

ONE FLU OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

By Duncan MacGregor

Most Australian pigeon enthusiasts would be aware of the recent goings on with regards to the scare with the birds being imported from Canada, but just in case you've been in outer space or you're one of our many international visitors to this site let me re-cap on recent events.

On Thursday, 20/11/05, the Australian Quarantine & Inspection Services announced that they had detected Avian Flu **anti-bodies** in three birds and Newcastle's disease **anti-bodies** in another four birds in the quarantine facility. As I've said these birds were being imported from Canada and were a part of a larger shipment and it's worth pointing out that none of the remaining birds have returned positive tests.

Subsequently there has been a degree of name-calling and finger pointing between Australia and Canada with each party blaming the other for the birds getting to Australia. Regardless of who is to blame both parties and medical opinion agree that these birds **DO NOT** have either virus, merely that at some point of time they have been exposed to some form of the viruses and as such carry the **anti-bodies**.

Australia, rightly, is one of the most stringent countries in the world when it comes to importation, be it livestock, birds or food products.

The upshot of all this is that even though there is **minimal risk** seven birds have been dispatched to pigeon heaven with the remainder of the shipment being returned to Canada with a ban being placed on the importation of **all** birds from that country as well as our government considering a blanket ban on the importation of **ALL** birds from **OVERSEAS** whilst the current situation with the Avian Flu continues.

Now, having regard for all of the above, it brings me to the crux of my ramblings on this occasion.

Firstly, we should applaud and be grateful to AQIS for their professional approach as to the way they protect us, and our environment from the

numerous problems that we could inherit from the many countries that export to Australia. Our pigeons pale into insignificance when you consider the effect such outbreaks would have on the multimillion-dollar poultry industry let alone the decimation that would occur should our native birds be exposed to such a virus. It's far better to be a little over cautious than live to regret in-activity.

Secondly, what an opportunity!!!! As a consequence of the AQIS announcement the media were whipped into a frenzy trying to find out as much as possible about pigeons, the sport and the odd types that keep them. People from various areas of the pigeon fraternity, more specifically pigeon racing, were asked for comment but without exception they declined. Their reasons for doing this remain a mystery to me. Maybe they were scared to put their collective arses on the line or maybe they were just shy, who knows, but what an opportunity missed. Consequentially it was left to myself to field the myriad of requests from all points, radio both commercial and the ABC, covering the breadth of Australia. The print media, AAP and The Bulletin weren't going to miss out on a story and the Television reports with Late Line, the ABC News, World at Noon and the 7.30 Report all hungry for information, not only about the pigeons, but the type of people that feel so passionate about these strange creatures of the sky.

This was the chance to turn as possible negative into the opportunity of a life-time and promote the pigeon fraternity to its fullest. Hopefully we did this successfully by offering interesting and informed comment on, not only the AQIS situation, but on, the pigeon fancy in general.

The pigeon world is a funny world though! Once the dust had settled and those who initially ducked for cover in fear of putting their collective feet in their mouth came out of hiding to ask;

”Why would they want to talk to him/them?”

The answer to their question is simple, we can be found, we're contactable and available, we have a profile, we have a track record

of providing informed and interesting input to those organisations that wish to talk to and with us. We offer this information in an unbiased form so as to promote the pigeons without prejudice to any person/s or organisation.

So in answer to the question, that's why they want to talk to us!!!

UPDATE 2006.

The up shot of the bird flu kuffuffle saw most of the major federations put into place a media strategy and appoint spokes-people to act on their behalf. A great idea!! Has this initiative worked? Not yet!!

This was evidenced in September this year. A number of people in Melbourne became involved in a brawl and required hospitalisation, on the face of it, all over the ownership of a pigeon. As it happens the pigeon was just the catalyst to ignite a long going dispute between two families. None the less I was again asked to field questions from the media.

To tell the truth I quite enjoy the contact, the notoriety and even the ribbing I get from friends when doing such interviews, BUT, isn't it time that the people who make the rules, and tell us what to do, year in, year out, came out of hiding and did the HARD STUFF as well.

SUCH MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDE A FORUM FOR US TO PLACE PIGEON RACING/KEEPING BEFORE "JOE PUBLIC" AND PROVIDE A VEHICLE TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE OUR SPORT TO THE OTHERWISE UN-INITIATED, ISN'T IT TIME TO TAKE HOLD OF THESE OPPORTUNITIES AND TURN THEM TO OUR COLLECTIVE FAVOUR?

I would be interested to hear comments from others within the pigeon fraternity. If you have any thoughts on the subject you can forward them via the 'contact us' key on the Mallee Classic web site.