



His Majesty the King
Buckingham Palace
London SW1A 1AA

6 April 2023

Sir:

I write on behalf of animal protection organisation PETA and our more than 1 million members and supporters across Great Britain to express our gratitude for the kindness that your Majesty has shown by banning foie gras from Royal residences, a decision that will rightly inspire others to reject this cruel product. May we respectfully now draw your attention to other birds who need your Majesty's help: pigeons, including those at the Sandringham Estate loft.

Over the last decade, PETA and its entities has collected and recorded extensive, inarguably clear, evidence that documents the cruelty inherent in much of the pigeon racing industry. Most regrettably, this includes birds from The Royal Loft who are entered into races in Britain, Europe, and South Africa. One race in which your Majesty's birds have been entered into – a flight from France to the Sandringham lofts - is over 1,000 km and include a harrowing portion in which the birds must fly over the English Channel - known by pigeon fanciers themselves as the 'pigeon graveyard' because massive numbers of bird deaths are expected.

Investigators have also filmed at the South African Million Dollar Pigeon Race (SAM DPR), where pigeons from the Sandringham loft have been sent to compete. The 600km "slaughter race" takes place in the sweltering heat and most pigeons forced to compete die from exhaustion, dehydration or starvation; others hit power lines or succumb to predators in their desperate flight home to their mates, eggs, or young. On average, only 22% of the birds who enter the competition survive to the end of the final race. In fact, only five of the 42 pigeons the Royal household has sent in recent years to South Africa for this race, survived.

Most of the winning birds at the SAM DPR, or other races, the survivors, are auctioned off to become what fanciers rightly call 'prisoners' – to be locked up for their entire lives, used for breeding, and never allowed to fly again, never allowed to do something that is the very essence of their nature. These birds will be mated repeatedly in pigeon breeding mills, often inbred to their own sons, daughters, and siblings. If they do not produce successful progeny, they and their offspring will have their necks broken. Cervical dislocation is not a painless end to a life of exploitation.

Because the Crown's link to pigeon races and pigeon clubs gives the industry social license and prestige, we most urgently and respectfully urge your Majesty to withdraw patronage from pigeon racing events and associations, and perhaps to convert your Sandringham loft to a sanctuary for lost, injured and unwanted birds.

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Your Majesty, pigeons, or "rock doves", are intelligent, gentle, loyal birds and marvelous, model parents. As you know, they have served in the military, delivering vital coded messages under the most dangerous conditions, earning them the most Dickin Medals – the animals' Victoria Cross – of any species. We hope you will conclude upon reflection that exploiting pigeons' extraordinary homing abilities is cruel, and ill-suits Britain's reputation as a nation that cares deeply about animals.

I thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

I have the honour to be, Sir, Your Majesty's loyal and obedient servant.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ingrid B. Newkirk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ingrid Newkirk
Founder
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