

The Ancient Gorguero Pouter

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Translated by Frank Barrachina

It was a real pleasure meeting Frank Barrachina and Frank Soto at the IV International Show in Valls, Tarragona, Spain, this past January. We really hit it off from the start and we spent some unforgettable days discussing Spanish Pouters and their origins. Frank Barrachina asked me to write something for this special about Spanish Pouters, and so I'd like to tell you about my favorite, the Gorguero Pouter to which I have solely devoted my efforts for the past 12 years.

First, let me tell you a little about the Gorguero's personality, it's the kind of winning personality that any admirer of Spanish Pouters will appreciate. The Gorguero cock courts his hen with a deep coo and struts in a manner reminiscent of a well bred Spanish horse. The cock only courts the hen, he doesn't touch her or even reciprocate should she pick at him with her beak. He will continue an affectionate courtship because he's persistent and valiant. And although his task of winning the hen's affection is sometimes a difficult one, his determination is unrelenting.

Many years and many pigeons went by until I actually understood this breed. I felt that in order to truly understand what the Gorguero is today, I had to investigate its past. This of course led me on a study of all of the Spanish Pouter breeds and their similarities and how they came about, etc. It was a difficult task, but a rewarding one to know the truth.

For centuries, the name Gorguero was used in Spain to describe a Pouter with a hanging crop and a conquistador like personality (ornithologist author Rojas Clemente in 1800). At the same time and even earlier, in other regions of Spain the name Colguero was used to describe a Pouter with a hanging

crop and a conquistador like personality (Ordinances for the Sport of Flying Laudino Pigeons, Intended for Colgueros-Murcia 1773). Authors such as Clemente thought that these Gorgueros and Colgueros were the same breed, when in fact they weren't.

A thorough investigation into these breeds brings me to the conclusion that the Gorguero is a descendant of the ancient "Paloma de Casta" or "Paloma de Casta Azul" that was bred in the center of the Iberian peninsula (Castile and Madrid). This breed was admired for its conquering instinct, blue feathering, particular head shape, and well developed beak wattles without heavy eye ceres.

The Colguero had a separate evolution. It was a descendant of the Quebrado (Broken) Pouter which was a posture pigeon. It had the unique conquistador abilities, but it also had a most unusual way of flight. It would hold its head back and carry its crop up against its body while holding its tail up like an inverted roof tile (just opposite of the Marchenero).

Both of these distinct breeds were crossed, and while each one left its mark on the other, they were bred according to each one's regional preferences.

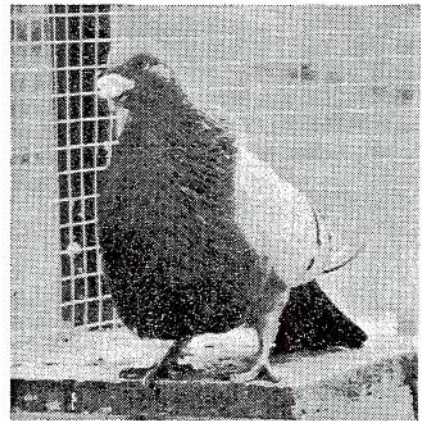
So where does the name Gorguero come in? The Gorguera was a large pleated collar which was worn by nobility of that day (look at a painting of Cervantes to see what I mean). The Gorguero's crop is formed in such a manner that the nape of the neck forms a rolled like collar or Gorguera, hence its name.

To add to the confusion of the name, the name Olguero has also been used in Murcia and it is actually a corruption combination of both names and more confusion! Time passes and nobody knows why similar names and confusing names were established. You might find some of this confusing, well it is, but in order to know the truth one needs a detailed explanation.

All of the wattled Spanish Pouter breeds have similarities and to the untrained eye they may seem to have very vague differences. While it is true that in Spain there are many "Mendellian followers" who believe that the only way to obtain distinct breeds is by crossing them, for the most part all this does is ruin existing breeds and confuse the novice breeders.

The two main types of wattled Spanish Pouters are the Rafeño Pouter and the Gorguero Pouter.

The Rafeño has a short beak, a square head with an Owl like look to the front, and a hanging crop that has a crease down the center. It is medium sized and is proportionately short and wide. It is a short distance flyer and flies with its head held down and its tail is carried flat or slightly downward, and it has a wide heavily feathered rump. It has a docile character and is a great conquistador



An old blue cock (3 years old) Gorguero. - Bred and owned by Dr. Jose Antonin Cuatrecasas, Barcelona, Spain.

in the loft.

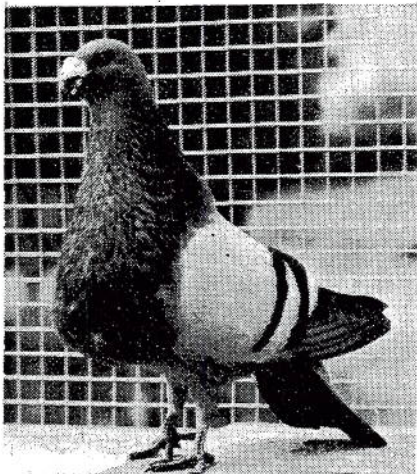
The Gorguero, or direct descendant of the "Casta Azul" has inherited and conserved unforgettable conquering abilities; these have been refined and selected for centuries - the abilities to bring home lost pigeons. The Gorguero seems to have an inexhaustible supply of energy. It constantly leaves its loft in search of other pigeons and often in extended and lengthy flights.

When the Gorguero encounters another bird in the air, it exhibits itself by slightly lifting up its neck and arches its tail slightly upwards. It swings up its wings slowly and positions itself in front of the other pigeon as if to guide it home; it makes no difference if the pigeon behind it pays it no heed, it will continue the siege and make all of the necessary trips until it brings the other pigeon home, and always guiding it in flight.

It's logical that the older a Gorguero gets, the less frequent are its flights due to a lack of strength, gaining of weight, and general old age. It does seem that the older the Gorguero gets, the more mellow it becomes and the better it gets at the refined conquistador art. It seems to have overcome the more nervous and impetuous behavior of the young birds.

To truly appreciate the Gorguero, one must see adult birds 3-5 years old. The birds

(Continued On Page 46)

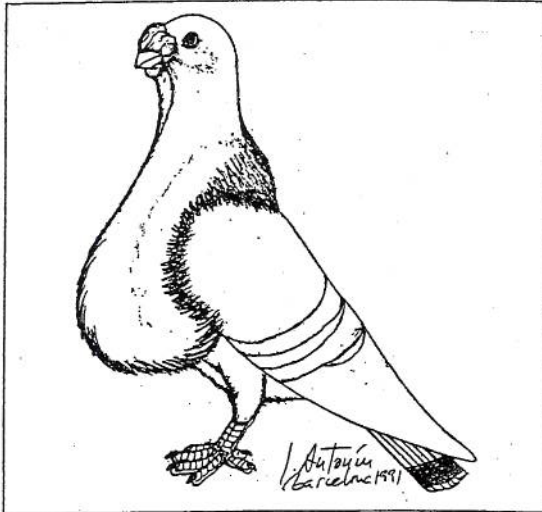


A five year old blue Gorguero cock. - Bred and owned by Dr. Jose Antonin Cuatrecasas, Barcelona, Spain.

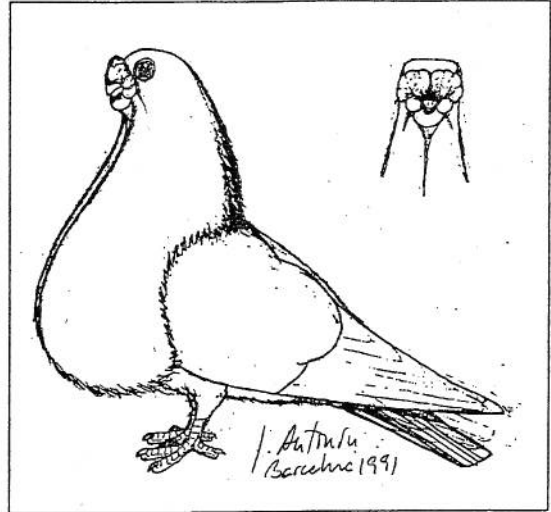


An eight year old faded ash red Gorguero cock. - Photo by Rafael Uste, Seville, Spain.

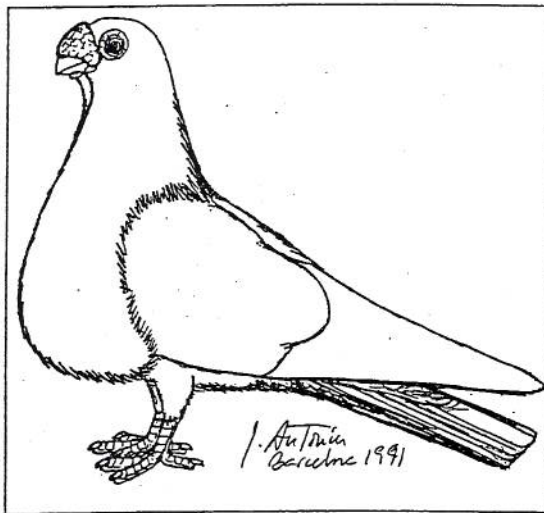
Wattled Spanish Pouter Breeds



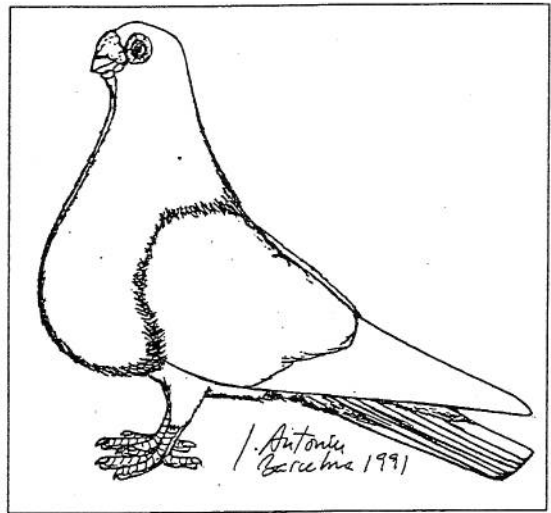
Gorguero Pouter



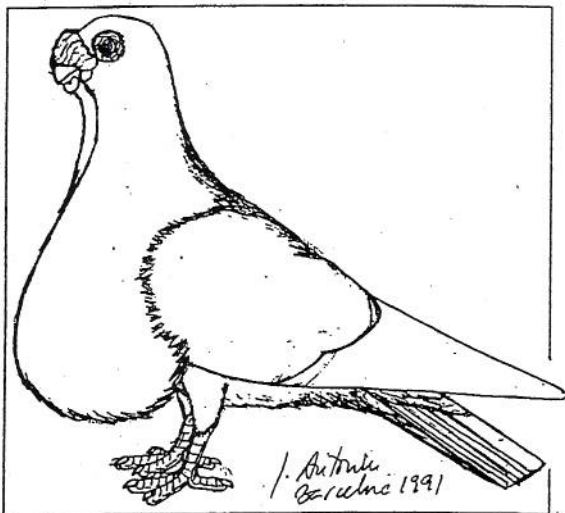
Rafeño Pouter



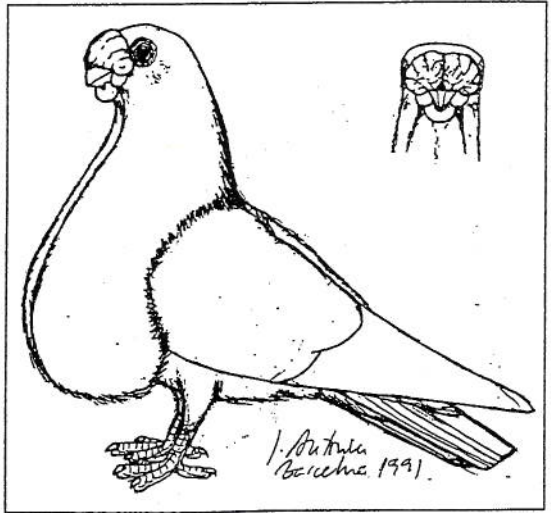
Laudino Valenciano Pouter



Laudino Murciano Pouter



Granadino Pouter



Laudino Sevillano Pouter

change quite a bit from the time they leave the nest; they go through an extensive transformation of not only personality but morphological features as well. For example, the beak seems fine, the body seems long, and they shouldn't possess much crop as young birds. The crop grows in size with age, and young birds with large crops while appearing attractive for a moment later lose that beauty when the crop fully develops into an exaggerated thing that ultimately causes the bird's deterioration.

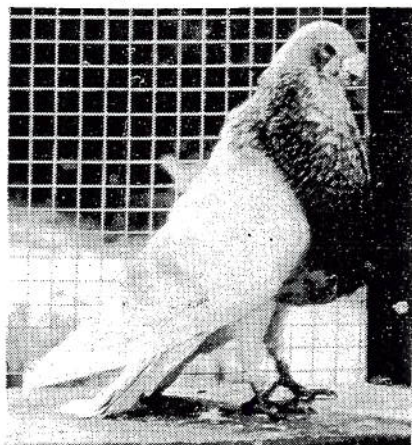
Here is the standard:

HEAD – Curved lines, great and large, wide, often referred to as ramish or almond shaped. The beak is short and "Roman nosed" (especially in adult birds). The beak wattles are well developed in adults but they shouldn't be exaggerated or soft and loose. They start smaller at the base of the beak and get larger as they go forward without detracting from the curved head shape. They should never grow together but always separate in the center and should be a powdery white. Under the beak you find three beak wattles which are round, well defined, and of equal size with the center one larger.

The eye is set back in the head and appears alert and defiant due to the ruby color of the iris. The eye ceres should be fine and the same color as the head plumage. Adults have a little more cere due to age but never overly coarse.

NECK – Large and long forming a "tirilla" or dewlap under the beak. This crease should never be parted as in the Rafeño or Marchenero. The crop comes off the dewlap in an even pear shape with two hollows or voids by the wing butts. In back of the neck the crop should fall towards the shoulders and the feathering should form a smooth Gorguera or collar.

BODY – Medium size (400 grams - a little over 3/4 pound). Proportionately high standing, with a wide short wedge shape. The chest is wide and deep to maintain a well formed crop.



A four year old Gorguero cock, "The Pirate", an ash red cock with an eye patch of dark feathers. - Owned by Dr. J. Antonin Cuatrecasas.

WINGS – Shorter than expected, wide, thick, and strong. They should be well formed and covering the back with the wing bars meeting by the rump. The wings should lay flat on the tail. It's typical and desirable that they have 11-12 primary flights.

TAIL – Short starting at the rump, wide and flat without over exaggeration and straight. The tail feathers should be grouped together tightly and closed. The tail feathers number from 12-16.

LEGS & FEET – Fairly long legs, strong with adequate spacing between them. Leg color purple, free of feathers with well developed brilliant scales.

PLUMAGE – Soft to the touch and free of powder. It should be loose on the crop but tight on the rest of the body. Colors accepted are blue bars, ash red (barred, checkered, and spread), grizzle, black spread and faded, and self whites. White feathers in colored birds not permitted. Other colors such as smokey blue, dilutes, browns, etc., are not suitable for this breed but are typical of some other Spanish Pouter breeds.

JUDGING POINT SCALE

General Aspect-Proportion, class, cooing & voice	10
Head: Form	10
Wattles	5
Color-2 / form 3	
Beak Wattles	
(the three under the beak)	5
Size 2 / form 3	
Eye Ceres	5
Color 2 / form & fineness 3	
Eyes	5
Beak	5
Dewlap	5
Crop & Chest	10
Size 5 / form 5	
Gorguera (collar)	10
Wings	7
Form 3 -	
Number of flight feathers 12-4 pts.	
11-3 pts.	
Form 2 -	
Number of flight feathers 13-3 pts.	
14-4 pts.	
15-5 pts.	
16-6 pts.	
Color & Plumage Quality	10
Feet & Legs	5
TOTAL POINTS	100

There exists a point which foreign fanciers don't know about: in Spain while each breed has its own distinct morphological features, we also select for ways of flying and conquering ways. Selecting for these three factors is a handicap for the breeders.

It is not unusual to find lofts where the breed characteristics and the flying ways are bred for but where the conquering art has been forgotten. Often times the cocks will beat the hens by picking at them and this is most undesirable.

In order to be successful, all three fea-

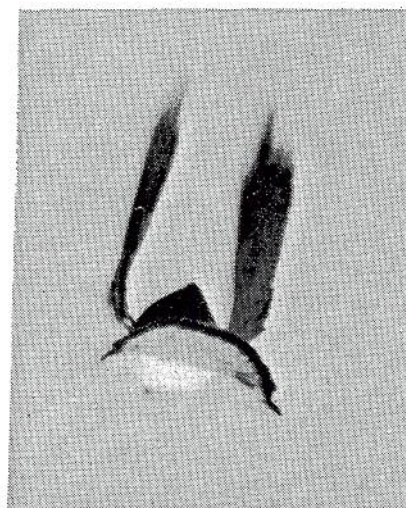
tures must be considered when breeding these birds. Those who breed for aesthetically attractive show pigeons don't even think of the other important prerequisites. Often times, they breed for exaggerated exemplar with the sole aim of making money and the breed is ruined.

The problem is that neophyte breeders sometimes breed for the most apparent physical property and the ancient rustic qualities slowly disappear. A truly great breeder knows all of the feathers that make up his birds – the physical characteristics, the way of flying, and the conquering temperament and breeds for all three and he can have a show bird and a real Spanish Pouter.

In the last ten years there has been a big surge in the exhibition of Spanish Pouters and this has been beneficial in promoting our breeds and in disbursing knowledge about them. But on the other hand, it has also fostered divisiveness and exaggeration of some features when breeds are judged solely in the show pen; important characteristics often are overlooked and disappear.

I don't think that it is necessary to divide pigeons into show and flying diversion stock. The judges at the shows should be capable of knowing the qualities that appear hidden to the untrained eye. If they truly know the breeds they can tie in physical aspects with flying form and also stress the importance of temperament. They can't do this by standing in front of a show pen and commenting on the bird inside of it without handling and studying its every detail.

The only way to success is to have selected real masters of the breeds judge them. For example a real Marchenero master can tell how the bird will fly in the air by handling it, examining the wing shape, etc. These breeds have been preserved for countless



A young Gorguero cock in flight. - Photo by Dr. J.A. Cuatrecasas.