

BBR Information Sheet: The Urban Pigeon

How to keep pigeons away from your building

Step 1: Discourage roosting in selected areas



Bird Spikes

These are humane, effective and cost-effective method of discouraging birds from roosting on your building or home. Although they look if they might harm the bird, they won't: the bird makes a couple of attempts to land and then decides to go and find somewhere more comfortable.

The spikes can be purchased mail-order, or more simply, made by hammering nails or pushing skewers through strip of wood which are then secured to sills and ledges.

Step 2: Encourage roosting elsewhere



Now you have discouraged the birds from roosting on your building, you could do the nature-friendly thing and provide them with a home of their own. There are various styles of Dovecotes ideal for pigeons to roost in but you must put barbed wire around the supports or possums will attack and the birds will abandon the roost. The dovecote also needs to be waterproof or they won't use it, and the interior requires small nesting boxes, much like a chicken coop. Remove the eggs once a week to prevent over population. Contact us if you would like detailed plans. You could also try to recreate an aspect of your own building that they find attractive such as a mini-roof with a ledge below. Incorporate this into your dovecote design to make an attractive dwelling for the birds

And there you have it, the ideal solution for all concerned: clean sills, an interesting and attractive addition to your premises and you have proven yourself to be a business that cares about the environment and all living things.

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Pigeon Basics

Rock Pigeons originated in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. They are the oldest domesticated bird in the world (232AD)

The 'rock pigeon' we see in our towns are a feral version of the domesticated pigeon. These pigeons were originally bred for racing and homing competitions and for carrying messages.



What's the difference between a pigeon and a dove?

The terms 'pigeon' and 'dove' refer to the same family of birds *Columbidae*. But, some people hear "pigeon," think pest or sky-rat." whereas "dove," conjures images of peace and love. But 'white doves of peace' are simply white pigeons.

How long do they live?

Pigeons can live about five years in the wild but up to 15 years or more in captivity.

What do they eat?

Seeds, berries, fruit, insects, grain, garbage: in fact they will eat whatever they can find!

Which means...

These birds are flying street cleaners. They clean up loads of human leftovers each year. Think about the great job that the ones in the market place do when everyone has gone home.

Are feral pigeons dirty? Do they carry diseases?

No. Pigeons have a bad reputation: many people believe they're dirty and carry diseases. But this is not true. Pigeon droppings can create problems on buildings if allowed to accumulate in large amounts and the droppings can harbour diseases unless they are regularly washed away. Quite simply, don't eat pigeon droppings and if you must play with them, wash your hands. Basic hygiene which is true of anything you touch.

Why don't pigeons perch on trees like other birds? Why do they like buildings?

Pigeons will perch on trees, but they are better adapted to the man-made surfaces in urban areas. That's because human-made structures are good substitutes for the cliffs and ledges of the birds' natural habitat.

Where do they nest?

Adult pigeons build nests in places such as covered areas along building ledges and in the nooks and crannies of building beams, rafters and eaves, even the tops of AC units, planters or balcony floors. Basically, they nest just about anywhere in the urban environment that mimics their natural cave or cliff-side habitat in Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa.



What is the life-cycle of the young pigeon

Pigeons incubate their eggs for approximately 18 days. It takes approximately 30 days after hatching for the young to leave the nest.

During their first week of life, the babies are fed with a rich

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crop-milk produced by both parents. They grow fast and walk well at about 18 days of age and start exercising their wings about a week later. But because they have been regularly fed by the adults and haven't done much exercising, the birds are often bigger than their parents by the time they start to fly, which is on average 30 to 32 days after hatching.

Most baby pigeons stay in or close to the nest until they are fully fledged, so we aren't likely to see a juvenile pigeon until it is full-grown.



Mating Behaviour?



Pigeons mate for life. The puffed-up, strutting bird is a male pigeon courting and showing off for a female. They parade or dance in a circle around the female, cooing loudly. This may lead to mating or it might serve to strengthen the lifelong bonds of an already-mated pair. Although this happens all year long, it is most prevalent in March-May.

What are pigeons' predators?

Cats, hawks and falcons. But primarily humans!

Amazing Facts about Pigeons

- Pigeons can fly at altitudes of 6000 feet or more and at average speeds of up to 77.6 mph but have been recorded flying at 92.5 mph. They can fly between 600 and 700 miles a day
- Homing pigeon races are often between 200-1000 miles in distance with distances of up to 1800 miles a common occurrence
- Top-quality racing pigeons have fetched up to \$135,000US
- Pigeons have an amazing sense of direction. They are thought to navigate by sensing the earth's magnetic field and using the sun for direction. Other theories include the use of roads and even low frequency seismic waves to find their way home
- Pigeons (and all the *columbidae* family) drink by sucking water and using their beaks like straws whereas most other birds sip water and then throw their head back to swallow
- Pigeons, like humans, can see in colour, but unlike humans they can also see ultraviolet light, a part of the spectrum that humans cannot see. As a result, pigeons are often used in search and rescue missions at sea because of this unique sense combined with excellent all-round vision
- Pigeons have been found to pass the 'mirror test', the ability to recognise its own reflection in a mirror. The pigeon is one of only 6 species, and the only non-mammal, to have this ability
- Pigeons are highly intelligent and can recognise all 26 letters of the alphabet as well as being able to conceptualise. Pigeons can differentiate between photographs and even two different human beings in a single photograph.

So next time you look at a pigeon and think "pest, nuisance, vermin, dirty..."

Think again!