

Groningen Slenkers

By K.D. Spurling (1995)



Groningen is a province/region of North Holland. It and the province of Friesland make up all of the northern Netherlands. While the Dutch have given to the world of pigeons many exciting varieties of pigeons (i.e. Dutch Highfliers, Hague Highfliers, Dutch Croppers, Dutch Tumblers, and so on); very few have ever achieved any general stardom in North America. Still, they have some wonderful creations and fanciers ought to keep and learn more about them.

Clapper Turner races were once very widely kept in the north of Holland. Often they were used as droppers for Racing Pigeons, and one cannot employ a better dropper than a ClapperTurner race such as Rhineland Ringbeaters, Belgian Turners, the Speelderkes, Smiters, and likely even the Anatolier Ringbeater for any type of flying pigeon. To this day the Clapper-Turners are found in some numbers in the northern Netherlands.

The Groningen Slenker has a history in Groningen city and the surrounding areas going back about the period of about 1600 or there about. Generally, it is believed that this race of per-

formance pigeon hails from a cross of the Belgian Turners (also known as Belgian Ringschlaeger; which is split into two varieties, the Brabanters and Aalsters); so crossed upon the Old Amsterdam Balloon Croppers (Holle) which the Slenkers do in fact largely resemble, and possibly also the Bohemian Swing Pouter. The Slenkers are a true bastard breed; half cropper and half Clapper-Turner.

In impression, the Groningen Slenker looks to be a poorly bred specimen of the Amsterdam race of Croppers; due to the great resemblance to the breed, but is less exaggerated in it's design. At once, the Slenker characteristics compose of a semi tremulous and long 'S' shaped neck attached to a rather long oval skull. The eyes are what I would term as 'gravel orange', beginning with a pearl iris that gradually melds into a bright orange. In the ideal, the inner half of the iris is to be 'pure white' fading into a dark orange. This applies as well to Self Whites. The eyes give off a strange fiery expression, that suggests a 'Go To Hell' temperament. The eyes are not too high set into the head. The head is carried back at a steep angle, and nearly rests upon the back. The body is of medium size, and is very wide across the chest which is highly erected. The legs are short, unfeathered, and set in what is rather the back portion of the body and are rather wide apart. The tail is short and wide, and should not touch the floor when the bird is in action. The back is short, rather wide, and with a hollow pocket. The wings are rather short and extremely strong, being carried rather on the sides of the tail.

Colors are Whites, Yellows, Mealy, and Cream with light colored flights, tail, and the lower part of the body and back. On the lower breast, the colors gradually fade into white. There are as well, Blacks, Duns, Blues, and Silvers - but these are very rare. Rare enough that they are almost never mentioned in any literature; but I have seen them with my own eyes, even if

some do not believe they exist. And these were among the finest Slenkers I have ever seen in my life. These particular birds were imported from a leading German fancier at the large Nurnberg show by our good friend Roger Miller in California. These are primarily blacks. Twelve, and sixteen years ago I was breeding Slenkers in Blues; but these do not exist in North America anymore after I lost them.

Also, there is what can be called the Red Barred and Yellow Barred varieties, which are more properly known as Streifigs or 'Streifigen'. I have also seen these referred to as 'Fawn Reds' and 'Fawn Yellows' here in this country. These birds are an off white, with the exception of a white crescent on the breast. The bars on the wing shield are colored along with some feathers in the wing shield, neck and the nape. In the lighter sub variety (i.e. 'Licht Rood Streifigen'- Light Red), the colored fields are replaced by even more white. This is to say that the Streifigs are what we would call Red and Yellow Grizzles of varying shades.

I have as well, seen Blue and Black Streifigs; which are both very, very, nice. Some Striefigs come showing traces of the third bar in the wing shield, which is a serious fault.

The Slenker in the air is one of the most unusual and awe inspiring spectacles in the pigeon world. This is the most important aspect of the breed, and color and type MUST NOT be the only goal in one's breeding. Even if one has not seen a particular specimen in the air, like Ringbeaters and other Turning races one can still spot good performing Slenkers in the show coop very easily by the wear of the primary flights. The wing plumage must show some extreme wear due to heavy wing clapping even if the birds are not flown in their life. This wearing of the primaries can be used as a guide in evaluating the birds, and if a Slenker in plu-

mage of even only a very young age does not show some wear; such a bird should not attain a high rating in a show. This particular family of Domestic Pigeons is the only one I am aware of where in feather wear is not only acceptable, but extremely desirable in the exhibitions. With this in mind, I would say that regular outside exercise would be an important part of show conditioning for the Slenkers.

The Slenkers do not fly as normal pigeons would. That is to say they do not group up into kits, and do not achieve any real altitude during flight. Their flying consists of low and broad circles just above housetop levels. These broad motions of flight are interrupted at regular intervals by heavy and noisy wing clapping, sailing (holding the wings over the body and gliding down on slow arcs), and even swinging down as would their Bohemian ancestors. The wings are struck not only above the body, but also below the body; which leads to the result of heavy wear in the primaries and inner secondary's.

The Slenkers and other members of their small family have always been very rare and abstract breeds of flying pigeons everywhere in the world. They are among the very unknown oddities of the pigeon world. Most fanciers will probably never see a live specimen of these antiquities in their lifetime, and they will be lucky to see them in books. Still, the Groningen Slenker is in fact present in North America. To my knowledge, Roger Miller and myself are the only breeders on the North American continent. It is fortunate that we only live about 4 or 6 hours apart and often attend the same shows on a fairly regular basis.

For those who really want a unique and unusual RARE breed that few people know, the Slenker of the city of Groningen, North Holland; may very well be the breed for YOU.