



Parade of Pigeons
By Lynita Strei

If you live in a city you probably see pigeons everyday. Maybe you can spot them outside your window, pecking and prancing around. You may see so many pigeons that you don't even notice them anymore. Even the most common birds, ones you see everyday, can be interesting if you know more about them. Let's get to know our close neighbors the pigeons.

While you read this book, see if you can discover the answers to these four questions:

1. How do pigeons drink water?
2. Do all pigeons look alike?
3. Do pigeons have any special talents?
4. Do pigeons move around the same as other birds?

Pre-reading Guide:

I already know about pigeons:

I have observed pigeons:

I want to learn about pigeons:



Pigeons were first called Rock Doves, but now they are called Rock Pigeons. Pigeons can be found in cities all over the world. Most pigeons live about three to five years, but in captivity they can live to be 15 years old.

Pigeons eat seeds, berries, grass, and, but will eat whatever they can find, including garbage! Pigeons use their beaks like straws and suck up water to drink.

Pigeons make sounds called *coos*. Male pigeons coo to get a female's attention. Pigeons make another coo to alarm other pigeons of danger. Pigeon babies make snapping and hissing noises when they are upset.

Pigeons can hear things we cannot. Especially very low noises like the wind howling. They can hear a thunder rumbling far away. Pigeons can also see colors that we cannot. At times, pigeons might be scared off by something we cannot hear or see.

Before we had computers and email, people used to train pigeons to carry short notes to other people far away. Pigeons can fly as far as 1000 miles and then find their way home. They are fast too! Pigeons can fly 30-50 miles per hour.

Pigeons have amazing skills that scientists are studying. These birds use the sun to guide them like a compass, but if they cannot see the sun, they still don't get lost. Pigeons can use the magnetic fields in the earth to find the way!

During Reading Guide:

Interesting pigeon facts:

Pigeons are special because



Pigeons come in many beautiful colors! Most birds come in just one color; like cardinals are red or blue jays are blue. But pigeons come in many different colors. Some pigeons are all white. They are sometimes called doves and can be a symbol of peace and love.





Other pigeons are grayish and have a wide black or blue stripe on their wings. They have shiny blue and green neck feathers. Some have a checker pattern on their wings. Other pigeons are a rusty brown color.

The color patterns on pigeons are called **morphs**. Scientists who study birds are called **ornithologists**. These scientists have named seven **morphs** of pigeons: Blue-bar, Red-bar, Red, Spread, Checker, Pied, and White. Count how many color patterns you see in the pigeons in your neighborhood.

Math Standards Activity (Graphing): Choose a place where you see pigeons everyday and feed them at the same time each day. Make a chart listing all the color patterns you've observed on the pigeons (example: red, white, black, grey, checker). Each day you observe them, tally how many of each pattern you see. (See the color chart of specific morph descriptions or go to www.pigeonwatch.org to learn more)

Write sentences to describe your findings. Example: We saw more white pigeons than all dark ones (Spread). Our graph shows that we observed mostly gray pigeons with black stripes on their wings (Blue-bars).

Color Morphs
Illustrations by Julie Zickefoose

	<p>Blue-bar: Blue-bars generally have a dark head, neck, and chest with some iridescence; a light-gray breast and belly; a black band at the end of the tail; and two black stripes or bars on each wing.</p>
<p>Red-bar: Some pigeons have the same basic pattern as blue-bars but the black areas are replaced by a rusty-red or brown color. These birds are called red-bars.</p>	
	<p>Checker: If a pigeon has a checker pattern on its wings it is called a checker. Checkers can range from very light gray with only a few black checks, to very dark with only a little light-gray still showing. Some checkers have wing-bars; some do not.</p>
<p>Red: When most or all of a pigeon's body and wings are rusty-red or brown, it is simply called a red.</p>	
	<p>Spread: If a bird is totally black or dark gray, it is called a spread. To remember this term, it helps to think that the dark color has spread over the bird's entire body.</p>
<p>Pied: Sometimes pigeons of any color have white patches, usually on the head or wing feathers. These are called peds. Pied birds come in many forms. Some look like they have been splashed with white. Others have white only on the primary wing feathers. Some birds are almost entirely white.</p>	
	<p>White: These birds are solid white.</p>

A pigeon family has a mother called a **hen**, a father called a **cock**, and a baby called a **hatchling**. When a hatchling is learning to eat it is called a **peeper** or a squaker. When a peeper is learning to fly it is called a **fledgling**. Hens lay two white eggs at a time. Both the mother and the father take turns sitting on the eggs in the nest. The cock brings pieces of sticks to the hen and she builds the nest. It takes approximately 18 days for the eggs to hatch and then about another month before they are ready to leave the nest.



Most birds hop on two feet, but pigeons aren't just any bird, they are unique. They walk like you and me, on one foot at a time. Watch the pigeons in your neighborhood. Notice how they walk and bob their heads up and down as they go. Compare this walk to most birds' hop.

If you see a pigeon fluff up his feathers and walk fast, this pigeon is trying to get a female's attention. Watch her fly away, but not very far. She is still watching him! See if she comes back or maybe he will follow her. This is how they get to know each other. What other kinds of movements do you see? What do you think they are "saying" with their actions? What noises are they making?

Science Standards Activity (Scientific Observation): Provide students with clipboards and pencils and spend time observing birds. Encourage students to be scientific observers. (Please see the chart of specific courtship behaviors or go to www.pigeonwatch.org to learn more). They can list various behaviors they observe and document. Use the descriptions from the Pigeon Watch materials and track which behaviors they see (tail-dragging, billing, driving, bowing, mating, clapping ...) Make comparisons between behaviors and sounds between different birds in your area. Students can make webs or Venn Diagrams of comparing various birds.

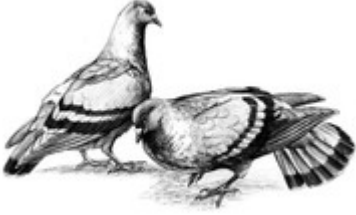


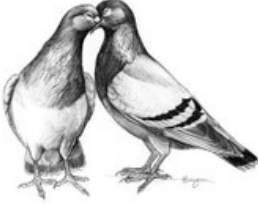


My observation of pigeons:

I observed

I noticed

Courtship Behaviors

Illustrations by Julie Zickefoose

	<p>Bowing: a male puffs out his neck feathers, lowers his head and turns around in circles</p>
<p>Tail-dragging: a male spreads his tail and drags it while he runs after a female</p>	
	<p>Driving: one pigeon runs closely behind another</p>
<p>Billings: when a female puts her beak (or bill) inside the male's beak during courtship</p>	
	<p>Mating: when mating, a male stands on top of a female</p>
<p>Clapping: After mating, a male pigeon may make a display flight. In this display, he "claps" his wings twice behind his back.</p>	

Language Arts Standard Activity (Root Words and Affixes): Create four boxes on a sheet of paper. In each square write a different form of the root word "observe". Explain that the word can be a verb, noun, and an adjective by using different suffixes: observation, observatory, observing, observant. Have the students come up with sentences or pictures for each form of the word in connection with their pigeon observations. Encourage students to think of themselves as scientists and use sentences to describe their activities. (Example: I observed pigeons pecking the popcorn we put out for them to eat.)



Pigeon Watch!

To study more about pigeons go to the www.pigeonwatch.org

The website has cool facts about pigeons, videos, frequently asked questions, and tells you how to become a student ornithologist. You can share your findings with lots of other people on the Internet. Pigeons are our neighbors. Let's get to know our colorful friends!

Diagram of Pigeon

Label parts:

Head

Wing

Wing bars (dark stripes on wings part of morphs)

Tail

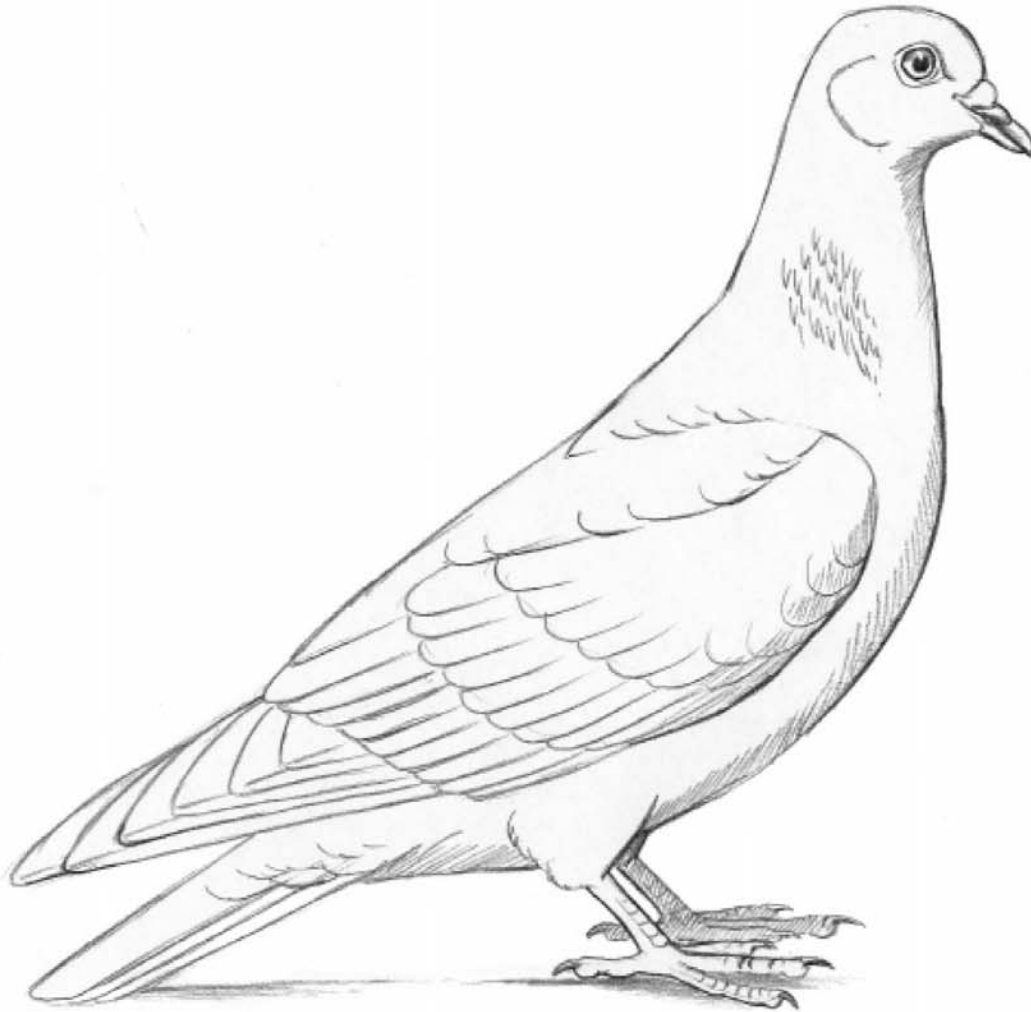
Feet

Neck

Beak

Cere (fleshy covering over beak – if it is white it is an adult bird; if it is gray it is a young pigeon)

Color the Pigeon / Colorea la Paloma



Post-Reading Guide:

Opinion: I think pigeons are:

Pigeons are different from other birds because:

The thing that surprised me most about pigeons is:

Glossary

Cock- male pigeon, father pigeon

Coo- the sound that a pigeon makes

Fledgling- baby pigeon learning to fly

Hatchling- baby pigeon just hatched from the egg, only two or three days old.

Hen- female pigeon, mother pigeon

Morph- the pattern of color on the feathers of pigeons.

Peeper- a baby pigeon learning to eat.

Ornithologists- scientists who study birds

Complimentary Fiction Reading

Erdrich, L. Illustrated by Jim LaMarche. (1996). *Grandmother's pigeon*. Hyperion Books for Children: New York, NY.

Freeman, D. (2004). *Fly high, fly low*. Viking Press: New York, NY.

Jennings, P. Illustrated by Anna Alter. (2001). *The bird shadow: An Ike and Mem story*. Holiday House: New York, NY.

Kurtz, C. and Kurtz, J. Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. (1997). *Only a pigeon*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers: New York, NY.

Selden, G. Illustrated by Garth Williams, (1980). *Chester cricket's pigeon ride*. Farrar Straus Giroux: New York, NY.

Willems, Mo. (2003). *Don't let the pigeon drive the bus*. Hyperion Books for Children: New York, NY.

All content is provided by Pigeon Watch, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

www.pigeonwatch.org

*Illustrations by Julie Zickefoose
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