

Problems with Pigeons?

Pigeons were domesticated by man thousands of years ago as a source of food and fertiliser. The feral pigeon can now be found in cities worldwide.

Habitat

Rock doves inhabit rocky cliffs, and their descendants, the feral pigeon, occupy the same niche in the urban environment. They perch and nest on ledges, roofs, window sills, under bridges, etc. They are highly sociable animals, often found in flocks, feeding by day and roosting by night.

Breeding

Pigeons can breed at the age of six months. They lay normally two eggs in a flimsy nest constructed in a sheltered site, and incubate them for 16-18 days. The young feed for several weeks on pigeon "milk" from their parents. They leave the nest after five weeks, but still rely upon parental feeding for a further week or two before becoming independent.

By this time the parents are able to commence the breeding cycle again, and this ability to breed up to six times per year allows the pigeon population to rapidly expand or replenish itself.

Pigeon populations are primarily dependent upon the availability of food, which is of great importance when considering population control.

Diet

Their natural diet is grain and seeds, but they also scavenge on food discarded on urban streets.

So what's the problem?

Many people like urban wildlife and enjoy feeding birds. However, sometimes pigeons can pose problems, particularly when they occur in large numbers.

Bird droppings are unsightly and their acid corrodes stonework and damages buildings. Droppings on pavements can become slippery when wet and pose a hazard to passing pedestrians.

Droppings, nest material and dead birds can block guttering and drains and cause water damage to buildings. In addition dead pigeons in uncovered water tanks can contaminate the water supply.

Many problems arise when neighbours overfeed birds, which can attract lots of pigeons. There are no laws the Council can use to stop people feeding birds. However, if a large amount of rotting food accumulates, or the feeding is attracting rats or mice, the Council may be able to help.

If the feeding is simply causing nuisance from droppings etc., it is a private matter between neighbours. Try approaching your neighbour to explain the problems that are being caused, and ask them to reduce the amount of food they provide in order to reduce the number of birds that are attracted. A gradual reduction in food will not cause the birds to starve. They will seek food elsewhere and reduce their breeding naturally. In this way populations can be humanely reduced.

Excessive feeding can actually harm pigeons as it can cause overcrowding at feeding sites, and promote the spread of disease among birds. In addition, many pigeons are killed each year by people trying to reduce their numbers. People should try to ensure that the number of birds they attract does not cause a problem which might cause a neighbour to have them killed.

There are a number of pigeon proofing devices which can be used to prevent or deter pigeons from roosting or nesting on your property. It is advisable to leave such work to professionals who can determine the most appropriate system for your circumstances, and install it to maximise its effectiveness.

Are they a health hazard?

Many people express concern that pigeons pose a health hazard to humans, but this fear is generally unfounded and exaggerated.

Pigeons, like other birds, can suffer from some diseases that can also affect humans. However, with the exception of people whose jobs or hobbies bring them into close contact with large numbers of birds or their droppings, the actual risk of disease transmission from casual contact is negligible.

Nevertheless, it is important to employ good hygiene practices, like washing your hands thoroughly after contact with pigeons or their droppings, to prevent breathing in or ingesting any matter which could cause illness.

Pest Control

Birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law, and it is illegal to destroy or interfere with them except under licence. Even where their destruction is licensed, non-lethal methods must be considered first, and many killing methods are outlawed. Lethal methods should always be left to pest control professionals.

However, for most pigeon problems, lethal methods are totally ineffective. They simply reduce competition for food and shelter, and the remaining birds increase their breeding rates to compensate. Although there is an immediate decrease, numbers soon recover, resulting in an endless cycle of killing and repopulation. Reduced food supply, coupled with pigeon proofing where appropriate and possible, is the key.

The Pigeon Control Advisory Service provides information and assistance on pigeon problems. They can be contacted on 07903-011-715 or www.picas.org.uk

The Council does not provide any pest control services for dealing with pigeons, but we can refer you to a humane deterrence service or the Council's pest control contractor, who will charge for this service. Alternatively, you can arrange for such service directly with another company. If you wish to contact the Council's pest control service, please call 020-8891-7800.

If you have any comments regarding this leaflet, or if you require more information or assistance, please contact Jane Edmondson, Senior Neighbour Nuisance Officer, on 8891-7737.

Please contact us at the address below if you need this in braille, large print, audio tape or another language

Residential Environmental Health, Civic Centre, 44 York Street, Twickenham, TW1 3BZ
Telephone 020 8891 7800, Fax 020 8831 6404 or Text phone 020 8891 7404.