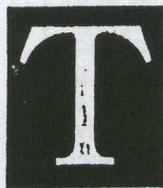


Bird wars



The domestic pigeon, a **30-million-year evolutionary** success story, is a descendant of the European rock dove. Common throughout the world, the pigeon is now regarded as the primary urban pest bird. Originally introduced as a "domesticated" bird, the rock dove's natural habitat was on rocky cliffs with protective ledges. By contrast, today's "street" pigeon seeks a similar architectural nook as an overnight roost: recessed window ledges, eaves, parking garages and billboards. Daytime lofting sites run the gamut, from balconies to billboards.

Since pigeons mate for life and have a voracious sexual appetite (starting as early as four months of age), it is not unusual for a pair to produce more than 10 young per year. The squabs are airborne within two months and generally roost in the same area. It does not take long before the flock number increases dramatically. With a life span of 10 or more years, no city-dwelling predators, and an unending food supply, the population increases exponentially.

The street pigeon, unlike any other species, will soil its own nest. Their droppings cause hundreds of millions of dollars in damage to property.

Feathered pests in society

Bird lovers abound in every city. Feeding the birds provides a pleasant diversion to city dwellers deprived of "wildlife." There is a certain mystique associated with birds; witness the "little old lady in the park" with her bag of popcorn feeding the pigeons. Realistically, these aptly named air rats, through their droppings, are carriers of several serious diseases, including histoplasmosis, encephalitis and salmonella. Pigeons are also the hosts for various parasites such as fleas and ticks.

Not all of the blame is due to pigeons. Starlings, numbering in the thousands,

are not an uncommon sight at power plants, city parks and office buildings. Seagulls in coastal areas (and moving increasingly inland) will often occupy an entire acre-sized roof or parking lot.

More alarming are the instances of bird strikes to aircraft. Damage to aircraft exceeds \$50,000,000 annually. In a futile attempt to prevent bird strikes at JFK Airport, the USDA killed 28,000 gulls. Within a year, 14,000 had re-nested owing to adjacent breeding grounds.

Pigeons are ... the hosts for various parasites.

Aquatic and flocking birds cause an estimated \$100,000,000 of damage to United States agriculture annually. Even the seemingly innocent house sparrow causes enormous problems for the food industry. An extremely agile and intelligent bird, the sparrow will "hitch a ride" on a forklift to gain entry to a birdproofed building.

Bird management

The variety of species of birds, and their ability to adapt to any architectural environment, has brought businesses affected by bird droppings to the brink of the "bird wars." The field general against this onslaught rightfully is the pest control industry. Pest control operators are required by state and/or federal law to maintain a more-than-passing knowledge of bird behavioral patterns and acceptable control measures. Until recently, the pest control operators' arsenal consisted of sticky gels, "porcupine spines" (inferior netting), and the use of toxic baits.

The Europeans, beset with more than their share of bird problems (annual costs exceed \$10,000,000 in the United Kingdom alone), have entered the fray with an impressive array of sophisticated, state-of-the-art bird control systems, such as the low-profile post and tensioned wire and one-piece "invisible" netting systems.

Health and legal concerns

Prior to undertaking any bird proofing, the infected area must be clean. Removal of bird droppings can be hazardous to your health and must be conducted safely and expeditiously. Protective clothing and use of a respirator is recommended. Also, it should be noted that migratory birds and endangered species are protected by a myriad of federal, state and local regulations.

Historical and aesthetic considerations

A study of bird deterrent systems in 1980 performed for the General Services Administration (GSA) by the architectural firm of Cooper-Lecky found that neither audio repulsion, "scare" devices, nor poison baiting have a long-term effect on pigeons and starlings in an urban environment. The study also concluded that most tactile deterrent systems are harmful and ineffective.

The ideal bird deterrent system should be inconspicuous and chemically compatible with the building components. The system should be reversible so that, if removed, the building could be restored to its original state. Moreover, the system must be easily accessible for building maintenance.

Control measures

Among the popular methods of population reduction are the use of toxicants mixed with grains, and shooting or live trapping. These techniques are labor-intensive and usually prompt an adverse public reaction. Moreover, the



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