

Meet the people behind Toronto's dwindling Giant Runt Club

Giant runts are colourful, hefty show birds

News Feb 20, 2018 by Bobby Hristova [✉\(mailto:newsroom@toronto.com\)](mailto:newsroom@toronto.com) Toronto.com



Twenty years ago, the plain-looking building was home to giant runt pigeons, prize-winning birds the size of chickens. Today, The Giant Runt Club of Ontario it is a meeting place for older men who enjoy beer and soccer. - Bobby Hristova/photo

A building in Bloordale Village is frozen in time.

The structure is unremarkable, besides the sign above the storefront's broad windows – Ontario Giant Runt Club, Members Only.

Giant runts are colourful, hefty show birds unlike their scavenging city cousins.

Built 19 years ago, members visited to revere giant runts, but today only city pigeons flock to the clubhouse.

Inside, trophies collect dust as older Portuguese men discuss giant runts, drink beer and watch soccer.

Manny De Medeiros, a club founder, said the group began because trading and breeding pigeons was popular in Europe.

“Before the internet, people started playing with pigeons for fun,” De Medeiros said. “Once people started immigrating to Canada, they brought that tradition with them.”

Originally raised for food, cross-breeding changed the giant runt into today's trophy bird.

“It's bodybuilding for pigeons,” De Medeiros said. “Each body part has a different score.”

Member John Teves, 45, said giant runts weigh two to three pounds, dawning a small beak, broad chest, imposing posture and “wings that feel like silk.”

Member Alfredo Pereira bred pigeons for almost 50 years, stopping because of time and money.

“I paid \$2,200 for a pair of giant runts. Their bloodlines matter,” Pereira said. “If it is a show bird, it will die of old age in your home and you will give it a proper burial.”

Although the pigeons are pricey, most competitions don’t garner prize money.

“We do it for the honour,” Teves said.

And maybe for a meal.

“Most breeders won’t say it, but if the bird isn’t show quality, we’ll eat it,” Teves said. “My kid walked in when I was cutting off the pigeon’s head and he freaked out, but that’s the way I grew up.”

The club, clearly, has seen better times.

“We’re broke,” said member Pedro Pons who volunteers behind the bar. “I don’t know anything about pigeons and people don’t grow up with them like these guys did.”

Teves said most members stopped coming or died.

“We used to have over 100 members and now there’s probably only 30,” he said. “It’s a different time now.”

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