



PEST MANAGEMENT DIVISION
PEST INFORMATION SERIES

Pigeons

Identification

Common pigeons or Rock Dove were introduced into the US from Europe as domesticated birds that escaped and formed wild populations. Pigeons can be found near parks, city buildings, feed mills, grain elevators, residential neighborhoods, and other areas that provide roosting, nesting or feeding sites.

Coloration can vary widely but typically, the birds have gray bodies with a whitish rump, two black bars on the secondary wing feathers, a broad black band on the tail and red feet. Body color can vary greatly, ranging from gray to white, tan and blackish. The average weight is 13 ounces and the average length is 11 inches. There is a wild, native pigeon occurring in parts of Los Angeles County called the Band-Tailed Pigeon. Band-Tails are found mostly in the foothill areas, do not readily live in or on buildings, and rarely cause problems. Common pigeons are far less likely to land in trees than Band-Tails preferring instead telephone wires, building ledges, roof tops, etc.

Biology and Behavior

Pigeons inhabit building ledges, attics, barn rafters, and ornate architectural features that allow for roosting, loafing, and nest building. Nests are made out of sticks, twigs and grasses clumped together to form a crude platform. Females lay one to two eggs while the male cares for the female and defends the nest. The incubation period is from 17- 19 days. The young are fed a predigested food substance called "pigeon milk", until they are weaned just before they leave the nest at 35 -

37 days of age. Often, more eggs are laid before the first young leave the nest. Breeding occurs during all seasons, but peak reproduction is in the spring and fall. Pigeons typically live 3 - 4 years in urban areas, but have been known to live 15 or more years in captivity. Pigeon populations usually consist of equal numbers of males and females. They are monogamous, but will select a new mate upon the death of their current mate.

Adult pigeons eat about a pound of food per week consisting of spilled or improperly stored grain, fruit insects, garbage or other food material provided intentionally or unintentionally by people. In some urban areas, the feeding of pigeons is considered a form of recreation.

Damage

Pigeon feces deposited on cars, statues, park benches, and buildings is not only unsightly, but also accelerates deterioration especially to buildings. Pigeon nests may clog drain pipes, interfere with awnings, and make fire escapes unsafe. Pigeons are infested with many external parasites including mites, fleas, ticks, and bugs many of which will readily bite people. These parasites frequently will invade homes from pigeon nests located in or on the building. Pigeons are the carriers of diseases such as salmonella and others that affect humans and domestic animals alike.

In rural areas, pigeons can cause crop losses by feeding on small grains and fruits in the field, contamination of food stuffs destined for live stock and humans, and the dissemination of diseases to farm animals.

Pigeons can threaten human safety around airports where there is a possibility for flocks to collide with in-flight aircraft. There have been several instances of jet aircraft engines failing when they collide with bird flocks, causing human fatalities.

Pigeons displace native birds as a result of these aggressive invaders out competing them for food and nesting sites.

Legal Status

Feral pigeons are not protected by federal or state statute. Band-Tails are classified as a migratory game bird and you must obtain a permit from the California Department of Fish and Game before attempting to control them. The scaring or herding of Band-Tails can be done without a permit. Antwerp or homing pigeons are the domestic birds that have a band on their leg indicating that they belong to someone. It is a misdemeanor to kill them. It is important that you check around your neighborhood for pigeon hobbyists before you begin a control program to avoid any accidental removal of their birds. There may be municipal restrictions on the taking or methods of taking pigeons under their jurisdiction. Always check if there are any local laws or licenses that must be obtained before beginning any control project.

Diseases

Domestic pigeons are known to carry many diseases, leading many vector control professionals to describe them as “flying rats”. The following is a list of diseases of significance to humans: psittacosis, Newcastle Disease, aspergillosis, pseudo tuberculosis, pigeon coccidiosis, toxoplasmosis, encephalitis, and Salmonella typhimurium. Except for the last three, the others are vary rarely found in humans. Salmonella is found in approximately 2% of pigeon feces and is statistically the most frequent cause of salmonella poisoning in humans which often is diagnosed as food poisoning. It can be prevented by washing hands and raw food before meals.

Cryptococcosis and Histoplasmosis are systemic fungal diseases that can be contracted from dry pigeon feces. Histoplasmosis can affect the respiratory system and, in severe cases, can be fatal.

Management

Anytime the management of a pest species is considered, it is important to recognize that in general, no one course of action or solution will eliminate the problem. It will usually require the use of several techniques to bring any long term resolution to the problem. Prevention is still the best solution to any pest control problem, but if it has progressed beyond that stage, it is best to consider all options before adopting your final plan of attack. One final point to take into account is that your pest control problem may be shared by several other residents as well. It is always a good idea if a plan of action can be implemented by a united, coordinated front as this may be the best way to assure long term control. If you need further advice about your pigeon control problem, you can contact the Pest Management Division of the LA County Agricultural Commissioner/Weights and Measures Department at (626) 575-5462.

Sanitation

Pigeons, like most animals, are opportunists that will readily exploit the easily available food, shelter and water that can be found in urban areas. Clean up efforts should be directed toward the removal of food attractants such as uncovered garbage cans and untidy dumpsters. It is always unwise to feed pigeons. Not only does it make pigeons dependant on human hand outs, but most of the things fed to them are nutritionally inferior to their natural foods and makes them more susceptible to disease. The removal of food attractants often enhances other control methods by reducing the incentive of the birds to be there in the first place. In order for this technique to be effective, the entire affected area within the community needs to

be apart of the program. Sanitation is rarely a single property owner problem.

Exclusion

The permanent solution to excluding pigeons from openings or spaces is to block the openings with wood, galvanized wire mesh or plastic netting. Ornamental architecture can be screened with nylon netting to prevent roosting, loafing and nesting, but it may not be aesthetically pleasing.

Permanent exclusion of pigeons from ledges, window sills, and roof peaks can be accomplished with the use of a series of wire spikes. These products are commercially available. The sharp pointed wires cause the birds to avoid landing on these surfaces; however, it is important to maintain these area clean of accumulated leaves, trash and debris as this can make the spikes ineffective.

Roosting on ledges can be discouraged by changing the ledge angle to 45 degrees or more. Wood, sheet metal, or stone can be formed and fastened to ledges to achieve the desired angle.

Nest Removal

The removal of nests and the euthanizing of young can help reduce populations, but this can prove to be very expensive because it can require large amounts of labor to locate and remove nests at two-week intervals that may be in inaccessible areas of the building. Great care must be used when removing nests because this exposes the person removing them to potential health risks due to the numerous diseases associated with pigeons. The nests and area surrounding them should be treated with a sanitizing solution to disinfect them and to reduce dust disturbance while removing the nests. Personal protective clothing including eye goggles, chemical resistant gloves, and respiratory protection should be used when removing or handling nests or fecal material, especially in confined spaces. Removed material should be placed

in plastic bags and treated as hazardous waste.

Frightening Devices

Due to the pigeons strong territorial sense, they are more tolerant of noises than are other birds. No practical distress or alarm calls have been found. Decoys in the shape of raptors such as owls are ineffective for repelling pigeons. Mylar strips, foil, and dangling paper may briefly work.

Repellents

Pigeons do not have a very well developed sense of smell, so odor type repellents are of little value. Tactile repellents, made of a sticky substance, can be applied to sills, ledges, or rafters where birds roost. They repel pigeons by entangling their feet and sometimes their feathers causing alarm, flight and a distress signal to the flock. These repellants should not be applied on dirty or unsealed porous surfaces and all surfaces that might provide roosting or loafing must be treated.

If applied on porous or untreated surfaces, staining may occur. Re-application will be necessary due to dust contamination.

Spraying water from a high pressure nozzle at night while pigeons are on their roosts may move them, but it must be done on a consistent basis until the birds establish themselves elsewhere.

Shooting

Where permissible, persistent shooting with a .22 rifle, a shotgun or a precision air rifle can eliminate a small flock of pigeons from an area. Because many towns and cities have ordinances prohibiting the discharge of firearms within corporate limits, this is not generally a viable option in L.A. County.

Toxicants

There are a few toxic materials available for use in pigeon control, however they can only be used by experienced certified pest control applicators because these toxicants can be hazardous to birds, animals, and people if used incorrectly. Anyone interested in using these materials should consult a licensed pest control operator who specializes in doing this type of control work.

it off before it returns to as bad as it was before you began controlling originally.

Trapping

Trapping can be an effective way to control a large colony of pigeons that use regular feeding and roosting areas. Traps come in two different sizes, a large walk-in "common" pigeon trap and a low profile trap. In most urban areas, the low profile trap is the best choice since most trapping will take place on the roof of a building or other raised platform. Traps can be purchased from trapping supply catalogs, feed stores, or from the agricultural commissioner's office. Traps can be made at home as well. Traps should be baited with some type of grain, chicken scratch being the most economical. Water and shade must be provided for trapped birds. Traps should be monitored daily, and trapped birds removed. Birds removed from traps must be disposed of quickly and humanely. For help on the humane disposal of trapped pigeons, contact your local humane society or animal shelter. Unfortunately pigeons released back into the "wild" will likely return, even when relocated 50 miles away. After all, they imprint on their surroundings and will "home in" on their last known territory.

Monitoring

As with any good pest control plan, it is important to include an on going monitoring element into your overall strategy. Not only does it give you the opportunity to evaluate how well your plan worked it also can allow you to treat a reoccurring problem at its least damaging (cheapest) time. The reality is that once you have a problem, it will very likely happen again, so it only makes sense to head