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# PIGEON CONTROL: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: Reducing a pigeon population to a tolerable or minimal impact level is a subject about which one can find much antiquated and impractical information. Most technical literature reports on the biology of pigeons and associated disease factors. The intention of this paper is to describe the practical application of large-scale pigeon population reduction programs that have been at least 90% effective in 45 out of 46 cases over the past four years. Human relations, exclusion, trapping, toxic perches and Avitrol are discussed.

## APPROACH

Whether dealing with pigeons on a single structure or a city-wide scale, the approach is the same, and the first consideration is to determine the number of dead pigeons tolerable at any working site. It is important even to a trapping program because there will always be a dead pigeon or two in a trap if the pigeons are packing in tight during hot weather.

A control program needs to be as invisible as possible. This means low operator and equipment visibility to the degree that it may be necessary to carefully plan a strategy for installation and maintenance work that calls for unusual working hours; the use of lightweight hoist rigging to raise and lower equipment, tools or pigeons from the alley side of a building; or professional business carrying cases for transporting equipment, pigeons, etc., up and down elevators.

We have found that only key people need to know about a control program. This is best accomplished by maintaining a high professional image with a low profile. Many confrontations are disarmed by a professional appearance and preplanned conversation for use when caught off-guard.

## CITY-WIDE PROGRAMS

Any large-scale program requires precise knowledge of the major roosting, loafing, watering and feeding sites.

### Roosting sites

Location of these sites is an absolute necessity. Reduction of 50-80% of the total pigeon population can often be accomplished at the roosting sites. Many roosting sites can easily be turned into a large trap by using Conwed net with weights and custom-made quick-release mechanisms to drop the net over all entrance and exit points at the roost site.

If the roost is a large structure, sections can be sealed off using the Conwed net to form smaller chambers in which to concentrate the pigeons. We have used this technique to remove 582 pigeons over a 1 1/2-month period at one roost site. The roost contained between 50 to 100 birds at any one time. This suggests the attractiveness of the site for roosting.

Removing the pigeons is accomplished by shooting with a pellet pistol (Beeman's Luftpistole Mod. S20 4.5 mm Cal - use white nail polish on the back of front sight for night shooting), collecting by hand or butterfly net, or placing small pigeon traps in the roost. The pigeons must be held in the roost for 2-3 days before they will get hungry enough to feed on the grain in the small traps. It is difficult to trap pigeons at their roost site unless they are stressed for food and water. The roosting site should never be sealed off for more than one week at a time because some pigeons use more than one roost site. The roost site becomes a natural and perpetual trap as new pigeons begin to move into the void.

### Exclusion

This is accomplished over large spaces or openings by using galvanized wire for a permanent exclusion or Conwed net for quick installation and temporary use. (Conwed net will last 3-5 years depending on how it is attached.) Permanent exclusion of pigeons from ledges, corners and other small areas can be done with the use of "porcupine" wire (Nixalite), tightly stretched stainless steel wire (0.066 inches), or sheetmetal placed at an angle too steep for pigeons to perch on (60-70%). Pigeons can be kept off support cable, conduit and piping by attaching "L" brackets at each end of the cable and attaching the stainless steel wire to the "L" bracket with turnbuckles. Slack can be taken out with the turnbuckle. "L" brackets can be welded or attached with a cable clamp or aircraft hose clamps. Threads on standard radiator clamps frequently become stripped under the high-torque load required when holding "L" brackets that support wire stretched over long distances. Nixalite can also be attached to cable or pipe with a simple tool provided from the manufacturer. Exclusion can be done in an aesthetically pleasing manner for single structure use. On a city-wide basis, exclusion is normally used to force the birds to move to a site more favorable to the program. For example, a favorite loafing site may be above an awning over an outdoor restaurant. The temporary use of exclusion net at this site may move the birds to a site more conducive to control measures. An entire building rooftop can be netted over to shift birds to another building if preferred. Exclusion is also used to permanently seal small or difficult-to-reach

roost sites as a means for moving the pigeons to a preferred roost site. Before causing a roost shift, the birds in the preferred roost site must first be reduced in number by about 50% so that the new arrivals will be easily accommodated.

### Trapping

The best adjunct to trapping in hot weather is a favorite water site. We have found as many as 700 to 800 pigeons obtaining water from the cooling condenser on one building in a downtown area. There were many other sources of water but this rooftop was preferred for some reason. The cool side of a favored watering site is an excellent place to trap. The next best trap sites are the most used loafing areas.

Trap design is critical. The entrance should consist of lightweight aluminum rods spaced one inch (2.5 cm) apart. The entire trap is made of 1 or 2-inch (2.5 or 5 cm) wide welded wire. There should be two chambers [a 10 inch (25 cm) entrance and 26 inch (65 cm) holding chamber] with a good-size hinged door in the second chamber for easy bird removal. Outside dimensions of the trap are 8" x 18" x 36" (20 x 45 x 90 cm). A minimum 1 gallon (3.8 liter) water container should be used and arranged so the birds have a continuous supply. Four traps can be placed back-to-back, arranged in a north, south, east and west direction with water devices placed in the square space formed at the rear of the four traps. This arrangement works well in a highly-populated area. Keeping the traps open, allowing the birds to walk in and out for 2-3 days and closed for 4-5 days will alleviate trap-shyness. This technique has been used with excellent results by Kessle and Crabb for city trapping programs (personal communication 1979). If pigeons will not enter a trap, it is necessary to keep the traps open and baited with milo until they are accustomed to entering the trap. Juvenile pigeons are easier to trap than adults. Some adults may require several weeks of an open trap with plenty of milo followed by placing a healthy adult in the trap as a decoy.

### Rid-A-Bird Perches

The use of perches requires one of two liquid chemicals. The active ingredient of one is 11% fenthion, the other is 9.4% endrin. Both solutions work equally well. The use of fenthion produces results in 3-5 days, while endrin is effective in 2-3 days. Pigeons will develop a site specific to perches placed at feeding, watering and loafing areas. After the initial reduction in population, it is best to leave the perches empty for a few weeks before refilling. Perches placed at a roost site will normally not create an avoidance reaction.

Pigeons absorbing a lethal dose of either chemical solution through their feet appear lethargic and usually die at the perch site. Once affected by the chemical, they seldom fly but prefer to find a protected place out of the sun or wind.

The use of perches allows one to select within 20-30 feet (6-9 m) the spot where pigeons will die. If perches are placed on building ledges, there should be an awning or cover to catch the pigeons that drop off the ledges at night. Situations have occurred where 50-60 pigeons dropped from ledges 3 stories high and fell onto storefront metal awnings where they were removed in the early morning.

In hot weather, the chemical solution in perches will expand and leak out of the perch reservoir onto any nearby surface. The chemical is an oil base and will discolor stonework, tile, wood and metal surfaces. Caution and careful placement of perches is an absolute necessity.

Very few perches are required for most jobs. Ten to twelve perches will solve most problems. A large job may require 30 perches at most.

In a warehouse 50'x 100' (15 x 30 m) most of the pigeons can be eliminated by placing 1-2 perches in each heavily used area. On rooftops, perches placed along the crown at 3-foot (1 m) intervals and about 3 feet (1 m) down from the crown will suffice in most cases. Dominant, aggressive birds will occupy the best loafing areas. Perches placed to eliminate these birds will make room for less aggressive birds to move into the best areas.

### Avitrol

This product, a chemically impregnated grain bait, is seldom used in a city-wide program except to move birds from a structure that has no easy access. Avitrol produces an area-wide aversion reaction and moves pigeons from one place to another. It doesn't have much effect on the total city pigeon population. However, plastic sandwich bags containing 1/4 lb (112 g) of Avitrol makes an excellent toss pack for ledges and rooftops as high as two stories. A two-story, 80-unit condominium complex has been treated with toss packs in the early morning in less than one hour. Toss packs can be dropped or lowered from high structures to ledges below. Overhead warehouse beams can be treated without the use of lift trucks by using lightweight extension poles with a toss pack attached to a mechanical quick-release device on the pole end. The technical aspects of Avitrol treatment procedure are covered in the next section.

### Single Structure Programs

Pigeons on single structures can be eliminated almost exclusively with Avitrol or Rid-A-Bird Perches. The limiting factor with perches is that someone has to attach the perches wherever the pigeons are located—often precarious locations. Avitrol, on the other hand, can be lowered, raised, tossed or

blown (compressed air in PVC tubing) into place. All of these placement techniques take considerable practice (using untreated bait) but once mastered large jobs can be done in a low key manner with minimal visibility.

Prebaiting with untreated grain bait is an absolute for a totally controlled Avitrol program. Pigeons prefer many small piles of grain over a few large piles. Prebait and treated bait should be in the same general area. A rooftop 50' x 100' regardless of the pigeon population should have 10-20 1/4 lb (112 g) piles of untreated prebait. After 80% minimal prebait consumption, 1/4-lb (112 g) treated bait piles are placed at only half of the prebait locations. If each of 20 prebait sites were 80% consumed, only 10 treated bait piles would be used. The blend ratio of treated bait is always 1:20 treated-to-untreated.

The small 1/4-lb (112 g) piles of 1:20 treated bait coupled with the reduced number of prebait to treated feeding sites provide a built-in safety margin so that few, if any, pigeons will be found dead. The 1:20 blend must be exact. A ratio of 1:15 or 1:25 can make a significant difference. A 1:15 ratio will result in obvious numbers of dead birds. A 1:25 ratio may require an additional baiting. If extreme caution is necessary, a 1:30 ratio can be used. It will require two or three baiting periods for effective results.

Sometimes extensive prebaiting periods of three-to-four months are required if bait-shyness is widespread. Occasionally, pigeons must be reconditioned to accepting certain baits. This is especially true if structural pest control operators have used Avitrol month after month whether needed or not. If for some reason an Avitrol program produces less-than-desired results, treatment should not be repeated until after an extended period of prebaiting with untreated bait.

Exclusion is also effective on many single structures. Netting, stretch wire or Nixalite can be effective for small jobs. Application is the same as previously described.