“The close symbiotic relationship between our bodies and intestinal bacteria is so profound that some scientists have suggested we be viewed as "metaorganisms." - Sayer Ji
http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/probiotics-and-mitochondria-bacteria-are-not-other

We racing pigeon fanciers are fascinated by many so called “secrets” and “short cuts” as well as a host of other useless theories that the majority of us lose our focus on the really important aspects of “columbaculture” (I just coined this new word as it sounds much more important and professional dare I say learned than say “pigeon keeper or keeping”). Throughout my over fifty years in “columbaculture” I have been amazed at the time and effort wasted on nonsensical topics like “eye-sign” or “wing-theory” and how little time is spent on studying much more basic and fundamentally productive issues like “colon health”!

“...the majority of these little "bugs" are good, helping you digest your food, stay protected from infections, and even keeping your immune system properly regulated...” Sayer Ji
http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/probiotics-and-mitochondria-bacteria-are-not-other

Why would I ever suggest we need to focus on an understanding of the “colon health” of pigeons? Well it is common knowledge that 80% of our immune systems (as well as our bird’s immune systems) actually lives in the gut. Having pointed this out you can then easily understand that colon health really equals overall heath. In fact I would say that you cannot have one without the other. Friendly gut bacteria or gut flora (probiotics from the Greek meaning for life) equates to greater health benefits than are commonly assumed.

“The gut flora is basically a collective term given to the group of microscopic organisms which live in your intestinal system. Also referred to as your microbiome, such bacteria and other microorganisms in your gut play few very important functions in your body, such as:

- **Regulating the absorption of nutrients**
- **Strengthening your immune system**
- **Enhancing your disease fighting abilities**
- **Influencing the pace of brain development and memory**
- **Facilitating weight gain or loss**


In fact it is one of nature’s very best kept secrets. These friendly gut bacteria or microbes or gut flora are absolutely essential, producing a range of substances including natural antibodies,
hormones and vitamins. The use of probiotics on a daily basis in the health regime of our racing and fancy pigeons will serve to counter the negative effects that can be caused by the ingesting of toxins and live viruses by our birds.

“A fundamental symbiosis with bacteria is built into the very infrastructure of our bodies, as exemplified by the evolutionary origin of mitochondria, which are the little "power houses" of our cells. Mitochondria, in fact, have their own DNA and it is only passed down through other mitochondria through the maternal germ cell. The mitochondrial DNA is circular like bacterial DNA, and the mitochondrial ribosomes and transfer RNA are also similar to those of bacteria, as well as other components of its membrane. The genetic sequences of mitochondria also clearly indicate an origin from a group of bacteria called the alpha-Proteobacteria.” Sayer Ji

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Colon health, when properly understood and considered, is enormously important (for people as well as our birds and other livestock) given that our birds can-not perform at the highest level if they do not or cannot achieve “super health” and it is impossible to achieve “super health” without a literal army of friendly microbes in the intestinal tract that battle disease causing organisms like E. coli or salmonella.

It is very interesting to note that the Royal Academy of Physicians in the United Kingdom have advised that:

“90% of all disease and discomfort is directly or indirectly related to an unclean colon.”

Further it is estimated that well over 50% of all antibiotics are used in animal applications and all one really needs to do is review any pigeon supply catalogue to see the enormous role that the use (dare I say excessive) of antibiotics play in our racing pigeon sport. These antibiotics can very quickly destroy all gut bacteria (both harmful as well as beneficial) once they make their way to the intestines. However the use of antibiotics is only one of many ways that friendly gut bacteria are destroyed. Others include the use of medications, the consumption of fluoridated and chlorinated water, stress (due to driving, breeding, overcrowding, overtraining etc.) poor diet as well as a host of other variables including pollution. Once the friendly gut bacteria are eliminated the result is that the health of our racing pigeons is compromised and very harmful opportunistic bacteria can quickly take over and create very serious health problems that we so frequently see.
Dr. Mercola who is one of the world’s most respected and best known integrative physicians has the following observations to make:

“Probiotics, along with a host of other microorganisms, are so crucial to your health that researchers have compared them to "a newly recognized organ." In fact, your microflora – a term used to describe the bacteria, fungi, viruses and other microbes that make up your microbial inner ecosystem – impact far more than your digestive tract. Mounting research indicate the bacterial colonies residing in your gut may play key roles in the development of cancer, asthma, allergies, obesity, diabetes, autoimmune diseases and even brain-, behavioral- and emotional problems like ADHD, autism and depression. Recent research also shows that your diet, and subsequently the microorganisms present in your gut, can affect how well you age. The study was published in the journal Nature, and some of the findings were surprising: the microflora in persons in long-term care not only was less diverse, but significantly correlated with measures of frailty, co-morbidity, markers of inflammation and other factors that contribute to aging and death. According to the authors, the implications of these findings are that senior citizens may need certain dietary supplements to improve their microbial health.”

Well the above few pages were intended as a very basic primer on friendly gut bacteria and the importance of same. I have over the years used virtually every probiotic product that is on the North American market for racing and fancy pigeons with varying degrees of success or more to the point lack of success. However all of this was to change this past year when I received an unsolicited call from one Guido Pfeiffer of Northstar Doves from Alberta Canada. It turned out that Guido had purchased two of my Spanjaards Janssen pigeons that I had donated to a charity auction run by Fred Goodchild also of Alberta. Guido had called me to advise that he was the successful bidder and so started a conversation that led me to view his website at www.northstardoves.com. In so doing I viewed photos of a series of fancy pigeons bred and owned by Guido that amazed me. You could literally see the “glow of health” via those photos so naturally I asked what he was using. It turned out that Guido had developed a close relationship with a German expert animal nutritionist that had spent virtually his entire career developing proprietary products for various manufacturers. In time this “nutritionist” struck out on his own and developed a unique series of immune supporting and immune building products under the name “re-scha” at http://www.re-scha.com/. Besides the production of nutritional supplements “re-scha” specialized in the production and distribution of biological pharmaceuticals with highly effective “lactobacteria” as the active substance. The founder of this unique company was a graduate of the “Agricultural Sciences Department” at the University of Bonn Ulrich Schäfer who had extensively studied animal nutrition, animal husbandry and animal nutrition and graduated as an “Agricultural Engineer”.
Schäfer had over the years starting in 1996 given considerable thought to the development of what he referred to as biological pharmaceuticals. He developed his expertise with pet and companion birds as well as with pigeons and he came to understand that unless the bird in question was in “balance” nutritional supplements had very little impact on overall health. It was at this point that he decided that the use of “microbes” or “microorganisms” might just possibly solve this problem. Moving in this direction he focused his research on lactobacteria (given that Enterococcobacilli occur naturally in the small intestine of pet birds and pigeons in high quantities) following the research of Professor Dr. Helga Gerlach. After a considerable number of years he was able to conclude that human strains were ineffective with birds but that “Lactobacillus Salivarius” worked exceedingly well. This lead to his final testing and development of his “proprietary” product called “PT-12”. L. Salivarius is highly effective and thus plays an important role in the restoration of a proper balance by promoting the growth of friendly bacteria while attacking many of the unfriendly bacteria and other opportunistic invaders. Unlike most products that are available this product has serious credibility and extensive testing plus tightly controlled manufacturing protocols with over site by the relevant German authorities.

It is very interesting to note that the journal of Applied and Environmental Microbiology published an important article in its November 1999 issue dealing with the effects of Lactobacillus Salivarius on Salmonella enteritis in chickens. The article outlined a study in which one day old leghorn chickens infected with Salmonella bacteria were dosed with L. Salivarius. The result astonished researchers as the salmonella was completely eliminated from the leghorn chicks within 21 days.

Well you must be thinking “so much for the research and background” but how does it work in real life situations? Well now that is always the bottom line “how does it really work” when the tires hit the road so to speak. Bottom line in the least words possible “I was blown away” by the results of the trials in my own colony.

The first item I tried was the PT-12 (the proprietary “re-scha” L. Salivarius). I was told to use it for 10 days in a row and that I would see a difference in my birds in as little as three days! Sure I thought to myself, I have heard this all before, so we shall see because as we all know the “taste is in the pudding”. Low and behold three days later I noticed that the droppings of my pigeons had changed dramatically, they were very small, round; solid not moist and they were black. Needless to say I was delighted and so continued for the full 10 days which clearly stabilized the physical condition of the birds. The birds looked marvelous but they were also much more animated, much more energetic actually looking forward to their exercise routine.
I called Guido and relayed to him my preliminary observations and confirmed that I was going to use his “Immun-o-Flash” immune building product for the recommended 21 days and then touch base again. The twenty one days passed quickly and again I was totally delighted with the results. Actually I was amazed and continue to be amazed. Wondering what to expect in other lofts I told some of my friends, Gardi Gamboa, Frank Webster, Sha Khan, Aziz, John Froelich and others about the PT-12 and asked them to test it as well. Again the results exceeded their expectations. All are delighted with my suggestion and the results in their own lofts.

Since this testing I have come to learn that many German racing fanciers are using the PT-12 on a regular basis including every Monday before the races. Certainly after the testing that I have undertaken I can totally appreciate what they are doing and why it improves their results. I do not go out of my way to make recommendations but in this case I certainly make an exception. If you are habitually suffering from young bird sickness, Polyoma virus, loose and watery stools, lack of vitality then you might want to seriously look at the products manufactured by “re-scha” and distributed across North America by Northstardoves. I am personally recommending the PT-12 and the immun-o-flash as very important advances in the field of probiotics and immune support for racing and fancy pigeons. You will not be disappointed and you could very well have your best season ever. Personally I am excited at the prospect of raising a few rounds of youngsters on these products in 2013 as I actually intend to use both products on a monthly basis.