

Controlling Pigeons

Background

The control of pigeons is a very emotive subject. Many people see them as part of the natural wildlife of the Borough. Others see them as a pest and would like to see them all removed from our streets and parks. Over recent years there has been a marked increase in the numbers of Feral (wild) Pigeons. Feral Pigeons have thrived in our cities by adapting to life, learning to roost and breed in the seemingly inhospitable environment provided by tall buildings, and to survive on the food available.

Description

The bird is about 33cm in length and weighs between 280 - 560g, averaging at about 350g. Its plumage can vary considerably, from a close resemblance to that of the original rock-dove (with blue-grey plumage, double black wing bars and a white rump) through various "blues", "reds" and chequered types, to almost pure black. Feral pigeons are sometimes called "the flying rat" - adapted to living and causing a nuisance in the borough. The feral pigeon is capable of breeding throughout the year, nests may be found in any month, however the peak occurs between March and July. Usually, two white eggs are laid on consecutive days. Incubation lasts about 18 days with fledging taking place about 4 ½ weeks later.



Controls

In many cases pigeon numbers are naturally controlled by the availability of food, and of suitable nesting locations. Problems often only usually arise where we have upset nature's balance. The most appropriate controls are therefore:

- Don't feed pigeons
- Repair, protect and maintain buildings
- and then if still necessary use the services of a Pest Control company

Don't Feed Pigeons

We understand that residents may still wish to encourage other wild birds, but would ask that they do this in a way which will not encourage pigeons. By choosing bird feeders which pigeons can not use, such as some designs of seed feeds, nut cages, or fat balls, it is still possible to selectively feed other native birds. Please **avoid throwing down bread, or loose seed** as this encourages pigeons (and sometimes other pests such as rats).

Feeding feral pigeons can deprive other birds of food and might scare them from your garden. Smaller birds such as thrushes and finches are often frightened away when numbers of much larger pigeons arrive. Feral pigeons can also carry viruses that can be spread to other birds causing death.

The food pigeons get from people may lack essential nutrients, which pigeons require for overall good health. Pigeon feeding is harmful because it makes pigeons dependent on people. If they were less dependent they would arguably have a broader diet and be less susceptible to disease and other health risks. Pigeons are wild birds and are capable of fending for themselves.

Where the Borough Council feels that the actions of an individual are creating pigeon problems for other residents, the Local Authority may consider legal action.

Repair, protect and maintain buildings

Pigeons can carry a number of potentially infectious diseases such as salmonella, tuberculosis and ornithosis (a mild form of psittacosis - pneumonia-like symptoms). They are also a source of allergens, which can cause respiratory ailments like pigeon fancier's lung and allergic skin reaction. There is potential for these illnesses to be spread to people through contact with pigeon droppings, dandruff and feathers; pigeon parasites; or where dead infected pigeons get into food or water sources. When working on buildings wear appropriate protective clothing – *see further advice below*.

The presence of pigeons, or their droppings (particularly when wet), can also contribute to accidents. Pigeon droppings are not only unsightly; their acid content can eat into soft stone and cause long-term damage. The nest droppings, and feathers also block gutters and rainwater pipes causing water damage.

Pigeons enter buildings to get food, to build nests or simply to roost and shelter. The birds gain access by any opening that is big enough. Total 'proofing' against all birds can only be guaranteed by the closure of all openings bigger than 20mm in diameter.

Pigeon proofing includes simple tasks like sealing gaps under eaves and replacing missing roof tiles (please remember to remove pigeons prior to proofing works).

Pigeons can be deterred from using common perching and roosting sites such as window ledges and roofs by fitting stainless steel wires suspended and sprung at the correct height to prevent the birds from landing.

Other commonly-available deterrents to the feral pigeon include barrier gel, spikes and bird repellent gel.

Using a Pest Control Service

Pest Control Companies can help in two ways. Firstly they can act to reduce the number of birds – typically by trapping or shooting they may also be able to fit bird nets, wires, or spikes which discourage birds from nesting and roosting on buildings. Whilst culls are initially very effective, they may only have a short-term effect, as other birds may return to take advantage of available food and nesting sites.

Further Information

A 'do not feed the pigeons' sign is downloadable from our website.

RSPB offer further advice on feeding native wild birds, and avoiding encouraging feral pigeons. See their website www.rspb.org.uk for details

Services from us.

- To request our help please call 01782 742590 during office hours.
- We will advise how we could help and explain any charges.

Health Risks and Recommended Safety Precautions for Removing Bird Faeces



CAUTION: PIGEONS ARE COMMONLY CARRIERS OF A NUMBER OF SERIOUS HUMAN DISEASES INCLUDING SALMONELLOSIS, PSITICOSIS AND PSEUDOTUBERCULOSIS. THEIR FAECES PROVIDE AN IDEAL ENVIRONMENT FOR THE GROWTH OF THE ORGANISMS CAUSING SUCH DISEASES AS HISTOPLASMOSIS, ASPERGILLOSIS, CRYPTOCOCCIS AND LISTERIOSIS. ALTHOUGH THE RISK OF INFECTION FROM PIGEONS MAY BE RELATIVELY LOW, THE DISEASES ARE SEVERE AND MAY BE LIFE THREATENING .

General Precautions

Fouling material presents the greatest risk when it is dry, and when the dust from it can be breathed in, or get into the eyes. Simple precautions like dousing the material with water significantly reduce potential health risks.

Excrement can be dangerous if it is:

- Inhaled as a dust or small droplets (aerosols)
- Gets into the eyes – as dust or splashes
- Enters cuts or abrasions
- Swallowed or transferred to food which is then eaten

Protective Clothing

A nuisance dust mask will provide some protection, however a suitable respirator with a (HEPA) filter for screening particles of 0.3 micron size should be used by contractors. Appropriate eye protection must be worn to prevent dust and splashes getting in to the eyes, close-fitting goggles should be used unless a full-face respirator is worn. Protective disposable coveralls plus suitable, gloves, boots, and hats are also recommended.

How to safely remove the material

Remove heavy crusts and build-ups by drenching the affected area with cold water from a garden hose, or a watering can with a rose and brushing with a stiff bristle brush or scraping with a scraper to start to loosen it. Pressure washers are not ideal as they tend to dislodge and scatter the material rather than dissolving it.

If the material does not start to break-up immediately thoroughly wet it, and leave it for the water to soak in. If the material remains, scrub the surface using a stiff bristle brush and a detergent. The more dilute the material is, the less risk it presents. Strong chemical are unnecessary.



CAUTION: DO NOT USE BLEACH TO REMOVE BIRD EXCREMENT. BIRD DROPPINGS CONTAIN AMMONIA AND IF MIXED WITH BLEACH CAN FORM TOXIC GASES.

On Completing the Task

- Wash down any contaminated equipment
- Thoroughly wash hands
- Launder any contaminated clothing

Rev July 2015