



Housing Guidelines

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Introduction

Purpose of this Document

This document has been compiled together by Freckle's Fellowship Pigeon Rescue & Sanctuary to inform prospective adopters of our expectations and recommendations when it comes to housing your pet pigeon and preparing to submit your application. In outlining these expectations, we aim to facilitate a fast and easy adoption process that ensures adopters are aware of their own responsibilities in preparing for a pigeon.

Readers should be aware that our guidelines are meant to serve as a framework only, as each application is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. This means adjustments may be requested that are alternative and/or additional to the following information provided.

Questions?

Any questions regarding housing expectations and adoptions can be sent to adoptions@frecklesfellowship.org

More information on adoption can be found on our website www.frecklesfellowship.org





Indoor Housing

Cage requirements

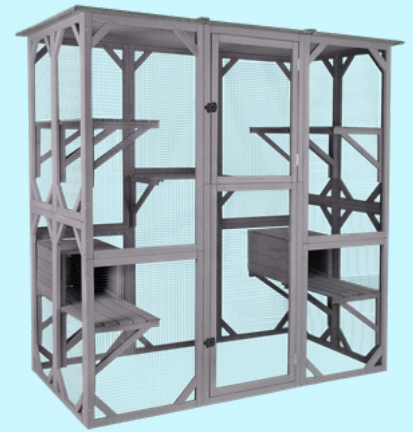
Pigeons need a space to live inside just like any other pet. The **minimum** cage requirement for a solo pigeon or a mated pair is a cage that is **92cm wide by 60cm deep and 76cm tall**. If there are other pets at home, the cage should be placed in the designated safe room where other pets can't access them unsupervised.



For most people, an XXL dog crate works best and is a cheap, versatile option. Other options may be utilised, such as ferret or double flight cages.



We recommend newspaper, puppy pads, fleece, or reusable puppy pads to line the bottom of the cage. Please make sure pigeons are not placed directly on wired floors as this is uncomfortable and unhealthy for them!



Catios are a good choice for those who may not be able to let their birds out as much.

For our minimum size requirement, pigeons need **6-8 hours** outside of the cage **daily**.



Air purifiers are **strongly recommended** as pigeons create a lot of dander that can irritate respiratory systems.

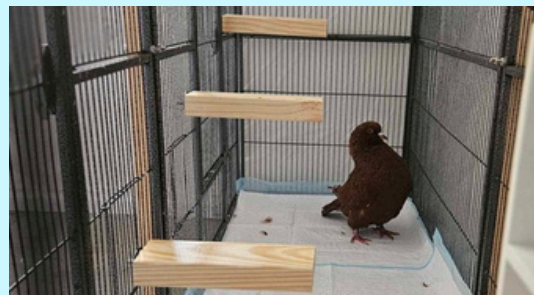
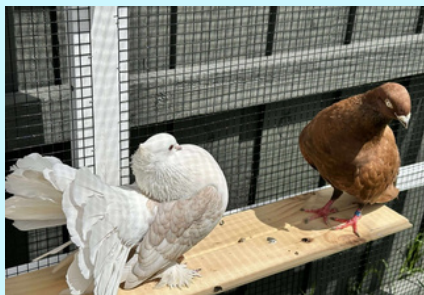
“I will not need a cage as my bird will be out 24/7”

As per our adoption policy, Freckle's Fellowship does require a cage, even if the bird has an entire room dedicated to themselves! Cages are a pigeon's safe space, and where they go to feel safe. Additionally, the cage is the “home base” of your pigeon, and provides them a sense of security if they need to be moved somewhere unfamiliar for any reason. It is good practice to house them at night.

Accessories

Perches

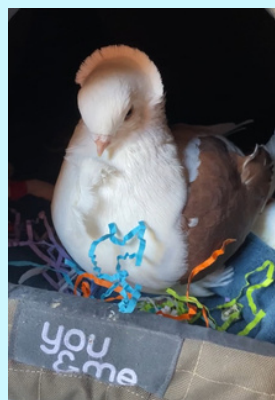
Unlike other birds that like and require varied natural branches, pigeons prefer flat platforms. A flat platform like a shelf has lots of space for a pigeon to strut their stuff and dance. You can buy these kinds of perches online, however, it is often a lot cheaper and more customisable to make your own by purchasing a bit of plywood from a hardware store and purchasing your own washers, rods and wingnuts to attach it to. [Here](#) is a simple tutorial if you are a bit unsure! **Make sure all metal used is stainless steel. Zinc and other metals are toxic to birds.**



There are many ways you can incorporate perches into your cage. Pigeons might also enjoy “perch stairs”. You can still add natural branches for variation.

Snuffle mats

Or even a textured bath towel works! Sprinkle your pigeon’s favourite food in them so they can forage.



Hidey holes

Pigeons love somewhere dark to have quiet time or build a nest! A cardboard box may suffice as well. Pigeons may use these areas to build a nest too, which is an incredibly enriching activity. You can offer pigeons items like pine needles, paper crinkles, q tips, twigs, and pipecleaners to build with.

Pigeons may also be interested in a brick which doubles to file down their nails!

Other options for enrichment are:

- Bell toys
- Shredder toys
- Plastic balls
- Crinkle toys

Mirrors

Mirrors are safe for pigeons but remove them if they get too attached! If the pigeon is obsessively trying to interact with the mirror for long amounts of time, consider replacing it with something else.



Maintenance

Feed/water

We recommended a durable, easy-to-clean dish to feed/water your pigeon. Ceramic ramekins and stainless steel coop cups are good because they are heavy and won't tip when the pigeon sits on the edge. Water and food should be replaced and cleaned daily to prevent buildup of harmful bacteria.

Pigeons drink like a straw so they need a deep dish to submerge their beak into.



Household Risks

Practice caution with the following:

Windows + doors

When the bird is out, make sure all windows/doors are securely shut to prevent escape and injury.

Fans

When the bird is out, turn all fans off

Other animals

Do not let other animals and pets interact with the pigeon

DO NOT use/have the following:

Scented candles/aerosols, etc

May release toxic fumes that can kill your bird. Deodorant/perfume may be applied at distance from your bird.

Non-stick cookery

Toxic fumes are emitted at high heat, use stainless steel equipment instead

Panacur / wormout gel

These items have oxfendazole and/or fenbendazole. Compounds in the albendazole class are toxic to pigeons and should not be applied

Cage Cleaning

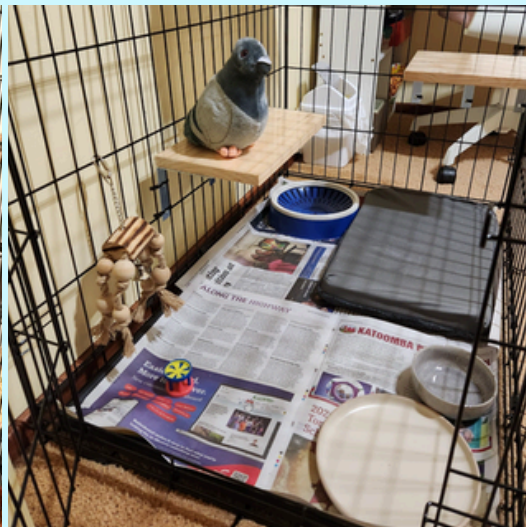
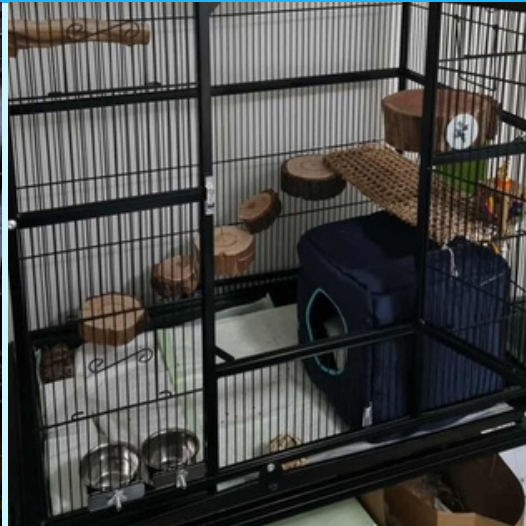
Daily Weekly

- Replace food/water/grit
- Rinse out bowls
- Change bedding
- Scrape droppings off surfaces
- Scrub ALL cage surfaces including the bars
- Clean dishes, perches, toys, etc with F10 / similar veterinary disinfectant
- look for rust
- Vacuum in / around the cage

Some activities listed as daily may be done every 2-3 days depending on cage size.

Cleaning only takes 5 - 30 minutes of your day!

Exemplars



- ✓ several perches
- ✓ enriching accessories
- ✓ adequate size
- ✓ not overcrowded

Common errors : cage too small, lack of (appropriate) equipment in cage, cage photo online used



- ✗ Cage too small
- ✗ lack of enrichment
- * Advised to replace cage and include more perch + toy variety.
- ✗ Cage too small
- ✓ suitable bedding and perches
- * Advised to upgrade cage + consider a hidey hole
- ✗ Cage is setup outdoors
- ✗ unsuitable perches / accessories
- ✗ rust present
- * advised to replace cage/ equipment and bring indoors

Indoor Checklist

Use this checklist to ensure you have met all requirements for our indoor housing:

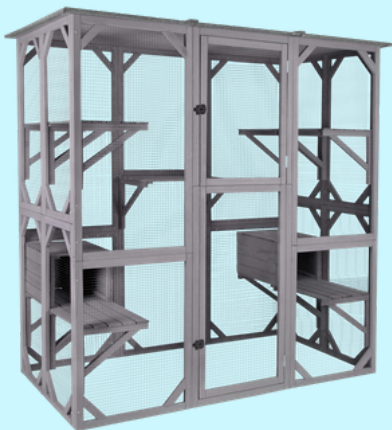
- My cage has dimensions of at least 92 x 60 x 76cm
- My cage is clean and has no rust
- My cage has 2+ raised platforms
- My cage has 1-2+ enriching items to keep my bird happy
- My cage has an enclosed area where the pigeon can hide and feel safe
- There are no toxic metals in/near my cage
- My household will not use non-stick appliances
- My household will not use aerosols / scented products near my pigeon
- My household is aware of common materials/items that will put the pigeon at risk and refrain from using them
- I have read the adoption policy



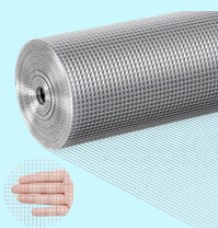
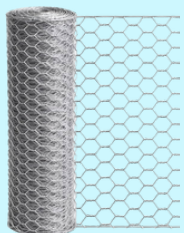
Outdoor Housing

Cage requirements

For those who perhaps have less time available at home to let birds out of indoor cages or just people who want to have a larger number of pigeons, an outside aviary/loft is a great choice. An outdoor pigeon aviary provides a spacious, secure environment for pigeons to exercise and socialise without the need to be let out daily. When constructing or choosing an outdoor pigeon setup, one of the most important considerations is space. **Pigeons require at least 0.7 square metres of space per bird**, with more space being ideal, especially if you plan to keep several pigeons. This ensures they have room to fly short distances and not get stuck in territorial disputes.



The smallest recommended space for an outdoor aviary is **1.5m long, 1.5m deep and 1.8m tall**. This size can comfortably fit 3 pigeons (however, even numbers should be maintained where possible). The bigger, the better! Prebuilt setups like chicken coops or catios are a slightly more economical choice than custom builds and a good stepping stone to housing pigeons outdoors. **The majority of prebuilt enclosures are not safe to house pigeons in without minor safety additions.** The following aspects are imperative to the safety of the birds in every enclosure:



Adequate mesh placement / size / material

The entire enclosure must have no gaps and use only 1x1cm or smaller steel aviary mesh. This means NO chicken wire, bird netting, etc, as rodents and predators can easily tear those apart.

Zipties have been used to fasten the mesh over the existing enclosure

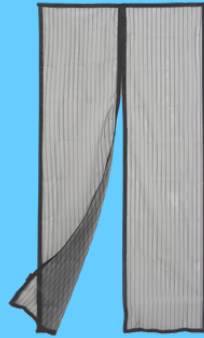


Safe Flooring

A sealed floor protects the enclosure from predators and rodents digging underneath it as well as pigeons being exposed to pathogenic organisms in the soil. We suggest laying out steel mesh and placing concrete slabs on top. Alternatively, if the aviary is placed on a solid floor already, ensure it is secured to the floor, as severe weather can displace it.



Fake turf has been placed over the concrete tiles



Safe Doors

This is often ensured by using carabiner clips or locks to make unlocking the cage door a two-step process. An add-on to this is a double door to prevent accidental escapes, but a beaded/magnetic curtain at the enclosure door can also work also.

Protection

At least $\frac{1}{3}$ of the exterior walls should be covered up to prevent exposure to drafts or severe weather. This also provides a place of safety and comfort where pigeons will tend to nest and relax. Additionally, we highly encourage that the enclosure is fully roofed to reduce exposure to debris from other birds who may carry parasites and viruses.



You can board it with plywood or fasten a weather-proof tarp to the exterior



Substrate

Concrete slabs are an easy and affordable option as flooring. Other options may include vinyl tiles or epoxy floors. Alternatively, some people may prefer to lay a substrate on top, such as woodchip or bark. These kinds of floors require mucking out once daily to ensure no moist spots form, and complete removal and replacement of the substrate every 1-2 weeks or when rained on.



You may be asked to provide photo evidence of safety measures during your adoption process

Accessories

Perches and Nesting Boxes

A common setup in larger setups is walls of nesting boxes and pigeonholes. These are great, especially for flock birds, as they are like a private dorm for each pigeon. This can reduce territorial disputes and double as a perch and a nice nesting spot. A cheap way to achieve this setup is to use a cube bookshelf. Alternatively you may build your own. They will still require flat long perches to sit and dance on.



Pigeons will often take over 2-3 nest boxes, so always have more than you "need!"

Because pigeons have evolved over centuries to nest on flat surfaces without hollows or specific environmental conditions, it is very hard to discourage nesting behaviour. As such, we encourage it as a form of enrichment with fake eggs in exchange for real ones.

Enrichment

As there are other pigeons to socialise with as well as a larger space, pigeons housed outside do not require as much enrichment as those housed singularly or indoors. However, we strongly suggest providing nesting materials, foraging boxes, bathing opportunities, and unique perches to provide fun activities.



Pine needles arranged into a nest



Splash pools provide ample space for bathing



Leafy vegetation is enriching and edible

Other species

As per our adoption policy, **we do not allow other species of birds present in the aviary, except quail.** This is because the birds speak different "languages" and will hurt each other when they miscommunicate. Those who would like to house quail alongside pigeons should only adopt fully flighted birds and build high perches that they can roost on so the species inhabit different areas of the cage.

Pigeons inhabit the higher half of the enclosure

Ground poultry reside on the floor



Source: Kelly's Farm

Maintenance

Feed/water

food and water should be served in spill-proof compartments and taken out each night to reduce the incentive for rodents to break in.



Pointed tops discourage pigeons from sitting on them and contaminating food/water.



Cage Cleaning

Daily

Weekly

- Replace food/water/grit
- Scrape/rake floor
- Scrape droppings off surfaces
- Clean any water dishes with F10
- Replace eggs
- Scrub / pressure wash ALL cage surfaces including the bars to remove feathers and cobwebs
- Clean dishes, perches, toys, etc with F10 / similar veterinary disinfectant
- look for rust
- Muckout and replace bedding (if substrate)
- Check wooden structures for presence of mites/moths

The cage is outside. Some bug presence is expected and normal. Monitor for discomfort.

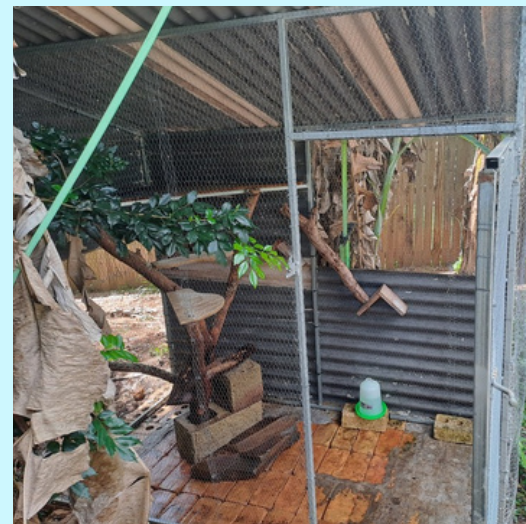
Zipties should be checked for sun damage and replaced every 6-9 months

Exemplars



- ✓ several perches
- ✓ Weather protection
- ✓ adequate size
- ✓ Solid floors (some have had fake turf laid ontop)

Common errors: insufficient predator proofing, size too small, unstable structure (aged, poorly positioned, gaps in floor, etc)



- ✗ Cage too small
- ✗ No predator-proofing
- * Advised to take down current cage and restart with another.
- ✗ Inadequate material (chicken wire)
- ✓ Good perching options and weather protection
- * Advised to apply stainless steel aviary mesh
- ✗ Other species present
- ✗ Extension not predator proof (improperly applied mesh, no solid floor)
- ✗ inadequate perches for pigeons
- * Advised to consider another cage for pigeons

Outdoor Checklist

Use this checklist to ensure you have met all requirements for our outdoor housing:

- My cage has dimensions of at least 1.5x1.5m or 0.7m per bird
- My cage has sufficient predator proofing:
 - 1x1cm steel aviary mesh
 - A solid floor lined with aviary mesh or concrete
 - altered safety mechanisms around entrances
- My cage is weather-proof and has a roof and boarded sides to protect from severe weather events
- My cage has a several nesting boxes and a variety of perching options
- Interaction with soil is limited wherever possible in/around my cage
- My cage will not be shared with any other species (except quail)
- I have read the adoption policy



Special needs

Cage requirements

Pigeons who are considered special needs may have:

- Reduced/No flight capacity
- Neurological problems
- Visual Problems
- Arthritis / issues with old age
- Leg problems (amputations, splay)
- Amongst other things!

We have **no set guidelines** for pigeons with special needs because **every bird is different and will need to be accommodated as such**. However, the following implementations are common for birds with special requirements:



Ramps

Allow access to high places pigeons feel safe in that they might not be able to get to on their own. This works for older birds or birds who cannot fly. Even pigeons who can fly like to use them to waddle up and down!



Before Adjustments



After Adjustments



Wooden perch base

Fleece bedding

Foam mat

Velcro for security

After selecting a bird with a splay leg, this adopter added foam and fleece bedding to accommodate their needs!

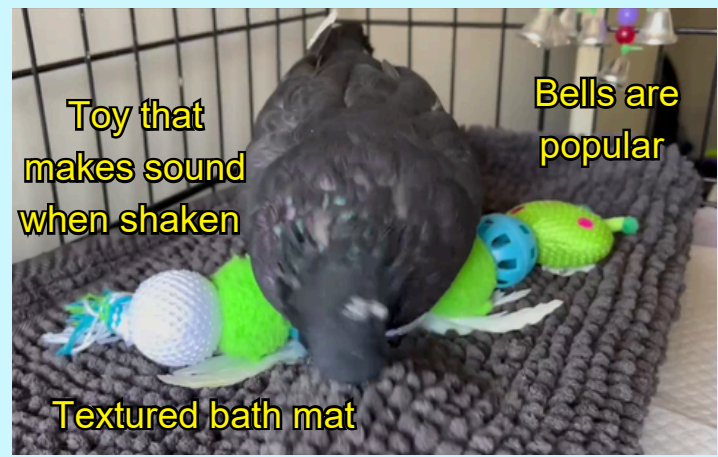
A good mechanism to facilitate easy cleaning and security

Padded bedding

Materials like fleece and foam absorb shock to ease the amount of pressure on joints affected by arthritis or muscular problems such as splayed legs. Soft bedding is **required** to house birds affected by significant mobility issues as it reduces the risk of pododermatitis, joint pain, and pressure sores. Fabrics like fleece and towel should be machine washed 1-2x weekly.



Toys of different textures that makes different sounds



Toy that makes sound when shaken

Bells are popular

Textured bath mat

Considerations for the visually impaired

Not every visually impaired bird is blind. Some only have one working eye, others have cataracts, and others can only see shadows. As such, their accommodations vary. Birds who still have at least one good functioning eye are able to get around fairly well with very few lifestyle changes. In contrast birds who have more significant troubles will often need housing adjustments. These adjustments can be played by ear where the adopter should start with a few items, and add/remove where needed.

For example, Polo, featured in the images above, has extremely limited vision and is suspected to only see shadows. In this case the adopter was encouraged to remove any platforms (as they cannot see/fly to reach them) and focus on implementing alternative enrichment ideas that are based on other senses. Different textures and sounds can be very intriguing for the bird to interact with if their sight is compromised. **Food and water should ALWAYS be placed in the same location.**



If adopters have questions about the requirements of a certain bird they are interested in, they may reach out to adoptions@frecklesfellowship.org where more advice can be given on complexity of setup.

Consider Adopting a Pigeon With Special Needs!

Often, the housing adjustments required are very minimal and take no more effort than setting up a cage for an able-bodied pigeon. You will be giving a home to a pigeon who will be chronically overlooked in the adoption space!



Doves

Cage requirements

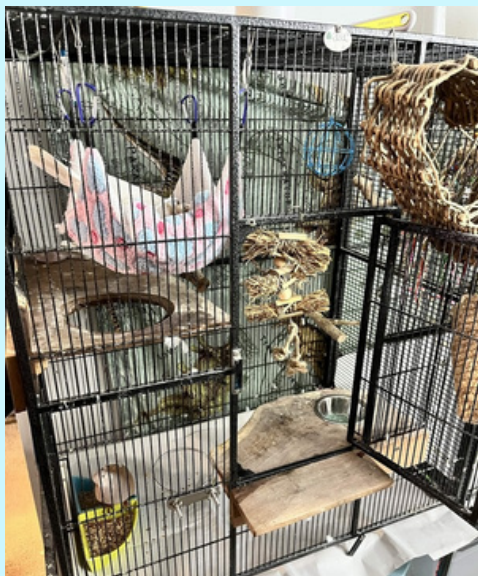
At Freckle's Fellowship, we occasionally have doves (either spotted or ringneck) available for adoption. Doves are related to pigeons however it is important to note they can be different when it comes to care.

Doves can live outdoors or indoors, however they are social and do best with a companion or small flock. They require an enclosure that is 92cm wide by 60cm deep and 76cm tall.



Doves enjoy the same enrichment activities pigeons do, and they like a mix of varied branches and flat platforms to sit on. Perches should be at least 1.5cm in diameter so they can comfortably grip the base with their feet.

Approved Exemplars:



- ✓ Adequate cage size
- ✓ Flat and natural perches
- ✓ Enrichment toys



References

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Housing exemplars were sourced from adoption applications addressed to Freckle's Fellowship Pigeon Rescue & Sanctuary, as well as other parties who consented to image usage.

FURTHER READING

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