



The Incorrect use of antibiotics

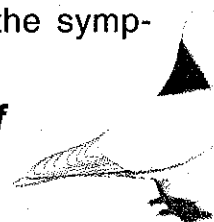
by Jan Lombard

I came across the following article on the Internet: <http://www.pigeonland.co.uk/>. It was an eye opener. Please think about what you are doing before you give the next sick pigeon a dose of antibiotics. When you fall ill, do you take the first available antibiotics left over by a family member, or do you consult a doctor for a proper diagnosis and the correct medication? Did you ever wonder why humans need a doctor's script to get antibiotics from a pharmacy, while pigeon antibiotics can be bought in every second petshop??? Why should your feather friends be treated differently. My personal policy is to keep my lofts clean and dry. I give vitamins once a week, and fresh water twice a day. I feed the best grain mixture I can get. I vaccinate against PMV, Salmonella and pigeon pox. If a bird gets sick under these clean conditions, it is most probably a

weakling that should be culled. By doing this I build a strong strain that is resistant to disease. Let's see what the experts say.

"The use of antibiotics by pigeon fanciers should be banned. Pigeon fanciers don't know what they are doing when it comes to treating pigeons with antibiotics, and what is worse; they are causing untold damage. Typically, most fanciers look at the pigeon's symptoms, guess what the disease is, they guess what to treat the disease with, and they guess what dose to use. Pigeon fanciers don't know how, or when, to use antibiotics properly. They give their pigeons antibiotics to treat diseases caused by viruses. Antibiotics do not kill viruses. The reason given for using antibiotics for viral infection, is to prevent the secondary infection caused by opportunistic bacteria. The truth is that the antibiotics cause the appearance of the opportunistic bacteria in the first place. All the good pigeon friendly bacteria are killed, leaving way for the antibiotic-resistant bacteria that cause disease, to move in. Fanciers will, in ignorance, give antibiotics for

almost anything; paramyxovirus, adenovirus, herpes, coccidiosis, hexamita, even worms. Antibiotics are no good against any of these ailments but as soon as there is anything wrong, pigeon fanciers are off to get the 'yellow powder' to put in the water. A bloke down the pub can get hold of some, the corn merchant can get some, a mate down the pigeon club has got some in a cardboard box at home. How much do they put in the water.....who knows? What exactly is the 'yellow powder'.....who knows? How strong is this magic powder.....who knows? How long should they give the yellow powder for....who knows? Even when the cause of the problem really is bacterial they use the wrong antibiotics for the wrong bacteria. For example, there is really only one antibiotic effective against the worst strains of Salmonella, but does the average fancier know that.....? In fact does the average pigeon fancier know anything about antibiotics. Well let's find out. Here's a test. Go down the pigeon club and ask if anyone knows the correct antibiotic for Chlamydia. Then ask them what the symp-

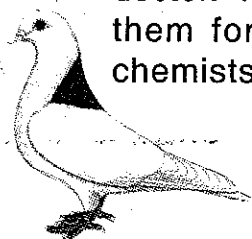


toms are for Salmonellosis, and how they can tell it from Chlamydia. Then ask them what is the difference between, 'Auremycin', 'Ornicure' and 'Terramycin'. Ask them, for how long they should administer Enrofloxacin? I suspect that none will know the answers, and yet I bet that most have used antibiotics at some time.....for something. To be sure of totally, and effectively eradicating bacterial infection, most antibiotics should be administered for 14-21 days. How many fanciers have the knowledge, or even the patience to keep up that treatment? Some just add the antibiotic powder to the water for just 2-5 days. This is not long enough. Any recovery they see in their pigeons is happening in spite of the antibiotics. The pigeon is fighting the infection primarily on it's own. Furthermore, what is remarkable, is that to get antibiotics to treat humans, you need a prescription from the doctor. You can't just buy them for yourself at the chemists. This is to limit

their inappropriate and indiscriminate use. Similarly if you want antibiotics to treat your dog or cat you need firstly to have the pet examined by a vet. But access to antibiotics to treat pigeons seems to be under no such control. Antibiotics can very easily be obtained within pigeon circles, usually from someone who buys them when they go abroad, where controls are less vigorously enforced. Even when fanciers obtain antibiotics legitimately, from a reputable vet, and follow the instructions to the letter, it can still turn out to be a complete waste of time and money.

Evidence? In Holland, at the University of Utrecht, all the antibiotics sold for treating pigeons were evaluated, and the doses recommended by the manufacturer were compared with their effectiveness at killing bacterial infections. They found that only 3 of the recommended dosages out of 60 formulations marketed were correct. It was concluded that the majority of

treatments are unlikely to work. The reason for this is that the so-called pigeon antibiotics were never developed for pigeons. They were first developed for humans, then adapted for farm animals like pigs and chickens, and for common pets like cats and dogs. Few, if any, trials have been carried out on pigeons. It's no wonder the manufacturers have to guess the dose. The antibiotics are not even administered on an individual basis to the pigeons. Fanciers just throw some powder into the drinkers. So how much is each pigeon getting? How much will the pigeon absorb? Will it achieve blood levels high enough to kill the bacteria? Will the pigeon's metabolism break down the antibiotic and excrete it before it can work? If you give too much is it toxic? None of these questions have been answered. The Dutch study concluded that if all the antimicrobials sold for treating pigeons had to be registered under the Dutch medicines act 1985 they would nearly all be rejected be-



cause of poor pharmacokinetics and bacteriological efficacy. To make things worse, fanciers are even giving antibiotics when there are no symptoms, just in case! So what, you might ask, it can't do any harm.....can it? It most certainly can! The indiscriminate use of antibiotics is about to cause the biggest disaster that has hit the pigeon world ever.

Let me explain to the irresponsible scribes in the fancy press that keep extolling the virtues of antibiotics, and I include all the qualified vets in that category.....if we don't stop using antibiotics a new killer superbug will evolve. A bug so resistant that it will chomp up any antibiotic that we throw at it. All life on two legs will become plagued by untreatable life threatening bacterial infection, and that includes the pigeon fancier as well. Scare mongering? I think not. I'm not the only one who is thinking along these lines. Let me

tell you a story. In America the Federal Drug Agency has banned the use of antibiotics by American poultry farmers. The reason new antibiotic resistant bacteria are springing up that cause untreatable gastric illness in chickens and yes, in humans. But that's only just a one off isn't it.....wrong! In hospitals, doctors and nurses are at the moment fighting an uphill battle. The cause is MRSA Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. If a patient coming out of an operation gets the bug it can dramatically reduce their chances of survival. Patients are dying, not because of their illness or surgery, but because of septicaemia. All patients being moved between hospitals have to be screened for this potentially deadly bacteria, and if someone is carrying it, they go straight into isolation, because once this bug gets out into the ward there is very little out there to kill it. It is resistant to nearly all known antibiotics.

It's rapidly becoming untreatable! Furthermore, two million people a year die of Tuberculosis, one new person per second is contracting the disease. But that's not a problem in Britain is it.....? Yes I'm afraid so. 70-100 people entering Heathrow airport a year are detected as having TB. They are X-rayed and given treatment to prevent the spread into the large cities like London, but people still slip through. In America they are taking the threat of a TB epidemic very seriously. In 1997 in New York they spent 1 billion dollars to try to control the spread of the disease. But TB is easy to clear up.....isn't it? Wrong!.....a person with TB has to take 6-7 antibiotics per day for SIX months to be sure of recovery. Why so many antibiotics, for so long? TB has evolved to become resistant. It is now known as Multi drug-resistant Tuberculosis MDRTB, and because of that, many classes of antibiotics have to be taken to

make sure that that the sufferers are using at least one antibiotic that's effective. However the list of effective antibiotics that can be used to fight TB is getting shorter. The reason? Over-prescribing and over-use of antibiotics. In the past doctors were so keen to give out antibiotics they treated them like sweets. If you went to the doctor with a cold you were given.....antibiotics. If you went there with a cough you were given antibiotics. Sure they killed some bugs but the bacteria that were resistant were left untouched, and suddenly with all the other bacteria out of the way they didn't have any competition. They multiplied and filled the spaces left by the good bugs. Does this scenario sound familiar to anyone. Read any of the pigeon journals. There is always some scribe telling everyone to use antibiotics for something. One of them proclaimed that as soon as his pigeons looked a bit off, he'd give them antibiotics. Well if he sticks to that re-

gime soon his pigeons will look more than just a bit off.....their droppings will be liquid, they will be throwing up, losing weight and falling over.....dead. He is creating just the right conditions for Antibiotic-Resistant Salmonellosis ARS and he is one, because if such a bug gets out and invades the poultry industry we will have to kill all our pigeons. Surely the Ministry of agriculture fisheries and foods (MAFF) wouldn't make us do that would they? All I can say to that is BSE.....over 100,000 cattle slaughtered to prevent the spread of the disease. Porcine swine fever.....tens of thousands of pigs killed to contain the infection. In the sixties Foot and mouth disease212,000 cattle, 108,000 sheep and 114,000 pigs slaughtered, need I go on. The MAFF are unlikely to risk the destruction of the billion pound poultry industry, so that a few people can race pigeons. Remember, it was the MAFF that proclaimed

paramyxovirus a notifiable disease in pigeons, and instigated compulsory vaccination to prevent the spread to poultry farms. So they have the power. So, is the appearance and spread of a superbug just fantasy? Well, let us just look around. In the 1940's penicillin could easily destroy the bacteria that causes meningitis, well today, in the United States, due to over prescribing, three quarters of the meningitis causing bacteria are resistant to it. Now outbreaks of meningitis have never been so high. In Greece where antibiotics are available over the counter over half of all the bacteria in circulation are resistant to treatment. In the bird world, in Kenya where antibiotics are added to chicken feed, chicken guts now are full of bacteria totally resistant to tetracycline. Exactly how serious is the situation? Well, in Madagascar a single strain of plague bacillus is now resistant to ampicillin,



chloramphenicol, streptomycin, kanamycin, tetracycline, and the sulphonamides. Yes I'll repeat that.....PLAGUE. We are not talking acne here.....this is plague. If that gets out we are in real trouble.

More frighteningly, once the superbugs move in there is no shifting them, you're stuck with them for life. Evidence? In Norway a broiler farm was hit by Vancomycin-resistant Enterococci, VRE, due to the use of antibiotics in the feed. They killed all the chickens, stripped down the whole place, scrubbed it out completely with bleach and germicides. They put in new stock from a clean hatchery and within three weeks all the new chickens had VRE. It only takes the ingestion of one resistant bacteria and before long there are millions of them. There are over one million bacteria in the guts of a pigeon. There are about two million pigeons in Britain. That's two

billion bacteria.....luckily most of them friendly. But if pigeon fanciers keep using antibiotics, they will wipe out all the friendly bacteria, and guess what will move into their place.....the antibiotic resistant ones....the killers. So if you get an antibiotic resistant strain in your loft, you will probably never be able to race again. You will have to kill all of your birds in the loft assuming they haven't died already, burn down the loft, and move. Even that will only work if you are not a carrier. Perhaps you don't use antibiotics. Well don't think that because of that you are safe. If someone down your club does use them, and his pigeons carry an antibiotic resistant strain of bacteria, and your pigeons go into the same race crate, they will share the same drinker, stand in the same droppings, and eat the same food off of the floor during a holdover. The process of infestation by an antibiotic-resistant strain of bacteria

can be very rapid as the entire bacterial population in the guts of a pigeon can be completely replaced in as little as 20 minutes.

So what is the solution. Stop using antibiotics, stop reading articles proclaiming the use of antibiotics, tell your mates to stop using them, stop buying antibiotics, and don't let your vet give you any antibiotics, get rid of any pigeons that are persistently sick and let your loft build up it's own natural immunity. Only then, will pigeon racing, and probably mankind, have a safer future. Naaa!.....I hear you say.....this is all in the future it won't bother us now. Well just open up your pigeon paper and see the new 'service' that is being offered by the vetsantibiotic-sensitivity testing!The bacteria found in pigeon droppings have started to become antibiotic-resistant! So watch out pigeons.....the superbugs are on their way!
