

Small-town cunning beats birds

Walkerton makes its mark in war on messy flocks

WALKERTON, Ont. (CP) - It's a battle all right; a deadly game of pigeon peekaboo.

Eagle-eyed Jim Bolden scans the rooftops protectively, as a town's mayor should.

"There's one!" Bolden declares, grinning after seeing nothing but sky for 30 minutes.

So it is. A lone pigeon sits atop a building several hundred metres away in a daring daylight display.

Daring because there's a war being waged in Walkerton,

about 50 kilometres southwest of Owen Sound. It pits all available resources of the town against the collective wits of a pigeon flock.

And this fight is to the death.

Those who complain about bird droppings that clog drain spouts, destroy rooftops and splatter poor pedestrians, say it's the only way.

Business people downtown clamored about the pigeon problem for three or four years.

"Of course council didn't take it very seriously," Bolden said.

But when he reminded them the new roof on the freshly renovated town library was a favorite pigeon perch, the outlook for the birds turned grim.

A passive fight was fought before a pest control company was hired to trap and "humanely" destroy the birds.

Replicas of owls — nature's police officers — were placed strategically on rooftops downtown. But the pigeons soon befriended the phony sentinels.

In one insulting instance, Bolden counted three or four pigeons actually standing on one owl.

"I mean, there were flocks of pigeons flying over that main street that would pretty near block out the sun at times. I kid you not."

Town staff went to work finding out how other communities dealt with the problem. The

method chosen is approved by experts at the University of Guelph, Bolden said.

Metre-high cages with one-way gates are placed on roofs to trap the birds when they dine on corn left for them inside.

It's become a game of peekaboo now because only the most wily of birds remain. Since the war began in spring, the score is Walkerton 162, Pigeons 0.

The mayor knows some fun has been poked over the pigeon problem and he chuckles.

Maybe the pigeon fight is Bolden's way of leaving his mark on the town?

"If they remember me for the pigeons, that's fine," he said.