

# Recreation

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## Racehorses of the sky

BY KENDRA EVENSEN  
River City Weekly

Roughly 20 years ago, Ammon resident Steven Earl helped rescue a bird that changed his life.

It was a homing pigeon that had come into contact with a power transformer and fallen. The bird suffered a broken leg and wing and had internal bleeding.

Earl cared for the bird while it healed and eventually adopted the pigeon that lived with his family for 10 years. But first, he tried to find its owner and that led him to the Snake River Valley Racing Pigeon Club.

Today, Earl is the secretary of the 10-member organization that races pigeons on weekends every spring and fall. And his flock of one has grown to include nearly 60 pigeons that compete in what some call the most exciting backyard sport there is.

There are no starting lines, no finish lines and only a handful of spectators involved in the sport, said Shelley resident Holland Dredge, the club's race secretary.

He calls pigeons "racehorses of the sky."

"A lot of people love animals and competition," Dredge said, adding that pigeon racing gives them a chance to have both.

Here's how it works: Each club member has roughly 60 pigeons, which they raise, train and race.

A few weeks after the birds are hatched, Earl

places his birds in an aviary so they can get used to his property. Soon after he lets the birds go twice a day. They fly around the house for about an hour each time, which helps build their endurance for the race.

As the event approaches, Earl drives the birds 50 miles away from his home and then releases them. The next trip, he goes 80 miles.

Eventually the birds are ready to race. The young birds, those less than a year old, begin the season racing 70-miles and slowly build up to 300. The older birds go as far as 500-miles.

During the races the birds are driven to places including Sandy and Taylorville, Utah, where they are released. They then head for home, where their owners eagerly wait in their backyards. They track weather patterns on the Internet and keep in radio contact with the other competitors for news of the birds.

"It's a neat sight to watch them come from 500 miles away and jump into their nest box," Earl said, especially when you've raised the bird from a hatchling. Dredge agrees.

"You see them coming and you say, 'My gosh, they



Above, Steve Earl keeps about 50 birds in his racing pigeon flock. He's raced pigeons for nearly 20 years.



Left, An identification band and electronic chip, indicated here by a ballpoint pen, are placed on birds when they're young. When the pigeons compete, the chips are checked to determine exact race times.

PHOTOS BY CHUCK HOOKER

were 200 miles away four hours ago and here come my babies," he said. "It's absolutely exciting."

No one knows exactly how the homing pigeons do it, but they always find their way home. The birds typically fly about 50-miles-per-hour, but depending on the weather and their breeding, they can go even faster. The birds made a 70-mile-per-hour record a few weeks ago, Dredge said.

"They get faster every year and better all the time," he said.

Their speed is calculated by the amount of time it takes for them to get home, divided by the distance they've flown since each of the flocks have a different

finish line. Their time is recorded by an antenna, which they cross as soon as they land in their own loft.

The SRV Club doesn't bet on the races, they're just in it for fun. But there are places where pigeons rival horse races, Dodge said.

Not in the Snake River Valley though, Dodge worries that the sport, which has consumed his life for nearly 50 years, is slowly dying out.

The club, which has been around since 1947 has always bounced between five and 20 members, but numbers have stayed low for the last 15-years, Dodge said.

Calling himself the

pigeon professor, he's vowed to teach anyone wanting to learn how to raise and race pigeons.

Those interested can contact him at 357-7808 or learn more by visiting the club's Web site at [www.srvclub.com](http://www.srvclub.com).

"A lot of people don't know about it, but it's one of the most fantastic backyard sports there is," Dodge said.

Earl agrees, adding that it's just as fun to raise the pigeons as it is to race them.

"When I first let them out (for the day) they jump on top of me," he said. "They're just like a pet, like a dog. The only difference is they can fly."

## Best bets for fishing Henry's Fork this week

BY DAN HURZELER  
River City Weekly

One of the area's best fishing bets this week is the Henry's Fork of the Snake River. Due to cooler temperatures, the spring runoff is coming in at a slower rate than in past seasons. The water is up and a little off color, but fishing well. The flow on the Henry's Fork is at 2,210-cubic-feet-per-second and is likely to increase. Anglers will find that stone fly nymphs are on the move, and hungry trout are keying in on them. Some



anglers have been catching fish in the 20-inch range, fat from gorging themselves on these big bugs. So if you are looking for a challenge and wanting to get into some big fish, consider the stretch and other pertinent information listed:

### Henry's Fork of the

**Snake River:** Warm River access to Ashton bridge access

**Dry flies:** Black caddis are abundant with some of the hatches being blanket hatches; however, trout are feeding on this little bug and hook sizes should definitely match the hatch. Using a size 14 or 16 black caddis trailed with a smaller emerging sparkle pupa will help with hookups on some of the rivers more finicky fish. Other dries that should be watched for are blue winged olives and there are still a few march

**Nymphs:** Don't be afraid to use big weighted rubber legs fished under a strike indicator so you can target fish that are feeding deep. Brown and black rubber legs in sizes 4 through 8, trailed with smaller nymphs will help get you to these fish. Red San Juan worms, prince nymphs and copper Johns are good choices for trailing nymphs.

**Streamers:** If you want to cover a lot of water in search of bigger fish, streamers are the ticket. Slingshot, ugly, shoulder aching, head ringing,

articulated streamers like circus peanuts or double bunnies can move big fish out of the safety of their cover.

On a side note, be sure to check area regulations. Not all waters are open to fishing yet.

Tight lines to all, and to all a good fight.

Dan Hurzeler writes about fishing for River City Weekly. Send comments for Dan to [news@rivercityweekly.com](mailto:news@rivercityweekly.com).