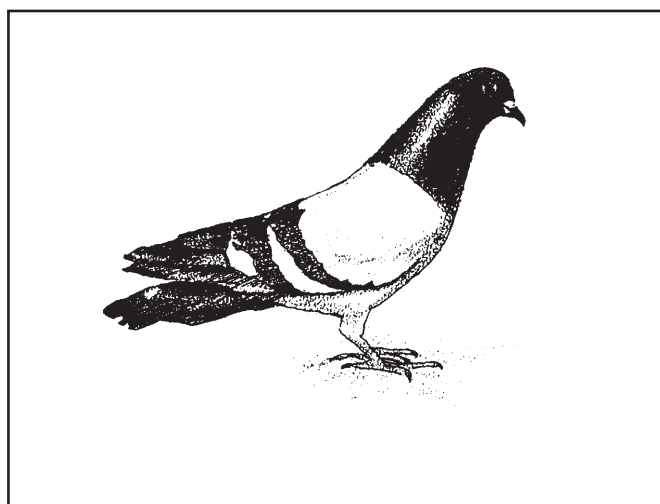




Controlling Feral Pigeons

Pigeons (*Columba livia*), also known as rock doves, are very common in cities, suburbs and parks. Pigeons are not native to the United States. They were domesticated in Europe and brought to the United States where some escaped and established feral populations. Abundant shelter in urban areas provides them places to live and breed. Pigeons are primarily grain and seed eaters. In urban areas they are especially common around grain elevators, dumps and city parks, where they often are fed by visitors.



Feral pigeon.

Damage

Excessive numbers of pigeons can create a nuisance or health threat. Their droppings will damage the finish on cars and kill grass and ornamental plants. In addition, pigeons play a part in the transmission of many diseases such as ornithosis, encephalitis, Newcastle disease, aspergillosis, thrush, histoplasmosis, cryptococcoses, toxoplasmosis, avian tuberculosis, salmonellosis and coccidiosis.

Control Methods

Roost Elimination

Pigeon numbers can be reduced by blocking their access to indoor roosts and breeding places. Openings to lofts, steeples, attics, eaves, etc., should be covered with hardware cloth, wood, masonry, glass or metal.

Roosting on window sills, ledges or roof lines can be prevented by the installation of "porcupine wire," which is made up of sharp, metal prongs attached to the roosting area (Fig. 1). This method is costly, but effective.

Also, chemical repellents can be applied to the roosting area. They contain a sticky substance that discourages pigeons from roosting. Although somewhat messy to apply, these repellents will remain effective for several months after application. They can be obtained at many feed stores or garden supply centers.

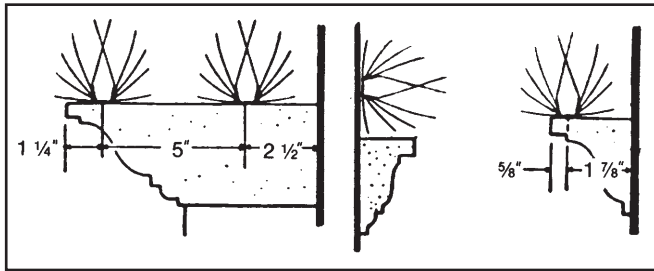


Figure 1. Pigeons can be discouraged from roosting on roof lines, window sills and ledges by the installation of sharpened, wire prongs called "porcupine wires."

Frightening Devices

Noise making devices such as fireworks, blank guns, distress calls and shell crackers are usually ineffective with pigeons. Pigeons in urban areas are accustomed to loud noises and are not easily deterred by them. Other frightening devices such as decoy hawks or owls, balloons, rubber snakes or streamers also have limited use. Ultrasonic sound devices are manufactured for pigeon control, although their effectiveness is questionable. Sometimes spraying roosting pigeons with streams of water will cause the birds to relocate; however, it must be done consistently for several days until all of the birds are gone.

Trapping

Pigeons tend to remain in the same feeding and roosting areas and often can be trapped in these locations. Rooftops are usually excellent locations for traps. Traps can be constructed or purchased ready-made from hardware stores, feed stores or garden supply centers. Most traps catch pigeons alive by allowing them to enter the trap, but not leave it. Trapped birds should be removed frequently, but one or two should be left in the trap to serve as decoys. Captured pigeons with leg bands should be released or returned to their owners.

Loft Trap. Pigeons often use attics, unused stories in industrial buildings, or steeples as nesting and roosting sites. These indoor roosts can be made into productive traps by closing them up with screening or plastic. Leave one or two entrances open until the birds become accustomed to using them. Then, fit the entrances with trap doors that can be closed from the outside at night after the birds have settled down. The trapped birds can then be caught by hand or in nets. When handling pigeons in enclosed areas, it is wise to use a face mask with a dust filter to avoid possible histoplasmosis infection.

Funnel Trap. A funnel trap can be made easily using 1- x 2-inch welded wire with a 1 1/2-inch "V" opening. A large nail helps keep the "V" from closing. Pigeons are attracted by a small amount of bait scattered at the entrance. They see more bait inside the trap and force their way through the small opening (Fig. 2).

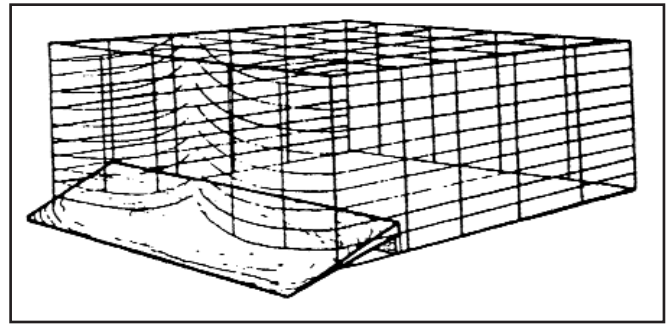


Figure 2. Double funnel trap.

Bob-Type Trap. The bob-type trap is probably the most popular type for pigeons. It can catch a large number of pigeons and is equipped with a small door that allows the trapped birds to be removed. The entrance through which pigeons are lured is the principal feature of the trap. Individual, free-swinging "bobs" are most practical and successful. The bobs can be made of heavy aluminum wire or lightweight metal rods. It is important that they swing upward and inward easily and drop back smoothly into slots at the base of the door. This trap, with some modifications, is manufactured by commercial live trap builders (Figure 3).

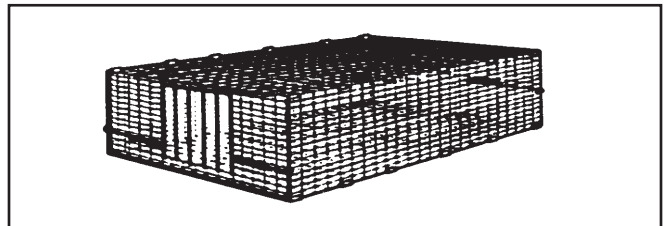


Figure 3. Bob-type pigeon traps can be constructed or purchased from commercial manufacturers.

Chemical Control

Several different chemicals are labeled for pigeon control. These chemicals contain a grain bait, usually corn, and will either kill the birds, repel them or inhibit their reproduction, depending on the chemical selected. Poison grain baits labeled for pigeons are effective in reducing local populations, but are not generally recommended for use in urban areas because of the potential danger to people or pets. In addition, these toxic baits are classed as Restricted-Use Pesticides and are available only to pest control operators or persons with private applicators' licenses. In rural situations, however, the use of a toxic grain bait is an effective and acceptable method of control. The key to success with this control method is to pre-bait for several days with untreated whole corn. After the pigeons have accepted the pre-bait and are consuming the corn on a daily basis, the treated corn can then be put out. The treated grain bait will kill the birds within several minutes to several hours. Dead pigeons should be collected and disposed of immediately.

The directions on the chemical bait label should always be read, understood and followed precisely.

Shooting

In rural areas, shooting is often an effective method of eliminating pigeons. Because most cities have ordinances against discharging firearms within the city limits, this method is not recommended in urban or suburban areas.

Restrictions

Pigeons are not protected in Texas and may be taken at any time; also, their nests and eggs may be destroyed.

For additional information contact the nearest office of the Texas Wildlife Damage Management Service.

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