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Pigeon *Columba livia*



GENERAL INFORMATION

Pigeons are often the most troublesome pest bird for institutions in urban environments and small rural communities. These birds, also known as rock doves, adapt well to man-made environments that allow them to nest and roost. The fecal droppings from pigeons can deface buildings and statues. Their nesting materials along roof edges can clog gutters, downspouts and air intakes. Pigeons and their droppings carry numerous diseases such as histoplasmosis, encephalitis, pigeon ornithosis, Newcastle disease, cryptococcosis, toxoplasmosis, pseudo-tuberculosis, pigeon coccidiosis and salmonella food poisoning. Some of the ectoparasites of pigeons, such as chewing lice, fleas, ticks and mites can sometimes transfer to people.

Feral pigeons are cosmopolitan and they owe their presence mainly to introduction by man. They are found in the tropics and north of the Arctic circle as well as in temperate regions.

SIGNS OF INFESTATION

Signs of infestation include sighting of the adult birds, immense amounts of fecal droppings, feathers and nests or nesting materials. Rudimentary nests are typically built along ledges or on roof edge near the top of buildings or structures. Nesting materials can be composed of sticks, twigs and other man-made and bio material in the area. Pigeons will re-use nests from earlier fledglings including the piles of dried droppings. Pigeons remain year long and will not seasonally migrate away. For roosting, the birds come in at dusk and will leave at dawn. There will be an adult bird in the nest during the day during the egg incubation period.



DIAGNOSTIC MORPHOLOGY

Adults:

- Adult body length is 11 inches
- Pigeons vary greatly in coloration, common colors include:
- slate blue-grey with two black bars on wings
- Blue-grey with black flecks on wings
- Reddish brown
- Solid Black
- Solid white



Immature Stage:

- Juvenile pigeons are similar to adult but lacking shiny neck feathers
- Newly hatched squabs are covered in sparse yellow down.
- True feather development starts 1 week after hatch

FOOD SOURCES

Pigeons can eat a wide variety of material including seeds, grain, animal feed, livestock manure and discarded human food. Grass seeds and berries in park areas can also be a food source. They require open water on a daily basis.

LIFE CYCLE

Spring and summer is the most common time of egg hatch for pigeons. They are usually 2 eggs laid in the nest per clutch. The eggs have an incubation period of 17 -19 days. The juvenile birds will leave the nest in 4 - 6 weeks after hatch. Courtship rituals take place in open parks and other gathering areas. The male will puff out his chest feathers and make cooing noises while he rapidly approaches a female. She will fly or run away and the persistent male will continue his behavior until she relents. Mating is brief with the male mounting the back of the female and sometimes locking beaks.

CONTROL & TREATMENT

The pigeons themselves are not a direct pest to museum collections, but their droppings, feathers and nests can attract pest insects like Dermestidae and moths.

Control is most effective by preventing the birds access into buildings. Displaying signs to 'not feed the pigeons' is not as effective because locations where these birds roost/ nest and feed, are not related.

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Fact Sheet: Pigeon

Mallis, A. 2011, Handbook of Pest Control, 10th Edition, Mallis Handbook LLC

Photos supplied by Suzanne Ryder