



Pigeons

Pest Note



Photos courtesy of: Terry Spivey, USDA Forest Service, United States; Christian Faulhammer



Pigeon



Stock Dove

Photo: Alain Fossé

Pigeons – what are they?

Pigeons and doves are of the same family (Columbidae). They are stout-bodied birds with short necks and short slender bills with a fleshy cere (the waxy fleshy covering at the base of the upper beak). The species most commonly referred to just as the “pigeon” is the feral rock pigeon, common in many cities and small rural areas.

The rock pigeon is 32 to 37 cm long with a 64 to 72 cm wingspan. Its lower back is white with two distinctive black bars on its pale grey wings. The tail has white markings. It is a strong and quick flier, with its lighter grey rump easily seen from above.

The head and neck of the mature pigeon are a darker blue-grey than the back and wings. The green and lilac or purple patch on the side of the neck is larger than that of the stock dove, and the tail is more distinctly banded. These birds come in many different colours depending on age: dark grey, light blue/grey, brown, peach, grey and white, pure white and more. The feathers of young birds show little lustre and are duller. The eye colour of a pigeon is generally orange, but a few pigeons may have white-grey eyes. The eyelids are orange and are encapsulated in a grey-white eye ring. The feet are red to pink.

What can they do?

Pigeons tend to breed and roost in groups. The largest problem that they cause is the amount of feces they produce. It is the accumulation of pigeon feces that may pose a health hazard to the general public.

Pigeons have been associated with a variety of diseases, including histoplasmosis and cryptococcosis.

Histoplasmosis is a disease caused by a fungus that grows in pigeon droppings. Pigeons are not the only source of this pathogen. It can also be found in bat droppings or in the soil, and is carried by the wind. When removing droppings, people may breathe in some of the fungus. When exposure is high, the fungus can cause infection. Most infections have no symptoms or appear as a mild respiratory illness.

Symptoms of histoplasmosis begin to appear about 10 days after initial infection and include fatigue, fever and chest pains. Most people, however, do not show any symptoms. Those with compromised immune systems such as cancer patients or people living with HIV/AIDS are generally more at risk of developing histoplasmosis. The disease cannot be transmitted from person to person.

Cryptococcosis is another fungal disease associated with pigeon droppings and grows in soils throughout the world. It is very unlikely that healthy people will become infected even at high levels of exposure. A major risk factor for infection is a compromised immune system.

The esthetic damage resulting from the accumulation of pigeon feces on buildings and other structures is compounded by the fact that pigeon fecal composition is acidic and leads to erosion of metal and stonework.



Pigeon feces



Pigeon nest on window ledge
Photo: Yazan Badran

Responsible Pesticide Use

Before Purchasing a Pesticide

- Identify the pest correctly.
- Use physical control methods and alternatives to pesticides.
- Read the label directions and safety precautions before buying the product. The label must include the name of the pest to be controlled and the treatment location (e.g., indoor, outdoor, garden uses, pet treatment).
- Purchase only the quantity of product needed for the treatment.
- Consider hiring a licensed pest control operator.

Using a Pesticide

- Carefully read all label instructions and precautions before using pesticides.
- Do not drink, eat or smoke while applying pesticides.
- Persons and pets should vacate the area during treatment. Cover or remove aquaria.
- If kitchen area is to be treated, cover or remove food, dishes and utensils.

After Using a Pesticide

- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any pesticide product.





Pigeon nest on an air conditioner
Photo: Rachel Lovinger



Feral rock pigeon chicks
Photo: Christian Faulhammer



Keep garbage containers closed and dispose of garbage on a regular basis.

How can I manage them?

In many cases, pigeons present problems in and around the home. Controlling them permanently is difficult because these birds have adapted to stress and there are many sources of food available in the urban environment. The most effective way to control them is to alter their environment.

- Remove roosting niches and seal any crevices, large openings and entrances in high areas to discourage pigeons.
- Screen off water sources such as rooftop air conditioners that pigeons might drink from.
- Never leave food out where pigeons can access it.
- Keep garbage containers closed. Dispose of garbage on a regular basis.
- On flat roofs or ledges, use bristling wires, also known as porcupine wires, or sticky pastes that will deter pigeons from landing and gathering.

Bird scaring devices

Bird scaring devices can also be purchased to frighten birds away from a given area. Loud noises, flashing lights, windmills and recordings of bird distress calls can be an effective means of controlling pigeons but may not all be compatible with urban settings. However, pigeons can eventually get used to these types of devices and may ignore them. If pigeons are a nuisance on a balcony, fine netting can be hung across the front of the balcony, or a combination of visual frightening devices can be used, if they can be moved around periodically to prevent birds from getting used to them.

Products

Bird repellents containing polymerized butenes are effective in controlling pigeons around the home and garden. These products are formulated as soft, sticky substances that you apply on windows, sills, eaves and roofs to discourage pigeons from roosting. Most bird repellents can be purchased at local hardware stores or garden centres.

Bird repellents and bird toxicants are available for use in, on, or near structures used for roosting or nesting. These products are generally sold for commercial or restricted use by qualified professionals. Alterations to the structural components to make them inhospitable to the birds in a more permanent way should be considered in combination with any applications of bird repellents or toxicants.

Did you know...

The pigeon's back-and-forth bobbing head motion helps it to keep its balance when walking?

Most studies suggest that pigeons bob their heads to stabilize their visual surroundings. In comparison, we rely more on our eye movements, not our head movements, to catch and hold images while in motion.



Photo: Cal Skinner

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Phone from outside Canada: 613-736-3799 (long distance charges apply)
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www.healthcanada.gc.ca/pmra



- Do not permit persons or pets to contact treated surfaces until residue has dried completely.
- Provide adequate ventilation of treated areas after use.
- Wipe clean all surfaces that come in direct contact with food, such as counters, tables and stovetops, including indoor and outdoor surfaces.
- Always store pesticides out of reach of children and pets and away from food and beverages.

Accidental Poisoning

- Call a poison control centre immediately and seek medical attention.
- Take the pesticide container or label with you to the emergency facility or physician.
- Follow first aid statements on the label.
- In case of accidental poisoning of pets seek veterinary attention immediately.
- Report pesticide incidents to manufacturers (phone number on label). They are required to send them to Health Canada.

Disposing of Pesticides

- Do not reuse empty pesticide containers. Wrap and dispose of in household garbage.
- Follow the product label instructions or contact provincial authorities for disposal of pesticides.

Note: These are general recommendations. Consult the label for specific instructions. When in doubt, contact a professional.

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