

# THE INCREDIBLE PIGEON



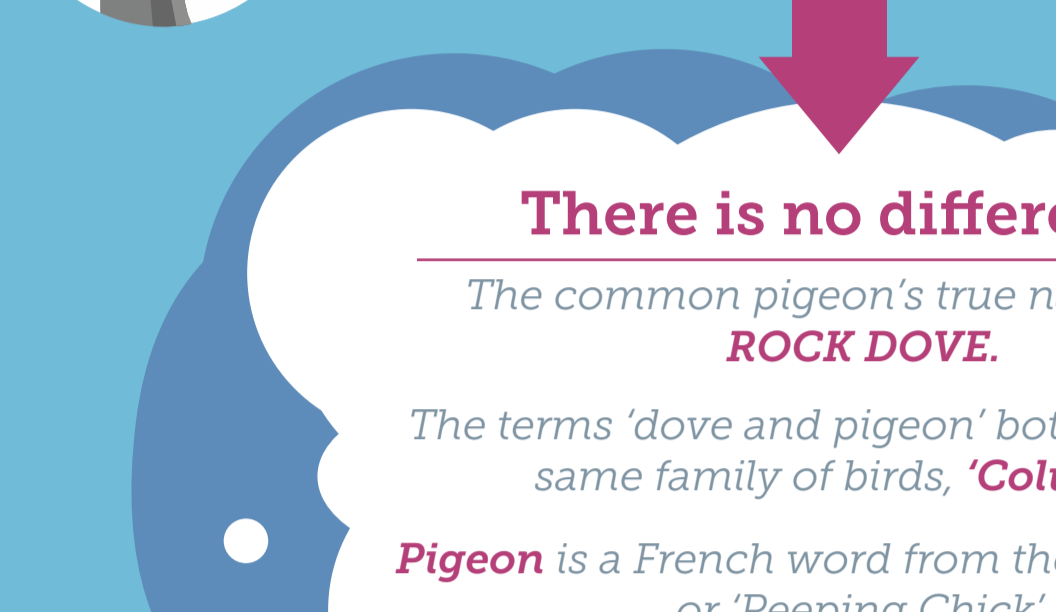
Consider the strongest, smartest, and most adored animal on the planet— what comes to mind?

Astonishingly enough, the boring gray bird—known for populating rooftops and eating breadcrumbs— has been loved by mankind because of its physical and mental abilities for thousands of years. A deeper appreciation for something as mundane as a pigeon, may reveal many more incredible things hiding in plain sight.

- 6** Continents Pigeons Inhabit
- 400M** Pigeons Living Worldwide
- 1M** Pigeons in New York City

## Amazing Anatomy

Pigeons are natural marvels, utilizing some of the most advanced abilities in the animal kingdom.



**Excellent Navigation**  
Pigeons have been able to travel thousands of miles in unfamiliar areas back to the safety of their nests. Many scientists believe that the birds use a compass in their beak to navigate through magnetic fields around the planet.

**Head Bobbing**  
Pigeons bob their heads to keep their line of sight stable; their eyesight is keenly adapted.  
Pigeons set on treadmills will not bob their heads given their stationary surroundings.

**Crop Milk**  
Unlike most birds, both male and female pigeons produce "crop milk" to feed their young.  
Infant pigeons are called squabs, and only leave the nest when they are fully matured.

**Super Lungs**  
Pigeons have a unique respiratory system that allows them to retain more oxygen than most animals with special sacks that separate exhaled carbon dioxide from inhaled oxygen.

**Powerful Wings**  
Pigeons are some of the strongest fliers in the world; their wing muscles consist of 35% of their body weight.  
Some pigeons have been recorded flying at speeds of 90 miles per hour.

The term 'Pigeon' and 'Dove' have two seemingly opposite connotations:  
'Pigeon' - an urban rat with wings.  
'Dove' - a beautiful symbol of peace.  
So what actually separates the two birds?

**PIGEON** **versus** **DOVE**

**There is no difference.**  
The common pigeon's true name is the **ROCK DOVE**.  
The terms 'dove and pigeon' both refer to the same family of birds, 'Columbia'.  
**Pigeon** is a French word from the Latin 'Pipio' or 'Peeping Chick'.  
-while-  
**Dove** is a Germanic word for the bird's aerial diving motion.

## Wonderful Wisdom

Pigeons are highly intellectual birds—and its not just street smarts, they have been known to pass some of the most difficult tests in animal cognition.

- ABC**: Pigeons are able to discriminate between letters in the alphabet based on hierarchical clusters, revealing close similarities between human and pigeon problem solving.
- Art**: Select pigeons have been able to identify previously unseen Monet and Picasso paintings by searching for the differences between cubism and impressionism.
- Memory**: Many pigeons have been known to remember faces and voices of particular people who were kind or threatening to them.



**Self-Conscious Bird**  
In addition to chimpanzees, dolphins, orangutans, and elephants, the pigeon has passed one of the most fundamental animal cognition tests, **The Mirror Test**:  
An animal is placed in front of a mirror with an ink spot on its body. If the animal looking in the mirror reacts to the ink spot, tries to remove the mark, or adjusts itself to see the spot more clearly, then it has recognized its image as its own, proving self awareness. Human children don't develop this level of cognition until they are 14-18 months old.  
Pigeons can identify themselves flying in groups alongside other birds; they will peck at the video's screen when they make an appearance.

## Fancy Breeding

Fancy pigeon breeding is a competitive discipline practiced all around the world, dating back almost 10,000 years. There are over 800 breeds of fancy pigeons.

'Fancy pigeons' refer to specially bred rock doves. Thousands of years of domestication and breeding led to specific mutations within the bird appear more prominent, creating separate breeds.

Those who raise fancy pigeons are known as 'Pigeon fanciers'.  
**Notable pigeon fanciers include:**  
Charles Darwin, Walt Disney, Mike Tyson, Roy Rogers, Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, Monet, Picasso, Clint Eastwood, Nicola Tesla

- Average online cost → \$150
- Country of origin → India
- Historic symbolism → Royalty

**Jacobin**  
Common colors: Green, Yellow, Red  
Jacobins were named after monks in the 1100's, known for their distinctive hooded hawks.  
Notable forms: Beak-Crested, Danish  
Average online cost: \$150  
Country of origin: India  
Historic symbolism: Royalty

**Frillback**  
Common colors: White, Gray, Blue, Black  
The frillback pigeon gets its name from the matted curls that cover their wings and feet (muffs).  
Notable forms: Oriental, Egyptian, Valencian, Spanish  
Average online cost: \$100  
Country of origin: Asia  
Historic symbolism: Elegance

**Fantail**  
Common colors: White, Black, Blue, Red, Yellow, Silver  
Fantails are often used alongside racing pigeons—their large tail acts as a guide to new racers.  
Notable forms: English, Garden, Indian, Hindi, American, Karakand  
Average online cost: \$300  
Country of origin: Pakistan  
Historic symbolism: Honor

**Pouters**  
Common colors: Yellow, Red, Black, Blue, White  
Pouters are fancy pigeons with an especially prominent 'crop' or chest in which they enjoy puffing out; both cocks and hens have this ability.  
Notable forms: English, Brunner, Pygmy, Gaditano, Holle, Bavarian, Reversewing, Saxon, Cropper, Ice  
Average online cost: \$200  
Country of origin: England  
Historic symbolism: Nobility

## Homing Races

While some pigeons are bred for beauty, others are bred for speed, endurance, and overall aerial ability.

- 1118 miles**: Farthest recorded US Pigeon race. Since the Egyptian dynasty in 3000bc, pigeons helped relay messages over long distances.
- 2300 miles**: Record flight by a US Army pigeon. Technology put pigeons out of service in the 1900's, but pigeon racing was widespread.
- Today, pigeon racing is a popular sport all around the world.

In 2013, 'Bolt', a champion homing pigeon, was sold for **\$400,000**

### Homing in 6 stages!



## The Infamous Pigeon

Pigeons aren't only incredible creatures, they're some of mankind's oldest friends. So why do hate them?

As technology improved, mankind found less and less practical uses for pigeons.

But it wasn't until two incidents in 1960 that made the public fear and hate the birds.

"There's no doubt people are at threat of dying so that others can have the pleasure of feeding pigeons."

Said by a New York City health commissioner after an unrelated meningitis outbreak.

"The wins, as soon as they're dried out, they make a beeline for Bryant Park, the homos make faces at people, and then there's the pigeons: I call them rats with wings."

Said by Thomas Hoving, New York City's parks commissioner, giving pigeons an unshakable and infamous title.

Pigeons are subject to alienation only because of ignorance and fear mongering.

A simple change in perspective towards ordinary things may just make the world a brighter place for us and for our feathered friends.

So next time you see a pigeon happily meandering the sidewalk, try to be a bit more thoughtful, because pigeons truly are an incredible species.

### Sources

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