Solving Problems with Pigeons

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Removing pigeons won't solve a pigeon dropping problem. From a pigeon's point of view, city living can't be beat. Food and water are readily available. Predators are few and far between. Plus, there's plenty of free housing: Window ledges, rooftops, bridges and warehouses offer space for whole flocks to rest and take shelter in close proximity.

At first glance, it appears to be an ideal arrangement. We provide room and board; in return, the birds add a little warmth and color to our cold concrete canyons. So what's the problem?

In a word: droppings.

Not only is pigeon poop unsightly, it can damage buildings, monuments and automobiles. Rarely, human health problems are said to arise from exposure to long-standing accumulations.

Luckily, a little patience and understanding go a long way toward resolving conflicts between people and pigeons. Removing the birds in question may seem like an obvious answer to some, but in truth, the results are short-lived. Removal creates a vacancy that other animals quickly fill. As a result, any strategy designed to resolve pigeon conflicts *must focus on eliminating what is attracting the birds to a particular area,* either through making roosting sites inaccessible or making the birds feel that the area is an unsafe place to congregate. To accomplish this, there are a number of humane, non-lethal approaches that can be used.

Exclusion

Exclusion-based products can be used to effectively make roosting and loafing sites unattractive or inaccessible to birds, and are ideal for sites that have zero tolerance for any bird presence such as hospitals, restaurants, and grocery stores.

Pigeons can be deterred from roosting on railing and pipes if a single strand of wire barrier is installed 1½ inches to 2 inches above the center of the surface, which will effectively throw the birds off balance when they try to perch there. Other devices that work include

wire coils, spikes and electrified wires. Pigeons can be discouraged from roosting on flat surfaces such as ledges and light fixtures if boards, sheet metal or prefabricated ledges are used to create a 45 degree or greater slope.

Netting can be used to exclude birds from virtually any type of structure, from a house to an office building. To evict birds from window ledges, the netting is anchored to the roof, draped across the front of the structure and then tightly secured to the base and sides of the building. Netting can be used under bridges or inside buildings where pigeons perch on beams, girders, struts and supports.

Door curtains can also be used to prevent bird access into buildings, such as warehouses, that must be somewhat open to daily traffic. The netting is installed in overlapping strips so as to form a protective curtain that parts to allow the passage of personnel and vehicles, then falls back into place to seal out pigeons. Large-scale applications of netting almost always require the expertise of professionals. A growing number of companies provide excellent long-term solutions to urban bird problems.

Repellents

A line of repellents using the chemical methyl anthranilate (a type of grape juice extract) is approved for repelling pigeons and other species of birds. Available in both fogging and liquid formulas, this product can provie some repellent protection when used in combination with other tools.

Sticky substances (polybutenes) are sold to discourage pigeons and other birds from landing on treated surfaces and are often marketed as "humane." However, The HSUS does *not* recommend these products because they can adhere to and foul the feathers of pigeons who come into contact with them, and are even more harmful to smaller species and various "non-target" birds.

Sound Deterrents

Sound has been used effectively to scare away some types of birds, but pigeons, more than others, seem to learn to ignore loud noises quickly. Municipal noise ordinances must also be considered when using firearms or pyrotechnics.

Effigies

Scarecrows of one kind or another are often used to control birds. Models of owls, hawks, snakes, and cats are available from many suppliers, and vary highly in effectiveness, depending on how realistic they are and how often they are moved. Mylar tape streamers can be effective when used near roost sites.

Contraception

Contraceptive technology can be an effective tool for large

facilities which can tolerate a certain population of birds. A contraceptive product for pigeons based on the active ingredient nicarbizin has been approved by the Environmental Protection Agency. The product has a wide margin of safety and is considered very effective. Furthermore, it has no effect on birds of prey which may consume the treated pigeons. Contraception is ideal for larger areas and can be deployed in combination with other tools and techniques mentioned here.

Toxicants and Trapping

The HSUS strongly opposes the use of toxicants or avicides (bird poisons) to manage pigeon conflicts. This includes the avicide branded commercially as Avitrol. This product is misleadingly marketed as a flock deterrent to scare birds away. This marketing is based on the distressed reaction of the birds who consume the poision which, it is claimed, will scare the rest of the birds away. However, up to one-half of pigeon flocks are poisoned and die to only temporarily scare away the rest of the flock. Simply killing pigeons and not altering the habitat or conditions that attract and hold birds to sites will only create a vacancy for other pigeons to fill. This results in an endless cycle of lethal control.

By the same token, The HSUS opposes the common practice of trapping and removing pigeons. Birds who are captured are typically killed, and again, the wanton removal of pigeons simply opens up a void for other pigeons to fill.

A Word About Pigeon Feeding

Frequently, large numbers of pigeons are supported by well-intentioned individuals who regularly feed them bread, table scraps or bird seed. From a modest beginning, the individual feeder encourages more and more birds to appear or stay in the area, thus requiring more feeding and further enhancing bird numbers. Eventually, the situation gets out of control, to the detriment of all concerned.

One of the keys to controlling pigeon populations around urban neighborhoods is to limit the amount of feeding by humans. In excessive feeding situations, the humane action is to gradually reduce feed—over a period of several weeks—to a reasonable baseline amount. Feed only as much as the birds will consume in five to ten minutes, and don't feed with the clockwork regularity that conditions the birds to appear at the same place, same time, every day—and attract more and more of their compatriots over time.

Sources

The HSUS has compiled a guide to manufacturers and suppliers of products used to resolve wildlife conflicts. Download the guide here.

- Guide to Retail Sources for Products to Resolve Wildlife Conflicts
- Pigeons
- Pigeons: An Interview with Andrew Blechman
- Poisonous Solution: The Avitrol Problem
- Solving Problems with Your Wild Neighbors
- Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program

Off site

- Bird Barrier: Source for bird exclusion products
- Innolytics LLC: Source for bird contraception products
- Flock Fighters: Source for chemical bird aversion products