

Oriental Frill Pigeons: Deforming their bodies also deforms their lives

Guest Post by [Jill McMurchy, Palomacy: It's Pigeon Diplomacy](#)

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Winnie is a breed called an Oriental Frill (OF). These poor birds are in the class of breed called Owls. Owl pigeons have been bred to have large eyes and small beaks. Most owl pigeons can feed their babies. OFs, however, have been selectively bred to have an almost non existent beak, leaving them unable to feed their babies. The babies have to be hand reared by people. They can barely feed themselves.



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The way baby pigeons eat is by inserting their beaks into their parents' throats and swallowing crop milk and regurgitated seed. In order to do this, they must have a beak. OF babies can't do this, so they and their parents are denied all the benefits that come from being raised together.

Pigeons like Winnie can't preen their and their mate's feathers. They can't defend themselves in conflicts with other pigeons and their big eyes are extra vulnerable to injury. Deforming their bodies also deforms their lives.



Winnie was surrendered to Oakland Animal Services and one of our wonderful vet friends agreed to take her. She arrived very skinny and also had a malocclusion of her beak (cross beak – where her upper and lower beaks didn't align properly). I think this was a result of the person who was feeding her prior to surrender to OAS, opening her very soft beak time and time again in a way that wasn't natural can cause misalignment. Winnie must have been hand fed by someone for at least a year if she was hatched in 2022 as her band suggests. That's a lot of wear on on the jaws and beak of a young pigeon.

Once Winnie came to me, I immediately cut down gavage feedings to one a day in order for her to be hungry enough to want to feed herself. I offered her different seed and pellet sizes in bowls that were deep enough for her to bury her head into. Once she was hungry, she immediately started feeding herself.

It was trial and error but because pigeons LOVE TO EAT, she quickly caught on! I stopped giving her assisted feedings almost immediately to see if she could maintain her weight AND SHE DID AND CONTINUES TO DO SO TO THE PRESENT!!! I love picking her up to feel her body condition now.



The presence of seeds in her crop is an amazing feeling for me but more so for Winnie. She is triumphing despite what a breeder has done to her and her breed. These traits that are bred into pigeons are traumatizing. When a bird can't perform natural behaviors due to deformities that were purposely selected for, it's just plain cruel and should be considered abuse.



Winnie gaining weight!



Winnie took a bath



Winnie's post bath celebration



Winnie LOVES her self-filling, always full feeder

Winnie is curious, shy, loves looking at herself in the mirror, is gentle and wants to make a connection. Her coo is very sweet, low and melodic. She has a lot of tenacity and still tries to eat seeds on the floor, even getting one occasionally. She hasn't flown yet but we expect she will.