drug empire. Escobar employed a team of pigeon handlers who were trained to tend to the birds' needs, ensuring their well-being and readiness for their crucial role in the operation.

These handlers, often referred to as pigeon keepers or trainers, were knowledgeable about the unique characteristics and requirements of homing pigeons. They took charge of feeding, housing, and training the birds from a young age, fostering a strong bond with them. The handlers played a vital role in maintaining the health and fitness of the pigeons, as their ability to navigate accurately relied on their physical condition and instincts.

The pigeons were kept in specially designed coops or lofts, which served as their homes. These structures provided shelter and security while allowing the bird's access to fresh air and sunlight. The pigeon keepers ensured that the coops were well-maintained, clean, and equipped with all the necessary amenities to promote the pigeons' well-being.

Training homing pigeons for their courier duties required patience and expertise. The handlers would familiarise the birds with their roosts, allowing them to establish a strong sense of home. They also conducted exercises to enhance the pigeons' navigational abilities, gradually increasing the distances they could cover while ensuring they always returned to the designated roosts.

The handlers were responsible for attaching the message canisters to the pigeons' legs before their journeys. They meticulously ensured that the canisters were securely fastened and wouldn't impede the pigeons' flight or cause any harm.

The pigeon handlers formed an integral part of Escobar's organisation, working closely with him and his trusted associates. Their dedication and expertise were vital in maintaining the efficiency and secrecy of the homing pigeon communication network.

It is worth noting that after Escobar's downfall and the dismantling of the Medellín Cartel, the fate of the pigeons is less clear. Some reports suggest that many of the pigeons were released into the wild, allowing them to live freely and return to their natural instincts. Others claim that some pigeons may have been adopted or taken care of by individuals associated with Escobar's organisation.

In conclusion, the care of Pablo Escobar's homing pigeons was entrusted to a team of skilled handlers who nurtured and trained these remarkable birds. Their expertise played a vital role

in ensuring the success of Escobar's clandestine communication network, further demonstrating the level of sophistication and dedication that characterised his drug empire.

### **What pigeon books did Pablo Escobar have in his library?**

There is limited information available regarding the specific pigeon books that Pablo Escobar owned or had in his library. Given his deep involvement and interest in homing pigeons, it is plausible that he possessed a large number of literature related to these remarkable birds.

DEA Agent Javier F. Pena stated that “We found volumes on how to take care of homing pigeons. Several pigeon coops were located throughout the prison, including outside of Escobar’s cell. The pigeons were used to deliver messages to various Escobar associates and members of the Cartel”.

Pigeon breeding and racing have a long history, and there are numerous books and resources dedicated to these subjects. Escobar, being a passionate enthusiast of homing pigeons, likely acquired books that covered topics such as pigeon genetics, training techniques, racing strategies, and general care.

However, due to the clandestine nature of Escobar's operations and the subsequent dismantling of his empire, specific details regarding the contents of his personal library have not been widely documented or made public. It is worth noting that Escobar's primary focus was likely on practical knowledge related to the breeding, training, and use of homing pigeons for his illicit activities rather than purely academic or scholarly literature.

It is also important to recognise that during his time, the availability of books might have been limited, especially regarding niche topics like homing pigeons. Escobar may have relied on personal contacts, experts, and practical experience to gain knowledge about pigeons rather than solely depending on books.

Overall, while the exact titles of pigeon books in Escobar's possession remain unknown, it is reasonable to assume that he sought out literature that could enhance his understanding and expertise in the realm of homing pigeons, contributing to his successful utilisation of these birds in his operations.