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## The Truth About "Dove Releases"

Guest Post by Palomacy Volunteer Kristi Craven

When I was a wedding and special occasion singer, I would often see a "dove release" as part of the ceremony. How breathtaking and awe inspiring it was to both myself and the other attendees to watch these majestic birds fly high up into the sky, circle around and then fly off to some unknown destination. Each time I witnessed it, I became more intrigued and wondered what was involved in training these birds to perform so magnificently. I was determined to find out and see if I too, could possibly do the same and be able to add this to my repertoire of services to make additional money at these events.

I decided to speak to the trainer at the next ceremony I performed. The gentleman said it was pretty easy to train the birds, but it involved a lot of time and dedication. I felt I could do this and if successful enough, quit my day job and make it my full time career. This same gentleman sold me a few squabs and adult birds and I hired someone to build me a loft. The first thing I discovered was that these birds were not doves at all, but white homing pigeons. The word pigeon immediately strikes negativity in some people and since they are a member of the Rock Dove family, this was more pleasant to the ears of potential customers. Still, they were beautiful and intelligent and I became quickly attached to them. I decided the best way to get all the latest tips and strategies was to join a group of like individuals who

were all doing the same thing. This brought me to the National White Dove Release Society (NWDRS). At first, I was thrilled to find this group. The members were full of advice on how to keep the birds healthy and strong, and how to avoid predators both on the ground and in the sky and how to raise the little hatchlings and squabs. The two adult pairs I had started laying eggs immediately and raising young so I was encouraged. I acquired another pair and before I knew it, I had a loft of 40 birds. We were ready to train!



Kristi's flock of white homing pigeons

We started with exercise around the yard and then a few blocks from the park to home. Everyone was accounted for after each release and things were going well. On the fourth trial, two birds ended up missing. I searched and searched for them and finally found one of them shivering on a rooftop a few blocks from home. Her mate was missing and she looked like she had been traumatized and feathers were missing. I brought her home and put her in isolation. She seemed to be doing well the first few days, but died on the third. I was heartbroken. I went to my friends at NWDRS who were all sympathetic but let me know that these things happen and not to grow too emotionally attached to the birds. I found that difficult to handle as I was already attached to

them. I had named them all and tagged them so I would know who was who. The other members warned me that they are not pets, but commodities. I didn't understand why they could not be both but tried to put those events behind me and move forward.

A few months later, I was surprised to find that two of my all white birds gave birth to a multi-colored baby. He was mostly grey with salt and pepper markings. I again asked my friends how this happened and what should I do with this little guy. This was the first time I heard the term "cull". I had no idea what it meant, but it soon became very clear. I was advised that this bird would "ruin the flock" and needed to be removed from the loft so not to breed with any other. (Incidentally, his nest mate was pure white like its

parents and all the others). I was given ways of killing this bird including snapping his neck or smothering him in a plastic bag with alcohol. His parents took care of him and when he became old enough to eat on his own and his parents were no longer feeding him, I removed him and decided to make him my special mascot. He sort of imprinted on me and began following me around like a little sidekick. He was named Kemo (for Kemosabe in the Lone Ranger series) and quickly became a beloved pet.

*This baby homing pigeon, the sort bred to be used as “wedding doves” was found at a trash dumpster, most likely dumped as “unfit” for the “dove release” business because of his markings. He was lucky not to be culled (killed) and to be found by a kind person before he was killed by a hungry animal. He was rescued by Palomacy and has been adopted. His name is Johnny.*



It was becoming obvious that these birds were more than just commodities to me. They all had their unique personalities and idiosyncrasies and were all named accordingly. I found myself pulling further and further away from the NWDRS and their opinions but still participated in some of their events, particularly the 9/11 releases. These, of course, were dedicated to the victims of the tragedy and the birds symbolized the hope for world peace. On the 10-year anniversary, I pledged 10 birds to be released from a nearby park. No sooner did I release them when a hawk appeared out of nowhere and grabbed one of my birds in flight. I was horrified as I watched helplessly as my poor Big Kahuna struggled to get away. That was the end. I told myself, I'd never do another release again and just let my birds enjoy retirement as I couldn't bear to see anything like that happen again. I was further encouraged when the next day, Kahuna made it home. I don't know how he got away, but it didn't matter. I was never going to be the cause of peril for him or any other bird in my care again. I also decided to not breed my birds anymore as it is hard on them to raise their young.



Homing pigeon Big Kahuna  
survived a hawk-strike

I dropped out of the NWDRS knowing I was defeated. Despite warning, I became too attached and could not see myself as using any living thing as a trophy for my own pleasure or anyone else's. I was discouraged how most of these people only cared about what the birds could do for them, ignorant to the fact that they are very affectionate, gentle and trusting creatures. I could not judge their worth or value by deciding which ones lived or died based on their appearance, performance or pedigree. I guess I am just not a top breeder and that's okay with me. I have remained an educator including commenting on blogs pertaining to dove releases including the disastrous one with the Pope a few years ago when he released a bird, only to have it immediately attacked by two other birds. Nature does not respect our idealism that these birds represent peace, love, hope and joy. They do represent all those things to me right in my own home, however. These birds are not wild, but domestic and unprepared for the dangers that await them in the open skies.

I now have both white homing pigeons and ringneck doves as pets and constantly use them to show people the difference between the two species as these poor little ringnecks usually

end up dying from starvation or an attack from an animal on the ground like a dog or cat if ever released. I used them as display at a wedding a few times, but never as release birds. They are much smaller and not very good flyers at all. They are all members of my family now and I can only be sorry for my previous ignorance and hope I can use that experience to make a difference.

*These three Ringneck doves, now named Nikki, Sage & Jordan were all found injured and stray in San Jose. They are the lucky ones - survivors of a do-it-yourself "dove release" that killed who knows how many. They were rescued by Palomacy & B2L House.*



#### Note from Palomacy Director Elizabeth Young

Please speak out against "dove releases". Whether done by professionals using trained white homing pigeons as described above or by do-it-yourselfers who tragically buy and "release" white King pigeons or white Ringneck Doves, it is animal exploitation that risks the injury, suffering and death of the birds used.

See environmentally-friendly alternatives at [Balloons Blow...Don't Let Them Go!](#)  
For more information, please read [Why "Dove Releases" Are Cruel](#).