

Bird Care Guide for
Classic Old Frill Doves & Frillback Pigeons
By Beth Meyer (2023)

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Before You Buy—Things to Consider

Before you jump headlong down the “Pigeon Hole”, there are several things you should carefully consider:

- 1) Is this simply a “whim”? Or am I committed to the long haul of owning and caring for these beautiful birds for their natural life span? Doves and pigeons can live 10—15 years.
- 2) Do I have safe facilities in which to house them? This means making sure that they are safe from other family pets such as dogs and cats, as well as from predators such as hawks, owls, raccoons, mink, and weasels.
- 3) Do I have a weather proof place where they can be housed during the winter months and during rainy periods while still providing an outdoor caged flying area for them to utilize on nice days? Doves and pigeons should always have access to a dry, well ventilated but draft-free place to roost, eat and drink.
- 4) Am I prepared for, and do I want my birds to breed, raise young, and what will I do with their offspring? Doves and pigeons are prolific breeders and if a pair is left together year-round, they will wear themselves down to an unhealthy state, producing upwards of 12 babies per year.
- 5) Am I committed to the actual cost of keeping and raising these beautiful birds? Building proper housing facilities is generally an initial one-time expenditure whereas purchasing feed is an ongoing expense that needs to be considered.
- 6) Is there someone who can care for my birds if I go away on vacation or business? This would mean having someone check on them daily to feed, give fresh water and make sure their enclosures are not being breached by predators.
- 7) Bird dander is a really big issue. For this reason, you will want to house your birds somewhere other than in your living quarters. Even with daily cleaning and an air purifier, the fine particulate matter sluffed off from the birds can aggravate allergies or cause breathing difficulties leading to serious health issues.

Still think you might be interested in keeping and raising Classic Old Frill doves and Frillback Pigeons? We certainly hope so. To get you started in this enjoyable hobby, we have created this Care Guide to help you get set up and fully prepared to welcome your first birds into your home and family. We believe that these beautiful birds are an incredible God-given gift to us, as are all creatures, and if we choose to bring them into our family, we are tasked with providing them with the very best care we can give.

Quarantining Your New Birds

If you already have other birds, you will want to quarantine your new birds for a period of about 6 weeks, before introducing them to and putting them in with your flock. This time apart from your existing flock will not only help the new birds ease into their new home base gradually and get used to you as their new provider, but you will be able to observe them to make sure they do not have any health issues that might endanger your other birds and cause unnecessary trouble and expense.

A move to a new home, can be a very stressful time for birds and can result in a weakened immune system, making them susceptible to catching one of several viruses or bacterial infections. In addition, the diet you may be feeding them might differ from what they had been getting and this could also upset their digestive system for a period of time.

The plus of quarantining your new birds is that you can spend more time with them. Give them a few sunflower hearts a couple times per day until they get to the point that they will take them out of your open hand. It's a fun pastime that is enjoyable for you and your new birds.

Feed & Watering Requirements

Classic Old Frill Doves and Frillback Pigeons kept in captivity are "seed-eaters" just like their wild counterparts. This means that they obtain most of their essential nutrients, including protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals from a variety of seeds and legumes. In addition, they will need grit (a mix of small chick grit and medium sized chicken grit is best) in order to digest their food. And like all living creatures, they require water.

In order to prevent disease, it is important to make sure that they always have fresh, clean water and that along with their feed, the dishes are protected from becoming soiled with poop. Water and feed dishes should have protective coverings above them so that birds are not able to sit in or on the dishes or fly over them and accidentally drop poop into them.

In addition, water should be changed daily and feed should be removed from the cotes overnight to discourage small rodents from gaining access to the feed and potentially soiling it as well.

An estimate of feed per bird per year would be approximately 25 lbs. So for a pair, you would need about 50 lbs. of mixed seeds. And for each pair of doves or pigeons born to your pair, you would need an additional 50 lbs. of mixed seeds.

The types of feed to provide will be covered in the section on Nutrition Requirements.

Housing

Dove and pigeon housing structures are called “lofts” or “cotes”. These structures typically contain a sheltered building attached to a caged flight space or “aviary”. For a pair of doves/pigeons, a minimum amount of shelter space would be about 3'L x 3'W x 3'H, with a door on each end—one for you to access for feeding/cleaning and one for the birds to access the aviary. Your cote should be able to hold a nest bowl, water dish, feed dish, grit dish and have at least 1 perch area.

Both doors can be made of wood with 1/2" hardware cloth covering an “observation” window which would help with air circulation. You may also want to create a plexiglass “shutter” that could be closed over the window during inclement weather. The access door should be large enough for you to comfortably reach into the interior of the box to clean the floor and perches periodically. Lining the floor with several layers of heavy paper about 4-5" larger than the floor space and then a layer of wood chips will help absorb moisture. Cleaning will be as simple as removing all dishes and simply grasping the paper by the corners to lift everything out of the box.

Good sanitary practice: Always wear rubber or latex gloves when doing any cleaning work for your birds. In addition, wearing an N-95 mask is also recommended to avoid breathing in any fine particulate matter.

Make sure that there are a few small, screen-covered holes near the top of the box just under the roof line for adequate ventilation. Birds may become sick in damp conditions. The top of the cote should have a layer of insulation to help prevent sunshine overheating the interior. A tin roof covering an insulated plywood ceiling with a slight slant and overhang and/or small gutter-like channel will prevent the shelter structure from getting wet and rotting. (See pictures of our cote/flight space for an example)

The cote and flight area should be off the ground by at least a 2—3' feet (high enough for you to access it comfortably). The flight area should be constructed of 1/2" hardware cloth (available at hardware or farm supply stores) and be completely enclosed and securely attached to the cote. The bottom of the aviary should also be 1/2" hardware cloth so that their poop falls through onto the ground below, keeping the aviary floor clean. Several perches can be installed and you can also install another door for access to the aviary for cleaning perches and floor boards, but make sure that it is secure and predator-proof.

Classic Old Frills and Frillbacks have feathered feet so you should provide them with several pieces of thin board material on the floor of the aviary for them to stand on as they don't like getting their feet feathers stuck in the hardware cloth.

Placement of your cote/aviary should ideally be south or south east facing so that the birds are able to get plenty of sunshine but are sheltered from the worst of the prevailing winds and inclement weather. If you plan on keeping your birds in this structure year-round, it would be a good idea to add some insulation to the cote. Many good examples of lofts, cotes and aviaries can be found online including building instructions.

As you increase your flock, you will need a much larger cote/aviary building and then you can use the 3'x3'x3' cote as a quarantine location for any new birds you purchase.

Nutrition Requirements

Classic Old Frill doves and Frillback pigeons are seed eaters (not cracked corn or soybean eaters). If you want healthy birds, their diet should consist of a mixture of milo (sorghum), millet, wheat and/or barley, and small field peas and for a training treat, sunflower hearts. Hulled seeds are best. This mixture should give them an approximate protein percentage of 10-13%. A 50 lb. batch of seed that would feed a pair of birds for about a year would consist of:

<u>Seed type</u>	<u>Protein %</u>	<u>Amount needed</u>
Small Field Peas	20%	5 lbs.
Milo (sorghum)	8%	15 lbs.
Millet	12%	10 lbs.
Wheat	12%	10 lbs.
Barley	12%	<u>10 lbs.</u>
Total		50 lbs.

The above mixture would provide approximately a 10% protein ration which would be fed from the molting season (August) through the rest period prior to breeding season in the spring. To increase the protein percentage for breeding season to around 12-13% protein, you would add a small amount (about 1/4 tsp per bird per day) of hulled sunflower hearts at 27% protein. Feedings should be twice per day (morning and late afternoon) and be about 1 tablespoon per bird per feeding, so if you have a pair, feed 2 Tbls. in the morning and 2 Tbls. in the late afternoon. Monitor this feed and adjust accordingly so that they eat most everything and have a little left over.

In addition to their feed, birds require grit in order to break down the seeds for digestion. Since Classic Old Frills and Frillbacks are much smaller in size than adult chickens, you would want to provide them with "Chick" grit that is specially ground into smaller, finer pieces of grit and in addition, is coated with probiotics which are important for digestion. The birds should have a dish of this available at all times and it needs to stay dry and clean.

Finally, the birds will also need a feed supplement that provides them with vitamins D3, B12, and E, as well as calcium for strong eggshell production. A good source that provides all of this is a chicken feed product (organic or non-GMO) called "Egg Layer Mini Pellets" (available at farm supply stores). These pellets are small enough for them to eat easily and contain lots of good nutrients to help keep your birds healthy. Just a quarter to half teaspoon per day will be sufficient to meet each bird's dietary needs.

You will want to store your feed in a rodent-proof, dry container, in a well ventilated room and kept from extreme temperature conditions and humidity. If the feed smells musty or becomes moldy due to damp conditions, throw it out as it can make your birds very sick!

Things that we have experimented with and found that the Classic Old Frills and Frillback birds will not eat are whole or cracked corn, soybeans, large field peas, split peas, lentils, flaxseed, rice, and rolled oats. Large chicken grit is also not eaten by the birds as most of the pieces are just too large. (See our list of possible suppliers on page 10 of this booklet.)

Breeding Time

Classic Old Frill doves and Frillback pigeons mate for life. If kept in mated pairs and are fed well, they will attempt to breed all year round with the exception of a molt usually in July-August. These birds become sexually mature between 5-6 months of age. If you don't want lots of babies, you have two choices: 1) separate the males from the females for about 6 months (Aug-Jan), or 2) let them lay their two eggs but within a day or so, replace those eggs with "dummy" eggs which can be purchased online.

Before they begin mating activity, set up a nest bowl in a nestbox area. After placement, do not move it or remove it. And never move their eggs to another location after they have been laid. The first egg will be laid between 5-7 pm (central time) and then the second egg will be laid two days later between 3--5 pm. (Ex: 1st egg laid on the 1st day of the month, 2nd egg laid on the 3rd day). At that point, the male and female will take turns setting on the eggs for the next 17-18 days. The male will set from late morning through mid to late afternoon and the female will set late afternoon through late morning the next day.

Both parents will feed the babies, called squabs, first with "crop milk" that they produce in their crops. After about 6 days, they will begin to mix the milk with seeds. This is a critical time and you must make sure that you have adequate food, water and grit for them at all times. It is best to double their food and also to feed more sunflower hearts and layer crumbles which are softer and easier for the squabs to digest. Mom and Dad will eat a good quantity of seed, then take a big drink and may also pick up some grit and then go to the nest to feed the babies.

The squab double in size within 2 days of hatching. Their eyes will open after about a week. After about 2 weeks, the parents will spend less time in the nest with them and they will become feathered out. You will need to routinely clean their nest box (or bowl), removing soiled bedding and replacing with fresh. Continue this weekly until the babies fledge. After about 14-18 days, the cock (dad) will mainly take over the feeding of the squab, especially if the hen (mom) is preparing and setting on another set of eggs. By 35 days (5 weeks) the squab will be fully developed and able to feed themselves and fly. Once the babies are about 8—10 weeks old, they can be moved to a larger aviary/cote to be with the rest of the flock and out of the care of their parents.

Banding

If you are considering showing your birds or selling to anyone who might be interested in showing them, you will need to band them and this *must* take place between 6-9 days of hatching while their legs are still small enough and the leg and foot feathers have not yet fully emerged. If you wait until later, you will risk injuring them by forcing the band over toes that have grown too large to fit through the band. Classic Old Frills require a Size C 9mm band and Frillbacks require Size D 10 mm. It is best to order at the beginning of the year and have a supply on hand. National Pigeon Association sells both sizes of bands. See page 10 for more details.

To place a band on a squab, have one person hold the bird while the other person slips the band on the leg by gently pressing the 3 front toes together, sliding the band over them, up onto the leg and over the fourth (back) toe. Gently pull the last toe through the band and let the band rest just above the foot. Be careful to not injure any of the leg feathers or have them pointing in the wrong direction after placement of the band. Record the band number in your records.

Health Problems & Remedies

If you feed your birds the proper nutrition and keep their cotes/aviary clean, you can expect them to live 10-15 years and raise many healthy young. The following is a brief list of several illnesses that can affect your birds and symptoms to watch for. The book "Pigeons, A Complete Pet Owner's Manual" by Matthew M. Vriends goes into more detail.

Coccidiosis—intestinal disease causes weight loss, droppings very watery, easily spread from bird to bird when oocysts contained in droppings are ingested accidentally when eating or drinking.

Mycoplasmosis-microscopic organisms transmitted through droppings in food and water. It is suspected that almost all pigeons carry it but it usually effects only homing pigeons.

Ornithosis (O-C)— *this disease is actually transmittable from bird to human*, birds less inclined to fly, develop respiratory problems, sit with open beak gasping for breath, watery eyes, runny nose, may also have raspy breathing and diarrhea. Transmitted via drinking water and through the air. Young birds are more susceptible to this disease if stressed, bad food, cold/damp loft, drafts.

Pox-viral infection, crusty lesions around eyes, beak, on feet and anus, also cheese-like foul smelling deposits in beak and throat, transmitted through saliva, can also affect liver and bone marrow.

Salmonella— can be fatal to young birds, intestinal bacteria passed through droppings of infected birds in food, water, crop-milk or saliva. Infected parents show no symptoms but infect their young, can affect joints, intestines, other vital organs, and the nervous system, symptoms are serious diarrhea and leg and wing weakness.

Trichomoniasis (called trich) - many adult birds are carriers but are not affected, they can pass it to their young via crop milk and babies from 1-5 weeks of age quickly die from it, bird becomes lethargic, fluffs its plumage, has serious diarrhea, loses weight, drinks profusely, gasps for breath.

Parasites—mites & lice - mainly irritants that cause scratching and excessive preening, generally not lethal. Well-fed, healthy birds, usually able to tolerate, but if infestation becomes excessive birds can lose condition quickly. Birds in poor health can suffer greatly.

Parasites—worms - parasites living in the body, spread through eggs passing out of the bird in their droppings and then ingested with soiled feed or water, birds lose weight, have diarrhea, molt excessively.

As you can see, almost all of these illnesses are passed from infected birds through their droppings that end up in feed or water. The best prevention methods are to first: quarantine new birds for a period of 6-8 weeks and monitor their health before adding them to your flock, and second: to make sure you scrupulously keep cotes and aviaries clean and have feed, water and grit dishes that have covers above them to help keep droppings from landing in them. Clean water 2 times per day, remove any feed that is contaminated with droppings quickly, keep floors (wire and wood) and perches clean. Make sure your birds are fed a healthy diet with all the vitamins and minerals needed, get plenty of sunshine and fresh air, keep in dry (not damp) well-ventilated housing, avoid over-crowding of the cotes, and constantly monitor their droppings as this is often the first sign of trouble. If you see loose, watery or blackened, smelly droppings, isolate the bird(s) from the flock. To help them recover, you can add a pinch of baking soda and salt to their water once a day to replace electrolytes. In a separate water dish, place a few drops of organic apple cider vinegar per half cup water which will alter the pH of their digestive system and make it less tolerable for the invaders. Never mix baking soda and vinegar in same water! Dried flaked oregano is also good for treating coccidiosis. We feel that it is not necessary to constantly be adding antibiotics and other medications to their water or feed as this actually tends to build up resistance in bacteria/viruses, and also weakens the birds' immune system, causing them to be more susceptible to illness. Let nature be your guide, keep them healthy with cleanliness, good feed, and fresh air and sunshine (Mother Nature's best disinfectant!). And make sure you wear gloves and an N-95 mask when cleaning cotes and aviaries to protect yourself as well!

Bathing

Classic Old Frill doves especially love to take water baths and it is fun to watch! Frillback pigeons are a bit less enthusiastic but will soak their feathered feet if given the chance. We use a sturdy metal 9" pie pan and fill it with about an inch of water. Place it in the aviary on the wire floor so that anything that is splashed out will drop through to the ground below. And then sit back and watch the fun! If the water becomes soiled with droppings, replace the water. Birds don't need to have bath water every day, but it can be given a couple times per week, weather permitting.

Mating Combinations

One of the great things about breeding your Classic Old Frills and Frillbacks is to see the amazing array of color combinations that are produced. For example, we have a pair of Black Lace Classic Old Frills and their first hatching produced a black lace and a black white bar bird. The second hatch gave us a bluette and a softer colored black lace. The third hatch gave us identical black laces with rootbeer coloration and spot tails. You don't have to separate your mated pairs to try to get other colors. Let them be mated for life and appreciate the amazing diversity that they will produce!

Sexing Your Birds

It is impossible to tell the sex of your birds until they near maturity at about 5—6 months of age. The males will begin to "coo" and do a dance where they circle around and bob up and down to get the female's attention. Females really don't display any dance or sound, but simply sit quietly and let the show proceed.

Handling

Never try to catch your birds by grabbing them by the tail feathers! You can pull them out and do serious damage to the bird. Grasp the bird so that your thumb is over the bird's back and your fingers cup over the breast, keeping the wings close to the bird's body. Then, with your other hand, place your thumb over the rump of the bird and the legs in between your first and second fingers, keeping the bird facing toward your body.

Record Keeping

We keep a written record of each pair of birds and this is a great way to track their matings and offspring. On the following page we have an example of a record that we use to keep track of our birds. Feel free to duplicate the format.

Origin of the word "Pigeon"

Somewhere over the years, the term "pigeon" came to represent a rather less-than-desirable bird that hung out in barns and parks and pooped all over the place. Oddly enough, the English word "Pigeon" comes from the French word, "Pyjon", meaning, a young bird, especially a young dove. In general, pigeons and doves are from the same family but doves are a bit smaller than pigeons and usually lighter in color. The word "Dove" carries a far more pleasant connotation and is often used as a symbol of peace or hope. We actually prefer the word "dove" to "pigeon". So feel free to call your birds doves!

Classic Old Frill Breeding Record

Year: 2022

Cock Band#: NPA22 9 CF1120 Color: Blulette Father Band#/Name: VOS 1
 Cock Name: Odin DOB: 4/30/22 Mother Band#/Name: VOS 2
 Hen Band#: NPA22 9 CF1134 Color: Brown Lace Father Band#/Name: VOS 3
 Hen Name: Claire DOB: 4/15/22 Mother Band#/Name: VOS 4

Eggs Laid On:	Date Hatched	Band #	Sex	Name	Color
8/23, 25	9/11	NPA22 9 CG2500	M	Eddie	Black/brown lace
		NPA22 9 CG2501	M	Freddie	Blulette
10/12,14	10/30	NPA22 9 CG2506		Linn	Black lace
		NPA22 9 CG2507		Michael	Blulette

Date: Notes:

8/14 paired Odin and Claire off together

Late Aug Odin not setting well during day. Claire doing most of egg setting as incubation progresses (Odin is rather young but is still learning how to be a good parent)

9/13 both Odin and Claire appear to be good first time parents, often both in the nest feeding the babies at same time.

9/18 Banded Eddie and Freddie at 7 days old

10/2 Eddie and Freddie out of nest box on main floor of cage at 3 weeks old

10/15 Eddie and Freddie both flew up onto perch bar for first time at 5 weeks old

10/28 Eddie and Freddie moved to aviary at 7 weeks old as Odin & Claire due to hatch In 2 days.

11/7 Banded Linn and Michael at 8 days old

11/24 Linn & Michael fledged out of nest box to main cage floor at 3.5 wks old

12/11 Moved Claire, Odin, Linn and Michael (at 6 weeks old) to winter protected aviary with other birds for the winter

Possible Feed & Supply Sources

The following is a list of several suppliers of dove/pigeon feed in the mid-west area. This is not intended to be an endorsement for any supplier. It is simply a list that we have compiled for you. You will want to talk directly to them to learn about the different mixes of seed that they carry. Please remember that Classic Old Frill Doves and Frillback Pigeons have smaller beaks than most pigeons and cannot for example eat what a homing pigeon might be able to eat.

Des Moines Feed Co. 2010 Hubbell Ave., Des Moines, IA 50317 (515) 262-0154
dmfnaturecenter.com

Pigeon Supplies Plus 25740 Hickory Blvd., Belle Plaine, MN 56011 (952) 212-8446
pigeonsuppliesplus.com

Hy View Feeds LLC 40928 County Rd 18, Mabel, MN 55954 (507) 493-5564

Hyviewfeeds.com **[NOTE:** You can only purchase the individual seed TYPES (wheat, barley, milo, millet, small field peas) in quantities of 50# per TYPE. So if you want the bird feed mix that we recommend on page 5, you would have to order 1 each 50# bag of each type and then mix them yourself. This means you would be purchasing a total of 250 lbs. (5 different seed types). This would feed 5 pairs of birds for a year.

Pet Expo in Mankato, MN carries a few individual seed types such as millet, sunflower hearts, and safflower. As of early 2023, they do not carry wheat, barley, milo or small field peas so buying and mixing your own feed from Pet Expo would be impossible.

For Organic 16% Egg Layer Crumbles or non-GMO Egg Layer Mini Pellets, you can obtain them at farm supply stores such as Tractor Supply, Fleet Farm, or other farm supply stores. These farm supply stores are also a good source for Chick Grit, as well as feeders and waterers.

As a quick source for a bird feed mix to tide you over, Menard's carries several types of wild bird seed mixes. One that would provide some of what your birds would need would be Kay Tee Wild Bird Food Basic Blend in 20 lb. bags. This has cracked corn, milo, millet, black oil sunflower kernels. They also sell hulled sunflower hearts in 20 lbs. bags. While the Wild Bird Food blend does not have sufficient protein, you could supplement it with the sunflower hearts to boost the protein percentage. But note that the birds probably won't eat the cracked corn or the black oil sunflower kernels so there will be some waste unless you also have a poultry flock.

For leg bands, National Pigeon Association P O Box 295, Winston, GA 30187 (404) 922-4960
npausa.com

Additional Reading Material:

Pigeons, A Complete Pet Owner's Manual by Matthew M. Vriends

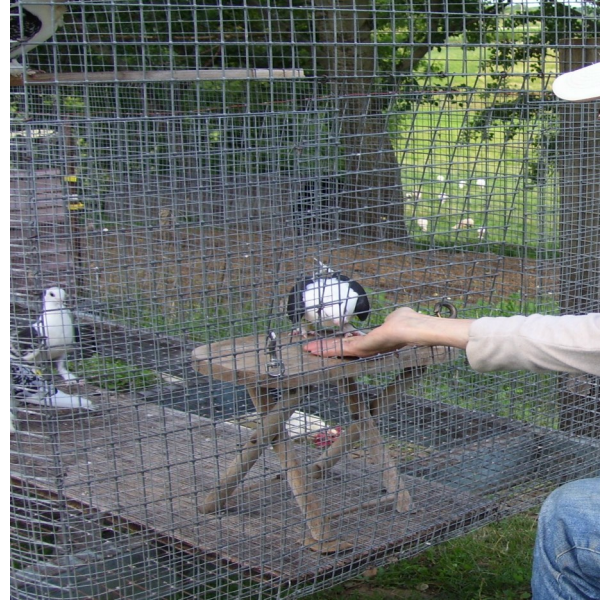
ISBN 0-8120-4044-9

Pigeons, Responsible Pet Care by Carlienne Frisch

ISBN 0-86625-193-6



3'x3'x3' cote with attached flight cage
Note the sliding door in upper picture



Extra cage door for access to hand feed



Breeder cages in heated building. Note nest box attached to right side of lower cage.



Aviary for housing multiple birds during winter months. Note the nesting shelves in the left pic.



Covered heated waterer and covered feeder along with grit dispenser. Note the droppings on the covers keep container contents clean. Also covered waterer prevents unwanted bird bathing.