

Scalped pigeon, bone exposed on skull

The sight of a pigeon that has had its scalp torn back, often exposing the bone, is shocking.

Will a scalped pigeon survive? Yes! And treatment is very simple.

Here are some case histories:

Winnie the Pooh is a racing pigeon that was found



huddled in a taxi rank in the city centre in November 2005.

She must have been hit by a car because had been scalped, was unable to use one wing and her beak wobbled alarmingly when touched.

Initially I treated her for shock by warming her on a heat pad for half an hour. then giving her rehydrating solution (1/2 pint warm water mixed with 1/2 tablespoon glucose, or honey or - if they are not available sugar and 1/2 teaspoon salt) and gave her 1 drop of metacam in the bottom of the lower beak for the pain. Then I washed the wound with sterile saline (that can be made at home by mixing a spoon of salt salt with boiling water and allowing it to cool) and smeared [Intrasite gel](#) which I bought from the local chemist over the wound to keep it moist and allow it to heal without scabbing over which would have caused problems.


I gave her a 7 day course of an amoxicillin/clavunate combination antibiotic (brands available in the UK are Synulox, Clavaseptim, Noroclav) which I obtained from my vet.



Winnie's
about 4 months to grow back.

skull healed quickly but the feathers took

This is Winnie in nearly six years later. Only a small scar remains at the site of the injury.

Moonshine was only a baby in the nest when she was rescued from a ledge in a town centre in mid April 2011.  She must have been scalped some days earlier as the skin around the scalped area had dried into a ridge.

This time I used F10 Germicidal barrier ointment, smearing it on her head every time I fed her which 4 times a day. I also treated her with a course of Synulox in case there was an infection. The ointment softened the tissues and kept the wound moist. Because Moonshine was only a baby she healed very quickly.

This is Moonshine 6 weeks later:



The photos show the new feathers growing.



Bald head

Vulnerable pigeons are often bullied by other pigeons which will peck at their heads. During the moult they will be naturally losing a lot of feathers and the additional attention that the bully gives will often lead to a temporarily bald head.

Pigeon Paramyxovirus



Pigeons with Pigeon Paramyxovirus will sometimes hold their heads tilted as they walk or appear to have difficulty controlling it enough to turn it the right way up, appearing to gaze at the sky (a condition referred to as stargazing) .

This is a list of the other symptoms that you could find in a pigeon with Paramyxovirus, not all affected pigeons display all the symptoms:

- Thin broken solid droppings in a pool of liquid
- Fine tremor of eyes or head
- Staggering
- Somersaulting in flight

- Crash landing
- Difficulty picking up seed, pecking and missing.
- Tossing seed backwards
- Twisting neck, head upside down (torticollis, star gazing) – see photo.
- Paralysis of legs or wings
- Spiralling in flight
- Flying backwards
- Turning in circles
- Having fits
- Suddenly dropping off to sleep, head slumped forwards (zonking out!)
- Pulling head backwards towards tail.

Despite the severity of the symptoms the pigeons don't often appear to be in discomfort or ill, we tend to describe them as "otherwise well"! However, the pigeon will need to be caught in order to isolate it from other pigeons that might become infected and to give it the supportive care that it will need to survive the disease.

Pigeon PMV can damage a pigeon's nervous system. Some pigeons make a quick recovery but can have the symptoms (not the virus) return weeks or months later, some will take longer as the healing process can be very slow, others will have residual nervous symptoms for the rest of their lives and will be unreleasable.

If you decide to take a pigeon with paramyxovirus to a rescue centre or to a vet the most likely outcome is that it will be euthanased, because PPMV is an infectious disease that requires the bird to be isolated from other pigeons for at least 6 weeks and most centres don't have the resources to do that. However, there are a few rescue centres that are equipped for nursing pigeons with PMV and some will be able to offer them a permanent haven if they don't make a complete recovery.

PIGEON PARAMYXOVIRUS is a viral disease that does not affect man or animals, but a human that handles a pigeon with PMV or the live vaccine can develop conjunctivitis if sensible precautions are not taken (eg, do not touch your eyes immediately after handling a pigeon with PMV or the live vaccine).

The incubation period can vary from a few days to several weeks. The most common symptoms seen by the rescuer, though only a few will be seen at the

same time are : Pigeon turning in circles, difficulty picking up seed, pecking and missing, tossing seed backwards, staggering, extremely watery poops, thin broken solid droppings in a pool of liquid, fine tremor of eyes or head somersaulting in flight, crash landing, twisting neck, head upside down (torticollis, star gazing) , spiraling in flight, flying backwards , having fits, walking backwards.

Some of these symptoms are found in other illnesses, **but not in the same combination**. The presence of PPMV antibodies can be established by a blood test, I would advise anyone who suspects PMV and wants this confirmed, or wants to eliminate other causes of the symptoms, to use the [Retford Poultry Partnership](#) postal testing service.

Wildlife Rescue Centres tend to diagnose PMV on a combination of symptoms, eg polyuria (passing a lot of water) and polydipsia (drinking a lot of water) without weight loss, or polyuria and nervous symptoms.

During the recovery period keep pigeons with Pigeon PMV in a quiet, warm (not hot) cage with soft flooring away from any intense light source. Provide a brick for perching.

To ensure that they are able to pick up food place seed in a deep dish so that if they stab at random they can pick seed up.

Because Pigeon PMV can cause fits pigeons are at risk of drowning but they need free access to water. Provide water (with added electrolytes if possible) in a deep narrow container to minimise the risk of accidental drowning. Watch the pigeon to ensure it is drinking.

Hand feeding may be necessary. Frozen peas and sweetcorn thawed in hot water for about 10 minutes can be hand fed as in this video.