

FOOD PREFERENCE OF THE CHUKAR PARTRIDGE AND DOMESTIC PIGEON
AT MILITARY AERODROMES IN ISRAEL

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INTRODUCTION:

The *Alectoris chukar* (chukar) and the *Columba domestica* (pigeon) are common resident birds throughout Israel including Air Force bases in the north, center and south of the country. The Israeli Air Force suffers significant aircraft damage due to strikes from these two species.

The chukar is a heavy (375-625 gr.) "clumsy" bird which escapes by running or low flight and is a hazard factor mainly during take off and landing. The chukar has a high breeding ability and few natural enemies within the bases. Often they appear in groups of 2-25 birds near or even on the runways. For that reason the chukar is a high hazard risk for multiple strikes.

Hundreds and thousands of pigeons cross some of the bases air space at least twice a day on their way from their resting areas to the feeding zones and back. They are an annoyance almost everywhere. Apart from the strike danger they also cause other damage to equipment and to public health.

CROP ANALYSIS:

In order to reduce the chukar and the pigeon populations in the bases we examined the abiotic and biotic factors of their ecological habitats. One of the most important biotic factors is the food.

This subject was investigated by using controlled feeding stations and especially by the crop analysis of dead chukars and pigeons.

Knowledge of their food preference gives us the key to monitor the problem by:

- * removal of preferred food.
- * controlled agriculture.
- * creating attractive points with the intention of trapping the birds.
- * weed elimination.

The crop is an elastic extension of the gullet functioning as primary storage and food digestion. The crop is an especially developed organ among seed eaters such as chukars and pigeons. It enables them to gather the food quickly. While in the crop the seeds are moistened and softened as the first step in digestion.

RESULTS:

figure 1-

- * Wheat is the most preferable from the sowing period until sprouting. than, from the first stage of ripening through the spring, summer and autumn wheat seeds are the principal food.
- * During the winter, when wheat seeds are rare, the most available food is green grass.
- * Concerning vetch, although its spread is similar to that of the wheat, it is rarely found and then in small amounts.
- * The Amaranthus seeds are very attractive to the birds despite their small size.
- * During the spring and summer time we find considerable amounts of Notobasis and Sorghum which are very common roderalic weeds at the bases.

figure 2-

- * At controlled feeding stations we have found a clear preference of sorghum seeds and wheat seeds compared to vetch.

figure 3-

- * During one day of pigeon hunting in March 1992, at a base in an arid area, we found inside 95 out of 100 crops cooked food that originated from the base kitchen (spagheti, corn, chick-peas, potatos, chicken etc.). This is a very alarming finding considering the efforts to decrease pigeon population by means of food control.

APPLICATION:

- * Wheat was reduced.
- * Vetch and oat areas were increased.
- * Notobasis, Amaranthus and Sorghum eliminated as much as possible.
- * Garbage disposal areas were put under strict supervision to avoid any organic refuse.

Figure 1

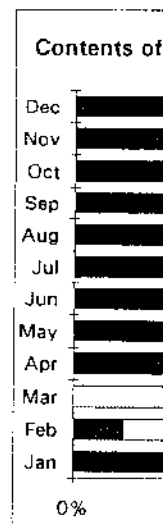


Figure 2



Figure 1

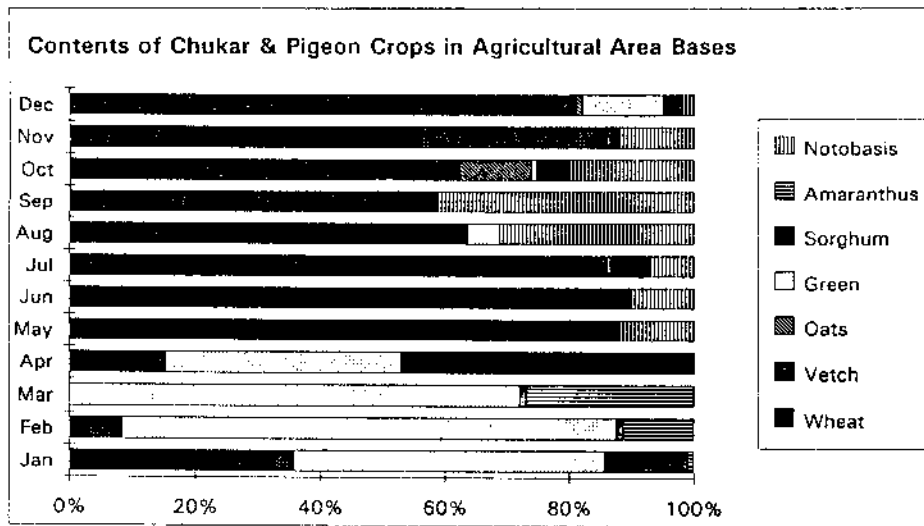


Figure 2

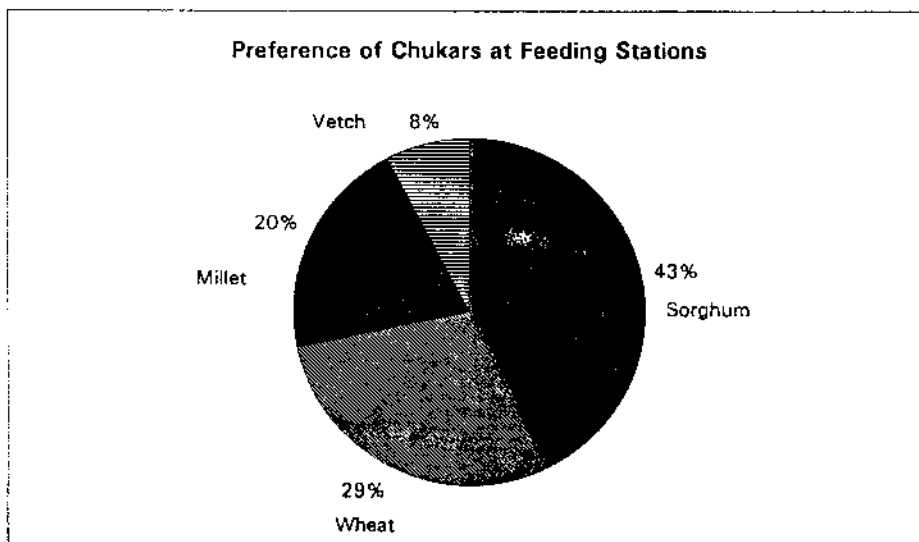
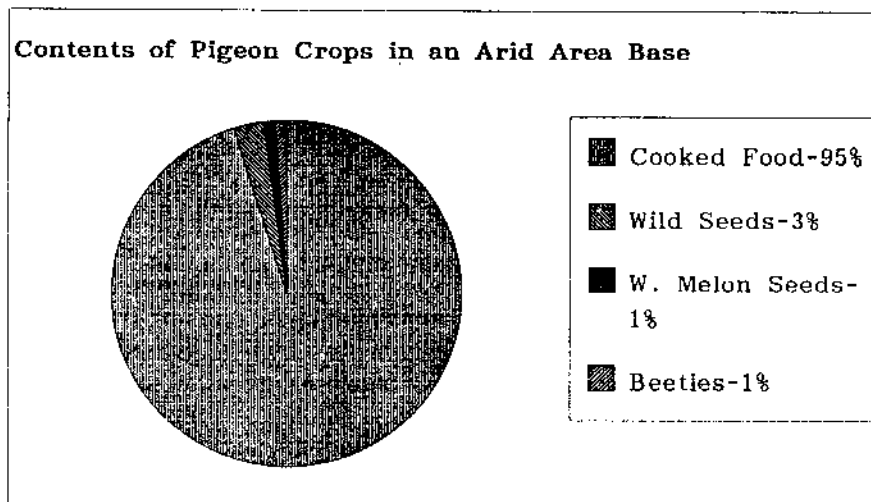


Figure 3



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