

Columbidology Part 2 with Rosemary Mosco

Ologies Podcast

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Oh hey, it's someone with your same name but a very different online presence, Alie Ward. Here we are, Part 2, pigeons. You loved Part 1 and so did I but if you haven't started with that, it's linked so easily in the show notes and you're going to want the basics about pigeons, bad nests, good parenting, pigeon breeds, what they eat, your pigeon alter ego name, why they like cities, how to love them, and so much more. That's Part 1. Okay, if you listened to that, let's get right into Part 2 with this pigeon expert, creator of *Bird and Moon* comics, the author of the book, *A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching: Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird*.

But first, before we do that, thank you so much to every patron we've ever had for making this show a reality and for submitting enough questions to make this a thrilling two-parter. You can join at Patreon.com/Ologies for as little as a buck a month. The upper tiers can even submit audio questions we may play on the show. Also, thank you for getting your summer merch at OlogiesMerch.com, we do have bathing suits if you need them. And for no money, you can support the show with a review because I'm sure to read it, like this one that was just left by cccc716, whose review said:

This podcast is the antacid for my existential dread... Also, slime mold would be cool.

Thank you so much for that cccc716 and agreed, we do need more slime mold in our lives. We'll do an episode on that eventually. Thank you to everyone who has ever left reviews.

Let's get right into Part 2 of your questions about nose barnacles, true romance, unusual fluids, war heroes, escapee pigeons, de-extincting pigeons, Las Vegas pigeons, pink pigeons, and so much more with author, science comic artist, highly lauded and adored science author, and second-generation pigeon advocate, columbidologist, Rosemary Mosco.

Alie: We have one million questions from listeners.

Rosemary: Yes! I'm so excited.

Alie: We are not going to answer all of them but we're just going to do our best. Is that cool?

Rosemary: Yes! Oh, I'm so excited. I'm so excited.

Alie: James Nance from Fort Collins, Colorado says:

"Hey Alie, this is James Nance from Fort Collins, Colorado. Why are there no professional sports teams named after pigeons? I feel like that's a missed opportunity considering how cool they are. And subquestion: Who do I need to send a letter to to start a petition to make this happen? Thanks!"

Rosemary: James, yes. Do it. [Alie chuckles] I've never heard of one, I'm heartbroken that this doesn't exist, and I need this swag. So, I'm on board, we need to do this. It's a true injustice.

Alie: Sweet. Change.org is about to hear about this. We'll get it going.

Rosemary: Yes, absolutely.

Alie: Kyle Rees, first-time question-asker, says:

"Hey there, Alie. First-time question-asker Kyle from Tacoma, Washington. I know that pigeons and doves are the same thing, but how did one get classified as magician's best friend and the other one a trash bird? I mean, really, pigeons have such, much more magical coloration! Help me understand this."

Aside: Okay listen, not all of your dove questions were this magical but many of you patrons wanted to know the distinction between pigeons and doves, all of us needed to know, including Mark McPhillips, Sara Rocero, Saira Manns, Sam Y, Earl of Greymalkin, Les Chats Gourmands, Sarah Metzger, Teresa & David, Elie Zwiebel, Ashley Stroup, Dave Brewer, Nita Chen, Kate DuHadway, JdubyaS, Jacqueline Church, Jasmine Liu, Kate Bates, Joanna Polk, GK Gurley, Molly Geisler, Eating Dog Hair for a Living, Edward Rice, Leah Rebecca, and Megan M, first-time question-asker, for Simon, who is the world's biggest pigeon fan, they say.

Alie: So, dove versus a pigeon, any idea how magic got involved?

Rosemary: Ooh! I don't know when magic appeared, but I will tell you that when people have a trained white bird, sometimes they have a species that we will call a dove and sometimes they just have a white pigeon and people can't really tell. Wedding releases are often just a big ole pile of pigeons that people are hucking into the sky.

Alie: *[through laughter]* Really?

Rosemary: Yes, absolutely, white fancy pigeons. If you go to Honolulu, all of the feral pigeons there, many, many, many of them are white and it's because so many people get married there that people release "doves" and what they're releasing is these white pigeons and then there are white pigeons everywhere. *["It's a tough call... They're so different."]*

So, pigeons and doves, they are the same things because that's a kind of sneaky thing to say. There are some species where we commonly call them doves and somewhere we commonly call them pigeons, and then there are some where we commonly argue back and forth about what to call them, like the rock dove or rock pigeon, the *Columba livia*, city pigeon.

What's going on is that English-speaking people have sort of two words for the same thing, probably because of the Norman conquest; the French came over and introduced the word *pigeon*, the word pigeon, and before we had this old English word 'dove.' So, we had two words for the same thing. And then as English-speaking people traveled around the world and met these creatures, all of which are in the pigeon and dove family, *Columbidae*, they would point at one and go, "That looks like a pigeon. Okay, that's a dove," and then they developed these common names but there's no evolutionary connection between all the pigeons and all the doves, this is just a random assigning of names. So, it's not a scientific division between pigeons and doves and that's why I think it's reasonable to say pigeons and doves are the same type of thing.

But at the same time, the creatures that we call pigeons and the creatures that we call doves are still unique in terms of different species having their unique characteristics. But yeah, absolutely, when Noah hucked the bird out the side of the arc, *[Alie laughs]* sounds like a homing pigeon to me, I'm just going to say. You threw a pigeon out there and the pigeon went, "Hey, I'm going to go find some hotdog buns... *["The hunt is on."]* Bring 'em back."

Alie: I mean, hotdog buns, who doesn't love one? Ask a pigeon, maybe it'll share. Who knows?

Rosemary: *[laughs]* I don't think they're good at sharing. We should have bred them to share their hotdogs.

Alie: Just like, "Go nab me a hotdog bun from someone eating one, bring it on back."

Rosemary: *[laughs]* "I'll give you a medal."

Alie: “Yeah, give me a bite.”

Aside: Augh, eating a hotdog bun with a pigeon, *Lady and the Tramp* style, a dream.

Alie: You mentioned the bump on the beak and Mad Madame Mim and The Bloated Toad wanted to know, in The Bloated Toad’s words: Why do some pigeons have those bulbous face protuberances on top of their beaks around their nose holes? What are they doin’ with ‘em?!?! They want to know.

Rosemary: We don’t know! [*Alie gasps*] Which again is an exciting pigeon mystery. It’s called a cere; it’s sort of a lumpy, fleshy thing that pigeons have over their bills. Males appear to have a slightly bigger one, although it’s so hard to tell male from female pigeons that even pigeon keepers can’t really do it without a DNA test.

Aside: So, unless you speak pigeon and really would like to know, and the vibes seem okay to ask, there’s really no good way to visually discern the sex of a pigeon or the gender for that matter. You could try squinting at their nose lump, which is called a cere, but even that beak hump stumps columbidologists. Rosemary explains...

Rosemary: We don’t know what it’s for. Because there’s a bit of a sex difference, we think that there might be kind of like a, “Look at me, I have a bigger, fancier cere. I’m a handsome male,” thing going on, and babies don’t have it. So, that’s one way to tell the younger pigeons is if they haven’t developed that fleshy protuberance which makes their bill kind of look longer. But yeah, we don’t know. So, someone please become a cere-ologist and tell us. And I want to know! Because it’s one of the most characteristic things about pigeons.

Alie: Well, on the topic of genders and sex, Daniella Napolitano and Cynthia Zhou, and Chino wanted to know: How do they tell? You said with a DNA test. Can you... get in their cloaca? Or no?

Rosemary: Yeah, they don’t have any external genitalia. Both males and females just have a hole called a cloaca that everything kind of flushes out of and when they mate, they press their holes together, and kind of shoot material through the holes. [*That’s hot.*] It’s called a cloacal kiss, which I think is delightful. So yeah, they just have a hole, there’s no real way to sex them so you usually need a blood test, or you know, if you’re keeping pigeons, they’ll lay eggs and then you’ll know it’s a female. But sometimes females will sort of act in a more male role. It’s just really hard to tell.

They also split up their egg-sitting duties so male and female pigeons will both sit on the nest, but females will sit on it overnight, for example. They’ll kind of alternate duties, so that’s one way to tell. But this is a serious issue. So, when I was looking into the war hero pigeon, Cher Ami, who was a hero from World War I who wound up carrying a note basically saying, “We soldiers are under friendly fire, please stop shooting at us,” and Cher Ami wound up saving the day and saving all of these soldiers.

When I was writing my book, I wanted to know if Cher Ami was male or female and I came across this blog on the official US government site, this random guy’s blog where he said Cher Ami was a woman or a female pigeon, and “we are ignoring the contributions of females to war.” And I thought, I have to find this out. So, I reached out to the Smithsonian, and they said, “Because of the pandemic, we don’t have the DNA test results back from Cher Ami’s taxidermied body, which is the only way to tell. But we think Cher Ami is probably female so you can go with that in your book.” So, I proudly called Cher Ami female in my book, in the first edition, and then the results came back, and Cher Ami was a male.

Alie: Oops.

Rosemary: So, we can’t even tell if we’re experts and we have the pigeon in front of us, what this pigeon is, which I think is wild. Pigeons can tell but we can’t tell.

Alie: I'm sure pigeons have their own way. Maybe it's that bulbous thing in their nose, it's just like a [robotic voice] "Beep-beep-beep-beep-beep. That's a boy."

Rosemary: [laughs] Lady alert! Yeah.

Alie: Who knows? A bunch of people...

Aside: Cynthia Zhou, Daniella Napolitano, Olivia Lester, GhoulNextDoor, AZM, Sara Rocero's friend James, Neen, Sage Agee, Waylo, Katrina, Kate E, first-time question-asker Jamie and Mary McGann, first-time question-asker, Deborah Gray who wrote: My friend, Kaylee, and I want to know: How much sex do they have? And Sir Monkeyboy asked: Are they getting a little freaky with the neighbors? And I'm assuming Sir Monkeyboy means the neighboring pigeons. So, all those folks...

Alie: ... Want to know about mating rituals and their courting and breeding behavior like puffing up their chests? AZM wanted to know: Do the females enjoy this or do they mean it when they seem to be saying, "Back off, you creeper?"

Rosemary: Oh, I wish we could get into their heads, I'm so curious. They have really elaborate mating rituals and it is a delight to see. So, if you have some time and you want to go look at your local pigeons, now is a good time because a lot of them are kind of getting back into the breeding spirit after the winter. Some of them breed all winter, but a lot of them don't. So, I was just today watching some males doing their thing. It's incredibly elaborate.

So, it starts with males doing what's called the bow coo, where they will sort of duck and puff up and bow and raise up and bow and raise up, and they'll do this coo... Let's see if I can do it. They do a coo that sounds like [deep, trilled coo that rises and falls] [applause] and they'll bow and bow and bow and the females will sort of look like, "Why are you doing this?" [Alie laughs] But what's interesting is, they mate for life. [Alie gasps] So, you may be seeing a male bothering a female who he hasn't, you know, yet connected with or you may just see like a paired-for-life pair of pigeons where she's just acting kind of aloof. And so, he'll do that for a while and then they'll groom each other and then they'll kiss but really, they're sort of like cramming their beaks down each other's throats and simulating vomiting in each other's mouths. [Alie laughs] But it looks like a kiss so it's really cute.

And then they'll mate, and the male will pick a nesting site and he'll stand there, and he'll make this really weird sound that sounds like it's sort of like [deep, almost moo-like call] it's sort of like the coo but there's no trill. And I've heard that, and it's really weirded me out because it sounds like a guy standing, you know, under my window going, [deep voice] "Woooo." But it's a pigeon and he's saying, "Check out this cool spot that I found," and the female will go and start sitting there and sitting on the eggs.

But the reason they go through all this ridiculous amount of bonding is because they are both responsible for raising the babies and they can't really do it on their own and one of the reasons is that both male and female pigeons make milk. ["I beg your pardon."] So, for the first several days, they're both feeding milk to their babies and the babies need that, so it takes both the mom and the dad. So, these bonding rituals do have a purpose even though they're also funny.

Alie: Miiiilk? I know... Okay. Milk. Is that what they're doing when they're making out? Are they pretending like, "Pretend I'm giving you milk. Pretend I'm giving you milk."

Rosemary: Yeah, or regurgitating seeds from this region of the throat called the crop. You know, "Hey honey, I have so much seeds and milk to offer you."

Alie: But they're simulating vomiting, they're not actually being like, "Do you want a bite to eat?"

Rosemary: It's hard to tell but from what I was able to find, they're probably not actually puking a whole bunch into each other's mouths. But we'll see, the jury is out on that.

Alie: And if they are, it's none of our business.

Rosemary: Go for it. Go for it, kids.

Alie: They do what they want. But milk. Talk to me about pigeon milk.

Aside: So, this question was on the minds and in the throats of patrons Meagan Walker, Julia Smith, Kristen Fuller, Jenny Chambers, Mandy Hobson, Becky Wilkinson, Matthew Walcher, and two patrons, Carissa Quisenberry, and The Bloated Toad, would like a review of its taste but that, I think that's asking too much of any columbidologist.

Rosemary: Yeah, so pigeons convergently evolved the ability to make milk. You know, we make milk, they make milk. There are some differences. All pigeons can make milk and they make it in this region of their esophagus called the crop so they're kind of secreting it into their throat and then they're kind of puking it into their babies' mouths. It is a bit cheesier apparently than mammalian milk. I've never actually seen it because the whole thing happens in a very subtle, puking, mouth-to-mouth kind of way.

Aside: You know how it is.

Rosemary: But apparently, it's a little bit chunkier. But the wild thing is that in both humans and pigeons, it's stimulated by this hormone called prolactin so it's the same hormone. It also has fats and proteins and, you know, immune-boosting things in it. So, it serves a really similar purpose, which I think is really fascinating. They've sort of stumbled upon one of the same solutions that we have to helping our babies get a lot of nourishment. They just do it by puking. [*"Thanks, Mom. Thanks, Dad."*]

Alie: So, if they're co-parenting, which is a beautiful thing... Any idea why they don't just co-parent for a season and then be like, "Well, this was nice, keep in touch," and then find a new one? I mean, are their lives like one season long or do they live to be, like, 10 and they're always with the same partner?

Rosemary: There just seem to be different strategies that birds will undergo. So, some birds will be "monogamous" for life, but they'll sort of, like albatrosses, they'll have a mate for life but then maybe they'll go off and mate with a little friend off on the side or something. A lot of birds will only stick around with their partner for a season. But for whatever reason, the strategy seems to work out with pigeons where they will just stay together with a tiny amount of cheating, potentially, but mostly very little. They will just be incredibly defensive of and loyal to their mates for their whole life. If their mate passes away, they will get a new one. But people who keep pigeons know that once pigeons are paired up, good luck gettin' those two apart, they are totally devoted.

Aside: If they are bonded for life, is that like for a year or 50? Either way, it's going to be longer than the average couple from *Love Island*, but how big of an emotional commitment is lifetime for a pigeon?

Rosemary: They can live for, you know, 25 years potentially, some really long-lived ones. In the city though, it's a lot less than that. They're being predated upon by peregrine falcons, they're eating cruddy food and, you know, there are cars and all that stuff so their romance might be a little shorter. But yeah, I was not expecting to find pigeon romance this cute.

Alie: Augh! I had no idea. I figured because so many options in the city, [*Rosemary laughs*] people are always looking for something else that they would just be one and done but that's very beautiful

and hopefully inspiring to people who think that romance is dead in general. [*"I think our love can do anything we want it to."*]

But so many people want to know about their fancy appearance, especially if they mate for life. Mad Madame Mim, ton of others, Average_pi...

Aside: The Joyful Spitfire, TheDorkNextDoor want to know: What's with the iridescence? And Mad Madame Mim says: It's almost like an oil slick. Why are they so rainbowy? And Tiane Scott, first-time question-asker asked: Is it just to be the most beautiful birds on the block or is it for mating or what?

Rosemary: It seems to be a display thing. So, the iridescence gets more intense as they get a little bit older and then when they're showing off to their mates, they will inflate that crop, that throat region and they'll poof it out and they'll show, "Look how fancy and shiny I am." It's really neat. So, it's purple and green but there is not a drop of purple or green pigment in there, it's entirely just the structure of the feathers and the way they look. Some of the feathers look purple from an angle and green from the front and some look purple straight on and green from an angle. It's just this beautiful, shiny, structural thing.

Aside: For more on how colors can be structural and how feathers can be so shiny and beguiling, you can please see our excellent Plumology episode all about feathers, which of course, we shall link in the show notes.

Rosemary: And it seems to have to do with showing off and with that all-important purpose of getting a mate. But I think it's the most beautiful thing about a pigeon.

Alie: It is. It's gorgeous. You can look at the same pigeon, which looks different as it kind of coos along and struts about and then suddenly you get a nice little, ooh!

Rosemary: Yeah, the sun hits.

Alie: Almost holographic.

Rosemary: Yeah, and you're in love.

Alie: And you're in love, with a pigeon. Cat Baklarz wants to know: If pigeons are feral, why does LA have mostly grey pigeons and New York has more brown/white/mottled pigeons? Have you ever noticed that?

Aside: Patron Chandler Witherington also needed to know this, asking: What's up with certain cities throughout a country having certain color schemes of pigeons? I traveled to several cities around Spain a couple of years ago and noticed every city had its own unique pigeon colors that were more common. Chandler, firstly, you get my kudos for even noticing because friends, if you're traveling, you've got to milk it for every memory you can, you gotta crop milk it.

Rosemary: Yeah, that is a great question. This is one of the wildest things is this whole time we've been talking about city pigeons as if they're this monolith of pigeon. But each sort of zone that has feral pigeons, those pigeons are the descendants of whichever pigeons were initially brought there plus whichever racing pigeons maybe, you know, stumbled over their wall undergoing a long race. Pigeons don't tend to travel all that far. So, there was a great study that Elizabeth Carlen et al were involved in a few years ago that looked at New York pigeons and Boston pigeons, and they don't really mix. Like there's like a place in Connecticut where they're just like, "No, we're not going to cross that dividing line."

Aside: So, patron Victoria Hantout wrote in and asked: I heard that there are large families of pigeons that stay in their region, one near DC and one near Boston/NY. True? And WHY? And yes, I

dug up the 2020 paper Rosemary cited, it's titled, "Widespread genetic connectivity of feral pigeons across the Northeastern megacity," and if you're like, "Pray tell, what is a Northeastern megacity?" The paper starts right off knowing that we're all thinking that same thing and they explained that a megacity is the region covering six large cities, in this case, Boston, Providence, New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. Okay? It's how the paper starts. But yeah, the study says that the dividing line in northern and southern East Coast pigeons is likely due to, "reduced urbanization across coastal Connecticut." So, pigeons are like, "What do you want me to do? You want me to go live in some woods where there are no Ziplocs of crushed Cheerios lying around? [*deep grumbly voice*] Get outta here."

Now, another 2021 study from the same lab titled, "Urbanization predicts flight initiation distance in feral pigeons across New York City" looked at 519 pigeons to determine how close you have to get to one before it scoots away from you and breaks your heart. In cities with more people and traffic, that distance was shorter. They're like, "I'm outta here," quicker. This is also true for cities with more peregrine falcons, like Chicago and New York. For more on the rise and fall of the peregrine falcon and why it's such a cosmopolitan urban bird these days, you can see our Field Trip: Birds of Prey and Raptor Facts episode in which I meet birds that could probably kill me and other ones who would lick my decaying bones.

Rosemary: So, when you're looking at your local pigeons, what you're looking at is the result of mixing of particular bloodlines from that area. So, the pigeons that are feral in Cairo, in Egypt, those ones have been feral for you know, maybe 5,000 years, 10,000 years, which is *wild*. And then you look at the ones in New York and it's a few hundred years. So, local coloration has just a lot to do with which pigeons were dumped in that area. I mentioned earlier, if you go to Honolulu, one of my favorite examples, if you google, "Honolulu pigeons," [*Alie laughs*] you will get people feeding these flocks that are full of white birds, or birds with bits of white in them and it's because those ones stem from wedding release birds.

Aside: So, I hope that answers your question patron, Tyler J Poeti who'd asked: Why don't we release pigeons when we get married? Turns out, we do. And Krista Jones, who wanted to know: Why do we shun pigeons, but we invite doves to our weddings? Oh, pigeons are on the guest list, many people just don't realize.

And for some behind the scenes, I was researching this episode while on a plane to Hawaii to see family and to record a few field trip episodes, and on the ride from the airport, I was looking down at my phone, checking messages, unlike Chandler Witherington, and I realized just as I was leaving Honolulu that I should look for pigeons! At that moment, I glanced at a telephone wire and there sat two pigeons, one grey and one as white as a wedding gown.

Now, how much will that set you back? I let my fingers do the walking on my phone to a website called "Bridal Dream Hawaii," which advertised the releasing of two birds for the low price of \$199, which honestly, that's probably the most affordable line item on any wedding budget in this day and age, am I right folks? It also noted that "Doves need at least two hours before sunset to fly home before dark. Sorry, dove releases are not available at sunset time." So, you can have pigeons, or you can have a sunset, choice is yours. But a sunset won't poop on you and it's free. But I like the thought that there are two rented pigeons attending a wedding and communicating with their eyes, "Let's get the fuck out of here and fly home." Or even better, "Let's quit our jobs in the wedding industry and live behind the dumpster at the Circle K."

Rosemary: So yeah, each population is unique and special so you should treasure your local pigeons. There also seem to be urban-rural differences and latitude differences in terms of which pigeon wing patterns do the best for reasons that we do not understand. So, you'll see pigeons that have these

dark, checkered wings more in cities and in higher latitudes. Why? No idea. So, there are also sort of inherent factors going on. But yeah, your local pigeons are special and unique.

Alie: Well, you mentioned those higher latitudes and I never thought about this but how are they surviving the winters?

Aside: Listen, we all wanted to know this, and by all of us I mean, Kaffeine who asked how doves stay warm, and Stephanie Coombes who wanted to know: Is their habitat restricted by temperature? Like, are they snowbirds like your grandparents who spend the winter in Arizona or in Boca Raton?

Rosemary: It's *really* incredible. So, you won't find them, you know, on the North Pole, but they have some really good ways to stay warm. One of them is they hang around our buildings, which have all sorts of toasty nooks and crannies, but they're also able to poof up their feathers and trap warm air. So, they're kind of wearing a feather jacket at all times, and they're able to tuck in their little feet and keep their little feet warm. They have different strategies. Usually, so long as they get enough food, they're able to do pretty okay, which isn't to say you should throw a pigeon out into the frozen wilds, but the ones near cities seem to manage and they, and they can be found all the way up into Alaska, which is pretty amazing.

Alie: Into Alaska! Sienna asked, on the topic of city coloration, that they've been noticing way more... Is it leu-cis-tic [phonetic] or leu-kis-tic [ph]? Do you know?

Rosemary: Oh yeah! I think it's leu-cis-tic [ph] but that's not totally the right term. So, what you're talking about are pigeons with lots of white in them, white splotches, which is a really good observation. What's going on with pigeons that have either an all-white body or bodies with white splotches is a set of really complicated genetics that we have not fully decoded. So, for example, there's this one pigeon coloration called recessive white where they'll have a dark eye and a fully white body and that can happen. But then there are all these pigeons with just blobs of white on them, and there seem to be different genes for each different spot where they can have different blobs. And those are the descendants of birds that would have had, you know, white blobs or fancy white colorations. And those are some of my favorite ones to see. But again, that's just sort of like pigeons being mutts and having these colorations that, you know, are holdovers from fancy breeds.

Alie: Well, Sienna apparently is in Portland, Oregon so if you're looking for white, blobby pigeons, [*"Who isn't?"*] they got a lot of 'em up there.

Rosemary: Oooh! Tempting.

Alie: But this I thought was a very unique question. Feather Evans said: I was visiting a city and among the little flocks of pigeons on the sidewalk was this bright pink, and I mean BRIGHT PINK FLAMINGO-LOOKING PIGEON. My friend and I were stunned and confused but we love him and still think about him to this day. Why was this pigeon boy posing as a flamingo?

Rosemary: Oh, I have bad news for you.

Alie: Oh! Oh no!

Rosemary: Well, somebody had a girl and that's why that pigeon is pink. So, pigeons are not naturally pink [*Alie gasps*] but people will dye them for gender reveals or for other purposes.

Alie: No.

Rosemary: There was an orange in Toronto and there was a pink pigeon in New York City and those were both dyed and sometimes that paint can injure the pigeon. So, if you see a pigeon that is colored, what's going on there is someone bought a domestic white pigeon, put paint on them, released it, and now

this poor pigeon is like, "Well, now I'm pink, and now I'm lost. Where's my home?" So, you should try to rescue that pigeon and bring it home. but yeah, please don't do gender reveals with live animals. It's not a good idea.

Alie: I never would have guessed that. So, if you see a powder blue pigeon...

Rosemary: It's a boy.

Alie: It's a boy. But that pigeon might not be a boy, but someone is having a boy.

Rosemary: I know. [*Alie gasps*] I don't think these heteronormative ideas are good to foist upon pigeons and paint them.

Alie: [*stifled voice*] I don't think so either.

Aside: I accidentally googled how much it costs to ask a pigeon to announce your child's crotch and somehow, I landed on a TikTok of an all-American family consisting of a mom, a dad, and their four sons standing near a rural lake for the gender reveal of a fifth child, every member of the family wearing custom T-shirts that said things like, "I'm your big brother." But the father wore one featuring two peanuts and the words "Team Nuts," as a picnic basket opened to release white pigeons and a few blue balloons, the mother seemed to hold back tears but maybe that was because she remained the only family member not on Team Nuts. I don't like this, and neither do the cops.

So, a February 2023 *New York Times* headline read, "A Pigeon Was Dyed. Then It Died. Now the New York City Police Department's animal cruelty unit has opened an inquiry," which it should because last year, this poor pink pigeon was discovered frail and smelling of hair dye behind the Shake Shack in Madison Square Park in New York. One rescuer told the *New York Times* that "Someone had dunked it in the dye all the way to the top of its head." Sadly, Flamingo (as it was dubbed) didn't make it through the week and it died, likely from ingesting the dye while trying to clean its feathers despite rescue efforts.

Commonly, those dyed doves are King pigeons which are all-white breeds used in the meat trade. In doing some rabbit hole, it turns out that a 2002, 9/11 memorial event in New Jersey couldn't get a hold of professional homing pigeon handlers for its dove release, they were all booked, so the organizers just bought a bunch of white King pigeons from a poultry market. And because squab are baby pigeons and not good fliers. They were released and they quickly plunged into the Hudson River or they hit windows, one perched on a 9/11 first responders construction hat at the ceremony. The *New York Times* reports that the chief organizer for the Jersey City event said that they did save a few hundred dollars because they didn't rent them at premium prices and that buying meat pigeons for this horrific scene to commemorate a horrific scene, "Without a doubt, beats what could have happened to them." Which he said was "becoming soup."

What's my point? Humans can be much grosser than pigeons. That's my point. And I guess check a Yelp page if you're going to rent pigeons, please don't treat them like Easter eggs because I promise when your baby is a teenager, they will see pictures of their gender reveal and they'll bring it up in therapy.

Alie: A bunch of folks, Sarah Williamson, Valerie Bertha, Meagan Walker, Neen, AZM, and Chris Moore wanted to know why their heads bob.

Rosemary: They don't.

Alie: [*excitedly*] What?!

Rosemary: This is one of my favorite facts about pigeons. They look like they bob, right? But secretly, pigeons are not bobbing their heads. What they're doing is they have a lot of neck bones. So okay, humans have, you know, seven neck vertebrae, and when we're walking down the street, we have to make sure that we're not going to step in dog poo or step on a nail or something. So, we're kind of flicking our eyes ahead and keeping our eyes a few steps ahead to look at the ground and make sure that we're not stepping on anything. But because pigeons have these really long necks, what they do is they stick their head out and they kind of use their head like this probe where they're sort of looking around making sure, "Okay, I'm not going to step on something bad," and then they bring their body up to meet their head. So, their head isn't actually bobbing back, it's that their body is catching up with their head and then they stick their head out again and they continue to do this motion where their head is sort of like this advanced guard making sure that everything is okay.

So, they sort of bob their head forward, but they don't really bob it back and forth the way we think they do. And there are videos on YouTube, thank the YouTube gods, of pigeons walking in slow motion and you can see this happen. It's really fascinating. Where their body is going forward and then stopping, and then forward and then stopping, and then forward and then stopping. So, it's an optical illusion.

Aside: So yes, I watched a video of this slowed down by ten times and if you train your eye on the pigeon head, it stays in place like a gimbal or a Steadicam, and then the body is indeed what is strutting. Just this fact alone can turn anyone into a rapt pigeon-watcher. Anyone you see sitting on a park bench staring off into the distance may actually just be closely observing the biomechanics of pigeon necks. They could also be having a personal life crisis and in a trance of their own mental undoing, unrelated to pigeons and that's fine too. Because honestly, we've all had those moments sitting on a bench.

So, this next one was about pigeon public relations, asked by Charlotte Parkinson, Olivia Lester, Haley K, Zoe Litton, Peregrine, Handrea, Storm, Sienna, Tea Danilović first-time question-asker, pigeon rescuer Cynthia Zhou, Olivia Coppin, Pidgey Koto first-time question-asker, Essence, Cassidy McKee, Mary Long, Sam Nelson, Andrea Devlin, who want to know about the haters, about the pigeon-phobes. The Awkward Cactus asked: Why do people hate on pigeons so much in a world where geese exist? Which honestly, let's not bring geese into this right now. But yes, Rosemary, as the author of the book, *A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching: Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird*, is the perfect columbidologist to answer this for that long list of concerned patrons.

Alie: I want to ask too about, oh my gosh, we have so many questions and I will wrap it up. A lot of people want to know about calling them sky rats, about flying rats, about the bad rap they're getting. We have done a whole episode on Urban Rodentology about rats so if you want to call them rats, listen to that one because it'll make you like rats more. But who started calling them that? And can you bust any myths on either disease vectors or... anything you want to get on a soapbox for about this?

Rosemary: Yeah, I took a deep breath because I have so many thoughts. [*both laugh*] So, rats with wings is a really frustrating expression and it's a disservice to both rats and pigeons... and wings.

So, we don't know who started calling them rats with wings. This fellow Colin Jerolmack went and looked at *New York Times* mentions of rats with wings, and he found someone in 1966, this parks commissioner Thomas P Hoving, complaining about pigeons being rats with wings. And the reason he was talking about them being rats is that he was talking about this local park called Bryant Park in New York City that was full of these perceived social ills. So, you know, people struggling with

substance addictions, and people who are unhoused, and trash and rats, and then these pigeons, which were rats with wings. And so, he was kind of lumping all of this undesirable stuff together. That's the first documentation we have of someone calling them rats with wings. And then Woody Allen, [*growsl*] in his movie *Stardust Memories* had someone call them, I think it's Woody Allen himself says [*"No, it's not pretty at all, they're rats with wings!"*] and that was kind of when it entered the cultural zeitgeist. So, it's hard to exactly pinpoint it but it's pretty recent, this whole rats with wings thing.

I find it really frustrating because pigeons are not the threat that we tend to think that they are disease-wise, although, again, you should exercise some caution. They're really not a big problem. Also, interestingly, although rats can be a really troublesome invasive species, pigeons don't seem to be an invasive species. Everybody just assumes they're an invasive species because they're everywhere and the reason they're everywhere is because we are looking at them and they are where we are. [*Alie laughs*] They don't go, you know, into remote areas, they don't go into redwood forests, they go where we are. They want to be where we are, [*"We loved your cooking."*] and their ecological impacts seemed to be pretty minimal. Although there was a case in the Galápagos where pigeons were removed from the Galápagos Islands for fear that they would get a local native pigeon species sick.

So, there are some potential impacts, but mostly they're pretty chill and they're not a big problem ecologically. So, I don't think it's fair to call them rats. And also, they're very different. They mate for life, I guess both rats and pigeons make milk. But that's kind of it.

Aside: Again, listen to the Urban Rodentology episode because Dr. Bobby Corrigan is an angel on Earth, below Earth. He can tell you all about New York's sewer superhighway and I do cry about the beauty of rats loving and caring for each other in that one. And it's not an animal's fault that they are successful in our cities. They are doing a big slay and literally leaving no crumbs.

Alie: Also yeah, they're feral. It's because of us and, kind of, our abandonment of them, right?

Rosemary: Yeah. And you know, when I say we, I want to be careful because, you know, definitely certain peoples of the world are the ones who carried pigeons all over the place and released them here. And so, for example, you know, the passenger pigeon, which was this, this beautiful and delicious species that Indigenous people in North America used to consume and used to sustainably manage, that is a pigeon where colonists came over and basically went, "Why are you managing these? Why aren't you eating them all at once?" and ate all the passenger pigeons to death and kind of also brought over the *Columba livia* pigeon. So, there's also been this sort of ecological manipulation from colonization that is one of the reasons why pigeons are all over the place and why the passenger pigeon, alas, is no more.

Alie: How different anatomically was the passenger pigeon? Obviously, we don't see them anymore, they're extinct, right?

Rosemary: Yeah, they were bigger, they had pointy tails; they looked pretty different. They would build little nests in trees. Although I've seen the nests, they're okay... [*hesitantly*] They're okay. [*Alie laughs*] They're fine. [*laughs*] But yeah, they were different in anatomy, they were different in behavior, they were different in sound; they were different in a lot of ways, but they were still in that pigeon family Columbidae, and they were still apparently this delicious and really important food source for a lot of people. And yeah, as colonists kind of destroyed their habitat and also ate them to death and they became more rare, then these highfalutin people in New York City started to pay extra money to eat these rare birds.

Alie: Nooooo!

Rosemary: Eat the last few passenger pigeons. I know, it's wild to think about.

Alie: Noooo.

Rosemary: Yeah, and it was a pigeon called Martha. Yeah, not really sure.

Alie: Did someone have her domestically, or him? Because I don't think they had DNA testing back then, to my knowledge.

Rosemary: Oh, she was in a zoo. And I think male and female passenger pigeons looked pretty different, unlike the city pigeons.

Aside: So, passenger pigeons got their name because they were in huge numbers, possibly three billion of them, in North America and would pass over in giant flocks. They were the most numerous bird in North America up until the mid-1800s. They had delicate-looking beaks and coloring kind of like a robin, with a ruddy breast and grey and black back and wings. The flocks used to snack on farmers' crops and there were so many of them naturally occurring that all a person with a shotgun would have to do was shoot upwards and half a dozen would fall out of the sky like it was raining cheeseburgers. So, that is what colonists did, with absolute abandon, and by about 1900, the last known passenger pigeon was shot in the wild.

Now, the last living passenger pigeon died in a Cincinnati zoo in the year 1914. Her name indeed was Martha and she lived, it's estimated, into her late twenties. The day that she was found dead on the floor of her cage, the zoo put her in a 300-pound block of ice and shipped her straight from Cincinnati to the Smithsonian in Washington DC, where she has been dead ever since.

I looked for news reports of her death since she had been a bird celebrity in her day, and in googling "Martha pigeon obituary," I landed on a Legacy.com page for the recently deceased woman, Martha F. Pigeon, who passed away in the summer of 2022. Martha Frick Pigeon, 86, was a preschool teacher and then she taught high school algebra. She loved to play bridge, she had such a sweet, warm smile. And then I looked, her memorial service was held on July 8, 2022, the very same day that my dad died. So, both Martha pigeons, rest in peace. You too, Pops. Not to make anyone sad, I think it's beautiful. But what about say, an encore from the world's most celebrated pigeon?

Alie: Valerie Bertha, Kaffeine, Carissa Quisenberry, Fybreklass, Sarah Railey King, Helios, and Patricia Evans all want to know about the resurrection of the passenger pigeon. Should they be de-extinct? Is that even possible? Is it in the works?

Rosemary: Oh gosh, since so many people want to know, I can't speak on that. I was focusing on *Columba livia*, so I don't really know. It doesn't sound like a great idea to me, any sort of de-extinction.

Aside: Okay, so this organization is called the Revive and Restore Project and I went on their website and found a passage titled, "HOW TO MAKE A PASSENGER PIGEON," which gave this recipe for "the five stages of de-extinction are:"

1. *Comparing the genomes of the Passenger Pigeon and [the existing] Band-tailed Pigeon*
2. *Identifying regions of the living Band-tailed Pigeons' genome to edit*
3. *Editing the germline [or sex cells] of living Band-tailed Pigeons*
4. *Breeding a new generation of Passenger Pigeons in captivity*
5. *Reintroducing Passenger Pigeons to the wild through proper conditioning and monitoring.*

So yes, it involves taking the germ line cells of existing pigeons and popping in some code for passenger pigeon sex cells.

Last year, I visited the World Center for Birds of Prey, and I was invited into the collections where they slowly pulled out a drawer to reveal a prized tawny-colored, taxidermied passenger pigeon. I was going to say, "In the flesh," but it's just pretty much the feathers stuffed with cotton. The moment of seeing it, it had the same energy as if you were 12, and you and your friend snuck into their older brother's room and they showed you a bong that they were hiding in their closet, like, "Isn't this intense? Can you believe we are seeing this?" Part "Whoa, that is wild," and part, "Oh, should I be concerned for the future?" But many people wanted to know about pigeons wearing things.

Alie: When it comes to fashion, Jessi, Steve K, Adam Foote, and Nick want to know about their apparel. Jessi said: I saw at a zoo in Hamburg that homing pigeons sometimes wore whistles. Steve K and Adam Foote want to know, Steve K's daughter Charlie who loves pigeons wants to know: What ever happened to the pigeons with cowboy hats in Las Vegas? Are they okay? Can you enlighten me?

Rosemary: Oh, I don't know because that happened after my book came out. I don't know what happened to those pigeons. I'm hoping somebody captured them and removed the cowboy hats from the pigeons. But please don't do that.

Aside: So yes, at least three pigeons, dubbed by locals Cluck Norris, Coolamity Jane, and Billy the Pidge were bobbing about behatted. No one ever found the culprit. So, please never ever superglue tiny hats onto animals. I can't believe anyone even has to tell anyone this. However, we do have an episode about sea urchins, and they *do* enjoy wearing small 3D-printed hats in case you'd like to consume some tales of consensual animal hats, we'll link that episode in the show notes.

But on the topic of helping pigeons, a donation for this week will go to Great Lakes Pigeon Rescue on behalf of Rosemary and in memory of her father, pigeon friend, Vincent Mosco. You can learn more about Great Lakes Pigeon Rescue at the link in the show notes. That donation was made possible by sponsors of the show.

[Ad Break]

Okay, where were we? Yes, sticky situations.

Rosemary: Don't glue things to pigeons, it's not a good idea. But there are some times when it's okay for pigeons to wear clothes. And I love the example of whistles. So, pigeon whistles are especially a big tradition in places in Asia, places like China and Indonesia. Pigeons will be flown around in these big flocks wearing these elaborate and very, very light (because they have to be very light and easy to fly with) whistles that are made of bamboo and various other really light materials. If you've never heard this, I recommend you do a search because these pigeons flying overhead will make this kind of like, [*hum of whistles fades in and out*] ghostly, ethereal whistling noise. It's really very beautiful and it's this gorgeous tradition. They don't do it to wild pigeons, people will do it to their own pet pigeons. So, whistles are a thing that pigeons will wear.

Also, if you have pet pigeons, one way to keep them from pooping all over your house is to put on pigeon pants on your pigeons.

Alie: [*squeals*] No.

Rosemary: So, pigeon pants are these amazing little vests with kind of like a butt pocket, like a cloaca pocket, and they come in all kinds of styles. You can get Superman pigeon pants and Spiderman pigeon pants and, and little maid pigeon pants. You can get jorts and you can get anything you want for your pigeons. [*Alie gasps, Rosemary giggles*] Rhinestones... It's a delight. And the pigeon poops into

the pants and then you clean the pants. And yeah, I remember going to one website that sells these and they had this FAQ and they said they had this question, you know, "Do the pigeons enjoy wearing the pants?" And the reply was something like, "They get used to it." *[both laugh]*

Aside: We don't always like wearing pants, but we do what we have to do. And before we started recording, as we were logging on and doing mic checks, Rosemary mentioned her own pet bird, not a pigeon, but still a bird.

Alie: Do people have those for like, parrots and parakeets and cockatiels and stuff?

Rosemary: Yeah, those can exist, but pigeons are a little less trainable than some parrots. So, I think really, they're super popular with pigeon owners.

Alie: As a bird owner, do your birds kind of know where to go and where not to go?

Rosemary: Yeah. And they will try to get around that at every available opportunity. *[Alie laughs]* So, parrots are interesting because they are not domesticated. Parrots were just sort of stolen from the wild and now they live with us. My parrots know they're not supposed to poop on me and so, they will do what I call a stealth poop where they'll try to, like, sneak it without me knowing, or they'll fly to a place and they'll poop and they'll come back. So, sort of whatever mood they're in. But pigeons, I know people who are trying to train their pigeons to poop in the potty and some pigeons seem to take to it and some of them do not, at all. And that's when you get the pants.

Alie: I love a pant. Well, last listener question. It's unfortunate that they don't have shoes because in first-time question-asker Natalie Quinones's words: Is it true that pigeons sometimes lose their toes because they get tangled in human hair from the streets? Kira Simon Kennedy, first-time question-asker, said: One of my professors did research on why pigeons in Paris have messed up toes and it turns out it's due to human hair!

Aside: Kira Simon-Kennedy, first-time question-asker, included with her question a mention of the 2019 paper, "Urban pigeons losing toes due to human activities." And other patrons including Lee Lawlor, Lisa Nijhuis, FybreGlass, KittyKat81, Cassandra Rodrigues, Juliet Petrency, Ayshia Yaeger, and AB had pigeon foot questions. Laura Kelliher, first-time question-asker, and Jenn Macgillivray wanted to know: Why do they have stumpy feet? Hannah asked about their nub feet and...

Alie: Naomi Jane wants to know: Should I feel awful that my long hair molts so much? A ton of others want to know about string foot. Can you tell me about it?

Rosemary: Yeah! So, I don't think you should feel bad about having long hair, I really don't. I think that you shouldn't collect a ton of your hair and put it in a big pile where pigeons are going to be walking around. But pigeon feet get damaged for a whole bunch of different reasons.

Really what's going on is that pigeons walk when they forage. So, you look at, like, a little sparrow and they hop, they hop around, and they perch on twigs and stuff. Pigeons aren't really perchers, they're really, they walk, and they forage, and they walk around. And so, whatever we have on the ground, whether it's bits of string or, you know, bits of trash, or sharp things, they will just kind of walk and they'll injure their feet for all sorts of different reasons. They'll get them tangled up too in different strings and different hairs.

So, if you see a pigeon that's in trouble like that, there are Facebook communities called String Foot Saviors and various other things like that and there are communities where people will trap their local pigeons and then figure out sanitary ways to remove the string and keep the pigeons' feet, you know, healthy during that process. I've personally rescued pigeons that have wrapped up feet and taken them to rehabbers, but I have not gone around and captured pigeons and trimmed the

strings from their feet. So, I can't guarantee that that's going to work. But I think you should check out those Facebook groups.

You know, this is one of the things, it's like, we all get so frustrated with humanity in general, but I really believe that most people are pretty good. The fact that there are people out there who care enough about pigeons, that they will catch them, endure the social stigma of standing there [giggles] with tiny scissors and a little pigeon and some antiseptic, you know, and help this little bird, just makes me feel so much better about the world.

Alie: [little sigh] There is a TikTok going around about... It looks so evil because there's this woman who is throwing birdseed and then all of a sudden, she swoops in like a hawk and grabs a pigeon and you're like, "What is this bitch doing?!" And then it turns out she's just got her eye on the ones that have string foot and she's grabbing them, calming them down, and then de-string footing them. So... hero. A pigeon hero.

Rosemary: Yeah, that is so wonderful, and also, I hope she's not teaching people to catch pigeons and then... [laughs] Take one or two.

Alie: I know. Tell me about it. Take part in the Facebook group, be apprenticed before you do it.

Aside: So, let's hand it to the feet-seeking volunteers out there who deserve their own documentary, I would watch that. Speaking of media, how have these ubiqui-birds flittered their way into our eyes and ears and hearts asked patrons Deli Dames, TheDorkNextDoor, Dani C, Dave Cannon, Scott Hanley, Abraham Livingston, and first-time question-asker Andrea Marie Squirrel Tree Roggero, who had questions about a wide variety of songs, dances, and pigeon movies including, Maggie Morgan and Katy who asked: What is the ologist's opinion on Bert's "Doing the Pigeon" song and dance? Is it a good *Sesame Street* bit or the best *Sesame Street* bit? [*"I love pigeons and I love how they walk, and I've created a really cool dance called doin' the pigeon."*] I'll answer that, it's the best. But overall...

Alie: Any movies that you think don't do pigeons dirty?

Rosemary: Oh gosh. So, there is a pigeon movie database. It's like the PMDB. And sadly, like right after my book was published, the person stopped updating it so, if you're out there, please update it. Where they went through and they talked about whether, you know, every single movie that has pigeons in it is doing the pigeons, you know, dirty or doing the pigeons nicely.

I think my favorite is *Home Alone 2*. [*"Merry Christmas!"*] Granted it's been a long time since I've seen it but there's a pigeon lady in *Home Alone 2* and she has all of her pigeons.

[Clip from *Home Alone 2*]

Pigeon lady: People pass me in the street, they see me, but they try to ignore me. They prefer I wasn't a part of their city.

Kevin: Yeah, it's sort of like that with my family, I'm kind of the pigeon of the house, just because I'm the youngest.

And at first, you're sort of scared of the pigeon lady, but then you realize that actually she just loves pigeons and she's this good person and you know, she's got a lot of big feelings. And I think that's true of all of us, weirdos, myself included, who enjoy pigeons. You know, people are good and care about pigeons and have big hearts. So, I definitely like that one.

Alie: And those pigeons were trained actors, right? From what I saw in your book.

Rosemary: They were, yeah! There were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pigeons that were trained for that. They were all domesticated pigeons. What's really sweet is that they were rotated out of scenes so that they wouldn't get too tired being in *Home Alone 2*.

Alie: And they just knew where to hit their mark and then when to fly off?

Rosemary: I don't know how much food was involved, *[laughs]* how much training was involved there. But pigeons can be trained to do some pretty cool stuff. B.F. Skinner taught them to play ping-pong, so you could probably train them to do a little bit of acting. Where's the Pigeon Oscars? That's what I want to know. Pigeons walking the red carpet.

Alie: This is a good question. *[laughs]*

Rosemary: Yeah!

Alie: All they gotta do is just put a trail of bagel and that's how you walk the red carpet.

Rosemary: *[slow gasp]* Yes!

Aside: Strutting the red carpet, chest out, beak first, because pigeons deserve our respect and our adulation for going barefoot in New York, for delivering messages long before DMs, for their natural iridescence and for not actually giving any city dwellers meningitis in the 1960s. So, if you are a friend to pigeons, and you help them, you're a friend to Rosemary.

Rosemary: You know, thank you for rescuing pigeons, people. And consider adopting a pet pigeon!

Alie: I'm thinking about it now. I mean, the pants alone I'm like... Exciting!

Rosemary: There are so many styles, and you can get pants for every holiday. *[Alie laughs]* Halloween, Christmas, little Santa outfits, it's gold. Hanukkah pigeons.

Alie: I'm going to be googling the pigeon shit out of that, that's so exciting. *[Rosemary laughs]*

And I know I always ask you know, the tough thing about what you do, or is there anything that is not your favorite about pigeons or is there anything that was difficult in writing the book that was just... that really got ya?

Rosemary: I think it's always hard to write books about animals and not get sad about some of the things that we've done to animals and some of the things that we've done to people. So, you know, hitting those points of injustice were really hard and it was hard to kind of figure out how to talk about those in a book that was supposed to be kind of funny and goofy and full of cartoons. That and the isolation of writing a book or doing this kind of media are really challenging. So, I always like, you know, hint, hint, if anyone wants to send me emails and say, "Hey, I read your things," because I just sort of put stuff out into the void and then, you know, I go and read a book very quietly. So, that can be challenging too.

Alie: And people can find you on social media and find your email, right?

Rosemary: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm around.

Alie: You're more adored than you realize, I'll tell you that straight off the bat. What about your favorite thing about pigeons?

Rosemary: *[sighs]* I think it's the milk. *["Oh, wow. Okay, great."]* *[Alie laughs]* It's hard. It's hard to not be obsessed with the milk. I mean, they're making milk! It's just shocking. And I remember rescuing a really young pigeon at one point, and there was no nest, and it was kind of like in the middle of nowhere. And I remember calling the wildlife rehabber and they said, "You have to bring it in because we have to make formula for this pigeon because it needs milk." Which is just amazing. I

mean, I kind of want to see, like, a mug of this stuff. *[both laugh]* Like, how is this? How did they make milk? It's just so delightful. Convergent evolution is just incredible, you know? How did we stumble on milk, and they stumbled on milk and here we are just like nursing our babies in two vastly different locations in ways. It's just fascinating.

Alie: But all in the same city.

Rosemary: Yeah, yeah. absolutely. Yeah. That and I think you know, knowing that Tesla and Darwin and a bunch of famous people were head over heels in love with pigeons also, really made me really delighted.

Alie: Tesla in particular, who described his love of a pigeon, almost like the love of a woman. It was his reason for being from what I remember, right?

Rosemary: Yeah! He said, "I love that pigeon. I loved her as a man loves a woman." Yeah, he fell in love with one particular pigeon. And I also just learned recently that he passed away in an accident while he was on his way to feed his local feral pigeons. So, he was very pigeon-obsessed. He was all about pigeons.

Alie: *[softly]* Wow.

Rosemary: Yeah. So, where are the billionaires who are putting all of their money into Tesla-based corporations designed to help pigeons? That's what I want to know.

Alie: *[laughs]* This is the call to action we've been waiting for. A hundred percent. *[Rosemary laughs]* You got money? Put it in pigeons. Maybe betting. Maybe just an investment in their well-being.

Aside: and if you would like to invest in a book, Rosemary has many, including *Flowers Are Pretty...Weird!*, *Butterflies are Pretty...Gross!*, *Birding Is My Favorite Video Game: Cartoons about the Natural World from Bird and Moon*, and *Expedition Backyard*, of course, the now-classic, *A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching: Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird*, and the upcoming: *There Are No Ants in this Book*.

Rosemary: Yeah, I have two picture books coming out. One I can talk about is called *There Are No Ants in this Book* that comes out this summer and is about spoiler alert, there are ants, it's a kid's picture book. *[Alie laughs]* And then I have another book for adults. I will caution people. Although my pigeon book has cartoons, it is for adults and has some *very* elaborate descriptions of pigeon marital activities. *[Alie laughs]* I've had a few people say, "Oh, it's got cartoons. I'm buying it for my 6-year-old." And I'm like, "No, no, no! But buy it for yourself and you'll be amused." But yeah, I'm the only Rosemary Mosco in the world, so if you google me, you'll get me, for good and for bad.

Alie: I'm so happy I got a chance to talk to you. Getting to sit and talk to you about pigeons anywhere in the world, in any form is a privilege. So, thank you for doing this.

Rosemary: Well thank you. All these listener questions were amazing and talking to you was such a delight. So yeah, you made my whole day, you and the pigeons I saw this morning. *[Alie laughs]* I'm all set.

So, ask pigeon people pertinent questions because look at that, they are eager to talk and change your mind. So, I hope you stop to look at a pigeon and say, "Hey buddy, I see you and I like you even more now." Of course, pick up any of Rosemary's books, and you can find her site linked in the show notes. She's on social media at her name, @RosemaryMosco. A donation went to the Great Lakes Pigeon Rescue in memory of her late, wonderful dad and pigeon appreciator, Vincent Mosco. Think of him when you see a pigeon and send a little cosmic hug to Rosemary as she grieves that loss. I've been there, it's tough. Rosemary, we adore you and we adore pigeons.

We are @Ologies on Twitter or X and on Instagram, where we re-post your *Ologies* art every Friday and your merch photos on Monday. *Ologies* Merch is available at OlogiesMerch.com and we have some new designs like an “Ask ____ People ____ Questions” you can fill in with a Sharpie however you like or leave it as is. We have a field guide shirt that I love and bathing suits, we have them all at OlogiesMerch.com. Erin Talbert admins the *Ologies* Podcast Facebook group, Aveline Malek and The Wordary make our professional transcripts, Kelly R Dwyer works on the website, and Noel Dilworth is our scheduling producer. Susan Hale is our grand puppeteer and managing director, Jake Chaffee is our assistant editor, and dusting up my crumbs into a whole bagel is lead editor Mercedes Maitland of Maitland Audio.

And if you stick around until the end of the episode, I tell you a secret and this week it’s that I forgot to say Nick Thorburn wrote the theme music, which he did. I also forgot to tell you about *Smologies*, which are shorter, kid-friendly episodes that we have, you can find them at AlieWard.com/Smologies or linked in the show notes... Very fun announcement coming soon about that, some changes we’re making on May 16th.

Anyway, the secret, the secret is it is 5:56 in the morning, Pacific time, and I’m supposed to leave in four minutes for the airport, [*chuckles*] going to be maybe five. But I’m going to Mexico City today and I’ll be there for a few days. I have a friend, my friend Kathryn Burns is a choreographer, she’s teaching down there. We keep saying we’re going to take a trip together so I’m going to go down there, we’re going to go to some museums. Field trip episodes coming soon, including one on axolotls, whaaaat? So, I’m going to go do some science reporting there which you’ll get to hear in upcoming episodes. But yeah, I’m supposed to leave in a few minutes. [*fake laugh*] It’s going to be fine. I also slept 13 hours last night, so I feel like I’m overall, doing okay.

This wasn’t the best secret and I’m sorry about that, but another secret is the best pair of tweezers I ever found, I found on the floor on a film shoot I was doing, that had dropped behind, like, a dresser, so it was obvious someone forgot them. I found them, I realized, 10 years ago. I’ve gotten other tweezers, they’re not as good. I still use this pair of tweezers I found on the floor. I washed them but they work better than anyone. Are they magic? Nobody knows. Okay, bye! I’m going to go to the airport. See ya!

Transcribed by Aveline Malek at TheWordary.com

Links to things we discussed:

[Human activities and landscape features interact to closely define the distribution and dispersal of an urban commensal](#)

[Cunning Neanderthals hunted and ate wild pigeons](#)

[Pigeons, a Darwin Favorite, Carry New Clues to Evolution](#)

[The Far Side Comic Strip by Gary Larson](#)

[Where Did Pigeons Come From?](#)

[Pigeon Iridescence: Physical and Functional Properties](#)

[Rare wild ancestors of feral pigeons found living on British and Irish islands](#)

[Limited domestic introgression in a final refuge of the wild pigeon](#)

[Americans used to eat pigeon all the time—and it could be making a comeback](#)

[Squab Producers of America](#)

[Nutrition Facts and Calories for Squab](#)

[Pigeon Breed Gallery](#)

[BONKERS pigeon breeds](#)

[Trumpeter \(pigeon\) - Pigeon Wiki - Fandom](#)

[Cropper Tumbler Pigeon \(video\)](#)

[Pigeon Breeding: Genetics at Work](#)

[Following the sun: a mathematical analysis of the tracks of clock-shifted homing pigeons](#)

[Magnetic compass helps pigeons find their way](#)

[Dr. Elizabeth Carlin's pigeon research](#)

[Urbanization predicts flight initiation distance in feral pigeons \(*Columba livia*\) across New York City](#)

[Widespread genetic connectivity of feral pigeons across the Northeastern megacity](#)

[The pigeon strut in slow-mo](#)

[Urban pigeons losing toes due to human activities](#)

[L.A. Was Once Home to the World's Largest Flock of Pigeons](#)

[Magnetoreception in birds](#)

[Magnetoreception: A Dynamo in the Inner Ear of Pigeons](#)

[A Putative Mechanism for Magnetoreception by Electromagnetic Induction in the Pigeon Inner Ear](#)

[German city issues coronavirus pigeon-feeding permits](#)

[A park where people have been going to feed friendly pigeons since the 18th century - Parque De Las Palomas in San Juan, Puerto Rico](#)

[NYC: It is not illegal to keep or feed pigeons, but a violation may be issued for failing to clean up unsanitary conditions that result from this activity.](#)

[Occasional human infestations by feral pigeons' ectoparasites: Two case reports](#)

[Gamasoidosis](#)

[Pigeons Exonerated In Meningitis Cases By Italian Specialist](#)

[Human diseases caused by feral pigeons](#)

[Million Dollar Pigeons Official Trailer 2022](#)

[Pigeons Get a New Look](#)

[PG-67 WW II pigeon message vial](#)

[Cunning Neanderthals hunted and ate wild pigeons](#)

[Pigeons, a Darwin Favorite, Carry New Clues to Evolution](#)

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[FIELD TRIP: Birds of Prey and Raptor Facts](#)

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