

# Worms

By  
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## Worms

Worms are part of pigeon raising worldwide. Actually every species of animal is infected by his or her own species of worms. Pigeons are infected commonly by Roundworms, Hairworms, Gapeworms, and Tapeworms. None of the worms that infect pigeons infect people. Some can infect more than one species of bird but usually it is a different species or subspecies of worm.

Roundworms or ascarids are visible to the naked eye, looking like fine spaghetti. Sometimes after deworming they will be visible in the droppings. Adult female roundworms lay 1000's of eggs per day. These eggs must develop outside the bird for about two weeks for them to be infectious. Moisture and warmth is required for them to develop. These eggs, with a larva inside, are then swallowed in dust that is inhaled or from droppings or dust that settles in the water or on feed. These larva hatch in the stomach then eat through the stomach wall and crawl around inside the bird, especially the liver. Normally this doesn't cause problems. Eventually they make it back to the intestine and molt into adults. The adults live in the intestinal space. It takes about 1-2 months for a fresh egg to turn into an adult old enough to lay eggs. This is termed the prepatent period. However no dewormer kills all the larval stages developing in the bird. Eggs will be found in the feces much sooner than 30-60 days. It is a good practice to deworm 2-3 weeks apart to maximize the % of worms killed. It is now recommended in horses to deworm 4 times per year. Not every 3 months, but 3 times, 3 weeks apart in the spring and once in the late fall. This destroys the life cycle rather than limiting it. A mild infection is not a serious problem but a severe infection can result in starvation and death. Young birds just out of the nest are most susceptible. Deworm them regularly. Roundworms in most species of animal do not cause clinical disease in adults. Some of the birds will be carriers and shed eggs, but no sickness will result. Deworm your old birds twice before breeding to decrease the transmission to the young. A nutritional problem or stress from other disease can trigger worm problems. Also a worm infection can bring a bird down just enough that it will get sick from something else.

Hairworms or capillaria are the most serious of the worm diseases. Even adult birds can die from starvation due to Hairworms. The life cycle is about the same as for roundworms. It takes about 1 week for the egg to develop outside the pigeon. Still the prepatent period is about 1-2 months. Adults are microscopic in size. Adult worms burrow in the lining of the intestine, gizzard, ventriculitis, and even the crop. This creates lots of problems. It severely damages the lining and lets Salmonella and E coli get a good start. Personally I think Salmonella can be fairly well controlled by preventing Hairworms and Coccidia. Salmonella can get

started on its own but not easily in a healthy bird. One of the Hairworms requires an earthworm as part of its life cycle. I assume it is fairly rare in pigeons. Capillaria lay many fewer eggs than ascarids so even one in a fecal float is significant.

Gapeworms or syngamus are fairly rare but interesting. The adults live in the trachea of the pigeon. This causes the bird to hold its head up and breath open-mouthed. Eggs are coughed up and swallowed. The prepatent period is shorter only 2 weeks. So if you run into this deworm weekly for 3-4 treatments. The eggs look like the eggs of Hairworms but are twice as big. The adults will be clearly visible in culled birds. Probably more of a concern if you also raise gamebirds or chickens.

Tapeworms all require an intermediate host. Something swallows the egg, which the pigeon later eats. The black bugs that live under feeders can transmit tapeworms. Since pigeons rarely eat bugs or snails this disease is also uncommon. However a tapeworm will live as long as the bird does. Prevention is by keeping pests in the loft down to a minimum. Also some of the dewormers will eliminate the adults. Fleas carry the tapeworm of dogs. Dog swallows flea and gets tapeworms. Flea larva swallows tapeworm egg to complete the cycle. Just for fun, there is a human tapeworm from beef.

Prevention is obviously a clean dry loft to prevent the eggs from developing. Regular deworming is a must for maximum health. I suggest deworming young birds 2-3 times at 2-3 week intervals. Deworm adults twice 3 weeks apart before the breeding season. Also deworm before the racing or show season. That's a lot of deworming, but mother nature didn't put all those birds in such a small coop. Think about how rarely wild pigeons would be exposed to their droppings. That's why roundworms, especially, lay so many eggs.

It really pays to develop a relationship with your local vet to do fecal floats. Every vet in practice can do them. Most are not familiar with birds at all, but the eggs look the same as those found in any other species. Worms can develop resistance to the dewormers we use so check to see if your program is working. Try to avoid deworming while there are young in the nest.

Ivomec: The best dewormer to use. Will not get tapes but does nicely for roundworms and Hairworms. I prefer to use the 1% cattle or hog injectable individually treating the birds. The dose is 500-1000 micrograms, which is 1/10 of one ml. Use a TB syringe for accurate dosing. Give orally. 1/10 is about 3 drops. 1% injectable is available at most all farm stores. 1% Dectomax is slightly better. In other species it takes almost twice as long for egg shedding to resume after Dectomax. Both products are 99% glycol which doesn't mix real well in water so using in the water is possibly less affective.

Tramisol) A second good choice. Available at farm stores. Also does not get tapes. Can not dose to treat individual birds. It requires 6 sheep oblates per gallon to get hairworms. The downside is that this is close to the toxic dose, so back down in the heat when water consumption is high. The dose for hairworms is 7-15 mg per bird. The toxic dose is 20mg per bird which can cause vomiting etc.

Droncit) The choice for tapes. 1/4 pill per bird, if needed, of the 23 mg cat tablet. Does not treat roundworms or hairworms. Prescription only.

Panacur/Fenbendazole, Telmintec/Mebendazole) Really good drugs along with many other relatives. If used for three days in a row will kill almost any type of worm. BUT will cause feather problems especially at higher doses or if repeated. Piperazine) Is an outdated drug that only gets roundworms on a good day.

DE) Diatomaceous earth is used in the feed and in the environment. Well covered by Jim Vines in an article on the MSRA Web page. Be careful not to inhale the dust. A mask is highly recommended.

Products and product strengths vary outside the US. Always double-check the dose and the active ingredient. Consult your veterinarian as needed, especially when using prescription drugs.

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