**Why You Don’t See Baby Pigeons**

1 When I moved to a flat in New York and discovered that my new neighbours   
 included a colony of pigeons, my first reaction was: exterminate the brutes! I  
 cringed at their morning mating calls, and agreed with my wife, Dana, when she   
 cursed them as winged rodents that soil the city. I attacked them with broom and   
 water-pistol. It was hard for me to believe that the traditional symbol of peace, a  
 white dove with an olive branch, is actually a white pigeon.

2 Then last December, after scaring away a grey pigeon roosting on the still of our  
 bathroom window, I found a nest there with an egg in it. “Revenge is ours!” I   
 shouted to Dana, triumphantly holding the egg aloft. “Should I smash it right away  
 or save it for an omelette?”

3 But Dana was looking in horror at the window-sill behind me. The pigeon had   
 swooped back to the empty nest and was beating its wings against the window   
 frame.

4 “You put that back this second!” Dana said, with the same look on her face that I   
 swear the parent pigeon had.

5 “How can a rational human being want to save a baby pigeon?” I asked as I   
 returned the egg.

6 And then it came to me. Here was a chance to answer the perennial mystery that   
 puzzled generations of city dwellers: why doesn’t anyone ever see a baby pigeon?  
 Let others plumb Loch Ness for its monster or climb the Himalayas in search of  
 the Yeti. I would be the first human to see a baby pigeon in the wild.

7 The bird roosted outside the bathroom for a week, and then one more the nest   
 was empty – no mother, no baby, no egg. Soon another nest appeared with two  
 eggs, but they, too, vanished.

8 I began keeping a field journal, and named the grey pigeon Medea and her black-  
 and-white speckled partner Don Guano. On March 12 Don Guano strutted about,   
 following Medea in circles around the living-room ledge. Finally he mounted her  
 for a second or two, flapping his wings – for balance, I suppose, unless he was just  
 happy.

9 Two days later an egg appeared, followed shortly by a second. Don Guano and  
 Medea settled into a domestic routine. From late morning until late afternoon he   
 sat on the eggs while she went off. The rest of the time, she roosted while he   
 brought twigs for home-improvement projects.

10 Then, after ten days of roosting, Don Guano and Medea abruptly abandoned the  
 nest. The next day the eggs were gone without a trace.

11 I reported the parenting troubles to Margaret Baker of the Cornell Laboratory of  
 Ornithology. “Eggs normally hatch after 18 days,” she said, “but sometimes pigeons  
 are frightened off the nest, and sometimes eggs never hatch because the parents  
 aren’t getting the proper diet to make sturdy shells.”

12 “And why,” I asked, “do we never see a baby pigeon?” “They stay in the nest for   
 the first month,” Margaret told me, “and grow so rapidly they’re nearly full size  
 when they emerge.”

**Why You Don’t See Baby Pigeons  
Questions**

**Look at paragraphs 1 to 5.**

1. a) Write down an expression from paragraph 1 that clearly indicates the writer’s  
attitude to pigeons. **1**

b) Given his attitude, what fact about pigeons did the writer find difficult to  
understand? **1**

2. a) “Should I smash it right away or save it for an omelette?”  
What was Dana’s reaction to these suggestions? **1**

b) Why is her reaction surprising? **1**

**Look at paragraph 6.**

3. Why does the writer begin paragraph 6 with a short sentence? **1**

4. What expression used later in the same paragraph means almost the same as  
“perennial mystery”? **1**

5. Explain how the writer tries to make the rest of paragraph 6 funny. **2**

**Look at paragraphs 7 to 10.**

6. What evidence is there that the writer started to take a closer interest in the   
pigeons? **2**

7. “he bought twigs for home-improvement projects.”  
a) Explain exactly what Don Guano was doing? **1**

b) To what is Don Guano being compared, and what is the effect of this comparison? **2**

**Look at paragraphs 11 and 12.**

8. Why might baby pigeons not hatch after 18 days? **2**

9. Why don’t we normally see a baby pigeon? **1**

**Thinking about the passage as a whole.**

10. What audience do you think this passage is aimed at? Explain why you think this. **2**

11. What do you think is the purpose of this passage and how do you know? **2**