

## Fanciers hold their breath after disastrous week-end

Contributed by John Walsh  
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THE Cumbria Combine birds were liberated at Weymouth at 10-30am today in a light south east wind. But fanciers all over the country are hoping that the devastating returns last Saturday won't be repeated. In fact Cumbrian birds did not fare as badly as others across the UK as thousands of birds failed to home. Unusual atmospheric conditions are being put forward as the reason for the dreadfully poor racing. Ian Evans, chief executive of the RPRC said: "We became aware quite quickly that something very unusual was happening on Saturday. "I'm 45 and have kept pigeons since I was nine years of age and I have never heard of anything like this, it was extremely unusual and is a real mystery. "On the face of it the weather conditions across the country were good, there was nothing to suggest that any birds would struggle to get home. "In fact in many parts the conditions were favourable and you might have expected some good times. "But in the events thousands of birds simply didn't return and as yet are still to return, which of course is a concern to the owners and breeders. "Something happened that disrupted the navigational abilities of the birds. We believe it may have had something to do with solar wind activity which can distort the earth's magnetic field. "There is a theory that this is what the birds use to find their way home with such accuracy. "There was certainly something happening because birds released from locations all over the country disappeared and we've had many many reports of strays since. "It wasn't just in this country either, we've had reports of heavy losses in Portugal and in Belgium as well. "The result of all this is that we have re-entered talks with the Met Office to see whether we can get a specialised report to be used by pigeon racing. "It would identify not just the weather, but also give us warning of any unusual meteorological activity. "That would enable us to stop races going ahead and prevent days such as the one we experienced on Saturday."

Picture -Birds being liberated at Weymouth (Keith Mott)