

Chinese Owl Chatter

By John Coe

January, 1986 APJ

Taking a peek backward into the world of Chinese Owls, we can see Don Hagen, Howard Hart and Bill Howe controlling the scene with all the good birds except for the highly frilled, highly forked tailed West Coast birds of old Bill Hawkinson stock. And there was the calm expertise of Jim Moyer on the scene. Well, at this time we had more worries than fork tails, so we merely pulled a few feathers on each side of the tail and went on. Thank goodness that era has been superseded. However, we are still doing the same thing but not with the tails. Pants and breast frills are now the popular targets of excessive plucking. Recently, a Giant Homer breeder walking through the Chinese Owl section took one look at the floor and remarked that we must have had a pillow fight in the area. I smiled and didn't tell him I was a Chinese Owl breeder. The floor was littered with plucked feathers from breeders trimming their birds. Some of them were mine. We still have room for the talents of good breeders to replace the expert pluckers.

Then the Standard closed in on us and required that, not only should the Chinese Owl have a beak large enough to feed its own offspring, but it soon cured the tail plucking by requiring that the breed must exhibit 12 tail feathers.

For the next 20 years, the name of the game was frill, 51 points of it, pants, collar and breast frill. I had asked Howard Hart to comment on my birds so that I might make some possible improvements. He responded that although they had fairly good collars, some of them had no pants and bare breasts. That is the letter that my wife got a hold of. She then inquired as to what went on at pigeon shows. She still asks some time. In the early history of the club, it was not uncommon to send a bird to a show if there was some showing of pants and a partial breast frill. It didn't seem to be clear whether the collar should hug the neck or cup outward thus framing the head in a collar-cup. Now some of these features have been more accurately defined and the birds have been highly refined to meet the more precise Standard. The only place where I think that we have weakened our standard to meet what we have instead of strengthening it to increase breeding skills is where we relaxed the 12 tail feather requirement. It seems to me that we should never weaken our standard to this kind of pressure. C'est le guerre.

At this point in the show breeding of Chinese Owls, all breeders have good Chinese Owls. If all birds don't show off and station well, facing the judge, they don't have much of a chance, and rightly so. Stationing is to a great degree hereditary and so is climbing the wire. If a bird flies the nest when you approach, it should not be used for breeding.

Now comes the era of specialization. I am writing this at a district show in Watsonville, California, where I have been listening and talking. The talk, to a great extent, is of specialization. Breeders no longer seemed to be satisfied with class competition. Two breeders with whom I visited each independently remarked that their goal was not how to win a district class, but to win a district show with something like a cream bar. They want new horizons.

In the future they are launching on specialization breeding projects. For some, it is not enough any more to win the show. They want a greater challenge. They want to win it with indigo, a cream bar, a white, or perhaps a reduced, a dominant opal, a recessive opal, or what have you.

What effect will this have on Chinese Owls as a breed? Well, it is all good and it is almost late in coming. It will lift the Chinese Owl into the true category of fancy pigeons. For a few years they have been somewhat borderline. They have been certainly in the run, but not really in the category of most popular fancy breeds. With specialization will come not only a renewed interest of older breeders, but also a whole new field for vigorous young breeders. This should expand our show and put us on the map with units of special colors in the show room. The most popular breeds have already done this and instead of 100 birds, they show up with 500 or more in a breed meet. We are still right on the turning point where we can either turn back or turn ahead.

Wouldn't you like to build the best brown stud in the nation? All this and good competition besides! Of course you would need to develop some good browns and then you must be willing to sacrifice a little bit for what you are doing. Why not put up a few awards for best brown? Do a little research into what is a good brown and what factors enhance it. Write an opinion article or two on the subject. Others will rebut and activity will result. Class color awards aren't spawned from mist and dew. They are offered by breeders from their personal resources for a cause they believe in or at least hope for. Pick out your specialty, reduced, almond, barless, whatever seems fun for you. If it isn't fun, it isn't anything. If you can't control the show, you can at least take a stab at controlling a specialty portion of it. Don't let your ideas, hopes, and ideals die. In two years from now, why not show up with a good show team of cream bars? Set a goal and get going. Specialization is not only the next major plateau for Chinese Owls; it is the tide that won't turn back. Get on the bandwagon of Americas No. 1 breed – the Chinese Owl.