





HOMING PIGEONS - HOW DOTHEY DO IT?

Pigeons have been used by man to carry messages for centuries. Indeed the Roman historian Pliny even mentions them as being successful messengers at the Siege of Mutina in 43BC! Our fascination with their homing ability has also attracted considerable scientific research.

Scientists today believe that homing (racing) pigeons use a range of skills to find their way home. The 2 most common theories are that pigeons use their magnetic and solar compasses to navigate. The earth's surface has magnetic contours and it is widely believed that the pigeon is able to follow these contours to get home. Similarly, they also use the sun to find their way home and as fanciers we ensure that pigeons have the opportunity to see the movement of the sun before they are released from their baskets on race days.

Other scientists also believe that pigeons follow landmarks such as roads and rivers and Oxford University has done significant research into this technique. The pigeon uses its sense of smell through its wattle, the white crusty bit on its beak.

With racing taking place from the continent the racing pigeon has to use a combination of these attributes to successfully fly home. A quarter of a million pigeons used in the 2nd world war effort proves this point and they were also successfully used in the NHS from Plymouth Hospital flying blood samples across the city to a laboratory in the 1980s.