

Canker, Trichomoniasis

Canker in pigeons is caused by a flagellate protozoan. It is not transmittable to humans or other mammals but can be caught by other birds that share the same water, eat seed dropped by an afflicted pigeon or through beak-to-beak contact.

Some vets and even some wildlife rescue centres give up on canker too soon, deeming it to be too far advanced to treat. But stubborn rescuers who don't give in easily have succeeded time and time again in bringing a pigeon back to complete health within two or three weeks.

I have included two case histories further down the page that show just how bad canker can be sometimes but still heal completely within a short time.

Canker Symptoms

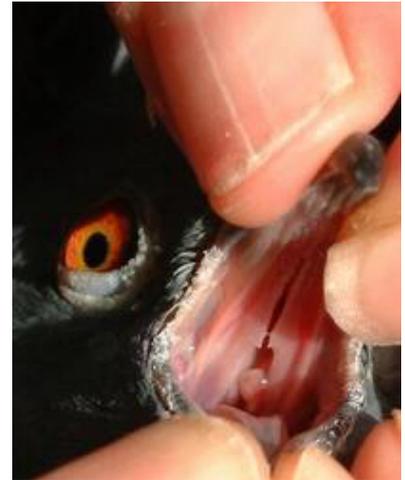
The most common symptom of canker is a yellow or brownish cheeselike



growth in the mouth.

This will usually be far back in the mouth...yellow growths outside the body or in the very front of the beak are not likely to be canker.

The photo on the left is a pigeon's mouth before being treated for canker.



The photo below is the same pigeon after treatment.

These are other common symptoms of canker:

IN SQUABS

Not all these symptoms will be present in each case. The symptoms appear 6 days after infection.

- Visible lump in the neck or navel area.
- Stretched skin over site of lesion.
- Cheesy growth in mouth or throat.
- Patches of baldness around neck and mouth .
- Slow blinking
- Ruffled feathers
- Loose watery droppings
- Excessive thirst
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of weight

IN ADULTS

Not all these symptoms will be visible in each patient:

- Visible lump in neck or vent
- Firm yellow or brown cheesy mass in back of mouth

- Soft flat creamy white growths in throat
- Inability to swallow seed
- Mouth may be partially open
- Birds stand upright with head high and neck straight (penguin posture)
- Crop full of water
- Distortion or swelling of forehead (if sinuses have been invaded)
- Vomiting
- Increased mucous in the throat

The condition must be treated, otherwise the pigeon will die of starvation, asphyxiation or choking or through the effect of nodules invading internal organs such as the liver.

It is important not to try to remove any of the growth unless you know what you are doing as this can cause a fatal bleed.

Canker Treatment

Metronidazole Oral Suspension (200mg/5ml) – obtained by veterinary prescription and given in a high dose of up to 0.25 mls per 100 grams bodyweight once a day for up to 14 days.

OR

Metronidazole tablets

Dose 20-50 mgs per kilo bodyweight twice a day OR or 40-100mgs per kilo bodyweight once daily for 14 days. *(This information obtained from www.pigeons.biz comes from various formularies)*

In very rare cases, liver damage can be caused by prolonged use over 14 days – but it is very rare and one must balance the risks.

If maintained for 14 days or more it is highly effective against a severe infection of trichomonas gallinae and in preventing an inside recurrence- (not reinfection from an outside source, ie another bird).

If metronidazole is not available Spartrix can be given alone, but there is a risk of reinfection from within.

Sometimes, if the canker is stubborn, it is necessary to switch to Ronidazole, which can be obtained without prescription

Canker nodules in the mouth and throat should be brushed with neat lemon juice, overlaid with Lugols 3 % . Apple Cider Vinegar should be added to drinking water.

While it is being treated the pigeon might not be able to swallow but staff at a wildlife sanctuary should be able to find a way to tube feed it [**Critical Care Formula**](#) or a hand feeding formula such as Kaytee Exact or Tropicana.

The canker will usually clear up completely within a couple of weeks but can linger longer if the infection is stubborn.

Sometimes, if there is a small opening in the throat area, the pigeon is able to drink and can be kept alive with Critical Care Formula (available from the vet) and failing this International Rehydration Solution made by mixing 1 pint warm water with half a dessert spoon of honey or sugar mixed in and half a teaspoon of salt.

I have kept pigeons alive by putting a little bit of highly nutritious smooth peanut paste dipped in water in the bowl formed by the the front of the bottom half of the beak , letting it ooze through the throat obstructions.

Canker is an organism that does not survive long outside the digestive tract and its associated organs so you won't find canker of the foot or anything similar. If you think a pigeon has canker of the foot it is more likely to be pigeon pox or scaly leg mite!

Case history of severe canker in baby pigeon

This is one example of a case of advanced canker in a baby pigeon. The vet judged too severe to respond to treatment and wanted to put it to sleep but the rescuer insisted on treating it and specified the medication that she needed.

The photos show the baby's progress (photos courtesy of M Reed who the copyright belongs to) :

When his condition was judged hopeless



Once treatment started



Making good progress



So much better now!



Fit and healthy



Ready to fly!



Case history, severe canker in an adult pigeon

This is an example of what could have been seen as hopelessly infected wood pigeon and his progress back to health (photos courtesy of C Harris to whom the copyright belongs).

13 March 2014, mouth and throat almost blocked by canker but rescuer able to get Tropicant mix into his crop via a feeding tube. Treatment with Metronidazole started.





23 March 2014 reported by rescuer as being “bright and chipper as his treatment continues. Huge dry pieces of canker coming out of his mouth, the tongue is free and in perfect condition and his “ Ronald McDonald” smile is greatly improved From a bird who was trying to eat anything in the garden and was being tube fed liquid Tropicana, he is now sifting through his food and complaining about the paper napkins”



Update from rescuer 15th of April: Briggs was released last Thursday. This evening he came back for the first time since to have some tea. If there is a better feeling than this, I would love to know what it is? Our hearts burst when we saw him looking so bright, just living his life.