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A BIRD CONTROL PROGRAM FOR DOWNTOWN AREAS

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INTRODUCTION

Almost every major city across the United States is faced with a constant problem of large pigeon populations sharing the downtown streets and buildings with the general public. To some people this is not an objectionable thought, but those who work, live, or shop in the downtown areas realize the nuisances these birds create.

Few people, however, realize the full extent of the problems caused by the birds' presence. Some of the more significant hazards are: diseases carried by the bird (Ornithosis, Encephalitis); diseases developed through their droppings (Histoplasmosis, Cryptococcosis); acidic deterioration effect of their droppings on buildings; nesting materials clogging drain pipes, marking window sills; hazardous fire escapes and sidewalks; noise irritation, etc.

When any city undertakes a beautification program, the pigeon and its remains must be considered near the top of every priority list. In 1974 such a beautification program was started in a 30-square block of downtown Kansas City, Missouri, and one of the top priorities was the large pigeon population living on the downtown buildings. Following is a description of the program developed to attack this problem.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Observation

Over a two-week period, the pigeons were observed to determine their habits. During the early morning the birds would fly west approximately one-half mile to an industrial district where they could feed on grain spilled from railroad grain cars. They would return to the city for the better part of the day, and then in late afternoon fly north to the river. They returned to the city buildings just before dark to spend the night.

Count

Based on figures developed by city officials, it was estimated that approximately 6,000 pigeons were involved in the downtown area. In order to determine the effectiveness of the program, the following method was devised to count the bird population at different intervals throughout the program:

From six key rooftop locations, all pigeons observed were counted during a 60-second interval. This count was recorded on six different occasions and the results were tabulated.

Method of Control

The following methods of control were evaluated:

Repellents (tacky)
Trapping
Rid-A-Bird Perches
Avitrol
Ornitrol
Strychnine

Repellents (tacky) — Although repellents would be effective where applied, the cost of treating sufficient areas to control the entire population would be prohibitive.

Trapping — Although trapping can be effective, the length of time required to deplete the population sufficiently would be prohibitive.

Rid-A-Bird Perches — Due to the large population of pigeons to be controlled, it was decided that Rid-A-Bird Perches would be too expensive and too slow in controlling the problem. Also, dead birds would be spread out over a large area and over a long period of time.

Avitrol — The use of Avitrol grain was eliminted for two reasons:

1. Due to the large area involved, it is doubtful that 6,000 pigeons could be chased away.
2. If Avitrol was effective in chasing away the pigeons they would have to go to the residential areas or the industrial areas, neither of which would be acceptable.

Ornitrol — At the time of this program, only a limited amount of testing had been done with Ornitrol. Its cost and length of time to be effective was prohibitive.

Strychnine Corn — Although public opinion was a big obstacle with strychnine, there were several factors in its favor:

1. Immediate depletion of the pigeons
2. Easy control of the poison and thus the dead birds
3. Costs would be low
4. Fewer pigeons would be chased to other areas of the city

As a result, the method of control would be strychnine corn.

THE PROGRAM

Bait Sites

In order to provide a complete cross section of baiting sites, buildings were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. Location
2. Accessibility to the rooftop
3. Type of roof; i.e. gravel covered, sloped or flat, etc.
4. Pigeon attractiveness

In addition to the above requirements we had to be sure each building would be accessible on weekends. In some cases, maintenance people or guards were on duty 24 hours a day. In other cases, we were given keys, or the tenant would meet us at a given time. There were some cases when access was impossible.

Prebaiting

On a Monday morning early in December we started our prebaiting program. Full 50 pound sacks of whole kernel corn were distributed to 28 different building baiting sites. One to three pounds of grain was spread out on the rooftops depending on pigeon activity. All prebaitings were performed approximately two hours before dark. This prebaiting procedure continued every other day until the following conditions were determined:

1. What species of birds would feed on the grain
2. How much grain would be consumed during each feeding period
3. How rapidly the pigeons would consume the grain and what the ratio was of birds feeding to those present on the building.

Amounts of prebait grain were adjusted according to feeding for each individual building. A total of eight prebait feedings were needed to establish a good feeding pattern.

Knockdown

During the last prebaiting, each building tenant was contacted to inform them of the knockdown baiting and to set up access to the building on Saturday, New Year's Day. Strychnine-treated grain was placed out in the same manner and approximately the same time as the prebait grain.

Pickup

Starting immediately after the final poison baiting, a pickup crew consisting of 16 people started patrolling the streets for casualties. The pickup crew was on duty for three hours after dark on New Year's Day evening and returned again one hour before daybreak on the next morning. They continued their watch until the cleanup of poison grain was completed later that day.

Cleanup

Starting mid-morning on the day after knockdown, a cleanup crew started removing the remaining poison grain off the rooftops. Dead birds, nests, eggs, etc. were also removed where accessible.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the bird count prior to, during, and after the knockdown program. The increase in count on December 18 was probably affected by the prebaiting program. The January 3 count was made two days after the knockdown. The birds counted during this observation were noticeably disturbed and disoriented. With the poison grain removed, the continuing decrease in birds on the fourth and fifth counts seems to show that those not affected by the knockdown left the area.

A total of 1,620 deal pigeons were picked up along with three starlings. No other birds were directly affected by the knockdown.

TABLE 1. Bird count prior to, during, and after knockdown program.

	BIRD COUNT*	
DATE	PIGEONS	STARLINGS
Dec. 4, 1974	205	12
Dec. 18, 1974	266	5
Jan. 3, 1975	33	0
Jan. 10, 1975	10	4
Jan. 25, 1975	4	2
Feb. 22, 1975	6	1

*Each figure represents the total of six counting locations.

All counts were made during the same time of day.

Public Opinion

This program was originally scheduled for completion in June 1974. However, due to the inexperience in presenting this program, adverse public opinion not only delayed the program, but almost eliminated it. When we originally applied for city and state permits, the press was alerted to the program. Rumors spread rapidly and public opinion stopped the program. Unfavorable press coverage, letters to the editor, and a law suit from Animal Kind, Inc. kept us busy for two months. To calm the publicity, the program was cancelled.

After a few months of complete inactivity on the program, the city requested its reactivation on a very low profile basis. With careful planning, the program was started and completed without further public awareness.

Program Followup

In the spring of 1975, three months after the knockdown, City Inspectors, with our guidance, started making building inspections to point out areas which were conducive to pigeon harborage. Some of the conditions found include:

1. Debris, such as old machinery, lumber, old heating ducts, etc., was found on the rooftops of many buildings. These items were excellent nesting areas for pigeons.
2. Broken windows, open maintenance doors and actual holes where birds could enter the buildings were found; again providing excellent nesting areas.
3. Awnings no longer used, inactive neon signs and billboards.
4. Ornamental statues, ledges and concrete art work.
5. Old unused cooling towers provided unbelievable roosting areas. One tower alone supported approximately 300 pigeons.

Building owners were given 30 to 60 days to correct the problem or face a daily fine. Two new city ordinances were written based on the bird eradication program. One involved the poisoning of birds in the city and the other concerned the presence of pigeons (specifically their droppings) on downtown buildings.

Building Cleanup

To aid the building owners in their cleanup efforts, we offered free guidance on the best way to eliminate their problem. Some of the methods used were screening, removing debris, repairing doors and windows, and applying repellents. The bird repellent was furnished by us to the building owners or, if they desired, we applied the material for them on an individual contract basis. Over 3,800 tubes of repellent were used.

Costs

With no prior experience in a program of this size, it was difficult to figure our costs for a bid. However, to encourage the development of the program, our first year charge was kept to a minimum. We developed our costs as follows:

Program set up	40 hours @ $20 per hour	$800.00
Prebait time	48 hours @ $15 per hour	720.00
Poison time	8 hours @ $15 per hour	120.00
Poison grain	72 oz. @ $6.80 per oz.	490.00
Corn	2400 pds. @ $8.00 per 100 pds	190.00
Pickup	80 hours @ $10 per hour	800.00
Holiday cleanup	40 hours @ $10 per hour	400.00
Subtotal		$3,520.00
Profit 10%		350.00
Total		$3,870.00

The actual time involved far exceeded our estimate, but first year losses were made up in subsequent years. The second year our expenses went down and our price went up to $5,400 to cover our first year loss. The price for the third and fourth years increased slightly. One of the largest profit factors was realized in the individual building contracts for applying repellent in the follow-up program.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The program continued for four years with a knockdown performed each New Year's

Day. By the end of the third year, the bird population in the downtown area was virtually non-existent. The fourth knockdown program resulted in a pickup of less than 200 pigeons. The unusual absence of pigeons continued well into the sixth year even though the knockdown program was stopped after the fourth year due to lack of funds.

Several key factors were involved in the success of this program.

1. Public awareness was held to minimum.
2. Excellent cooperation from the City and building owners.
3. Excellent follow-up by the City Inspectors after each knockdown.

As is the case in all types of pest control, sanitation must go hand in hand with proper pest control efforts to create lasting results.

With the above experience it is apparent that an effective pigeon control program can be developed in large metropolitan areas. It must, however, be understood by all parties involved that it is not a one-time effort by the PCO but a joint venture between the city government, the merchants, and the professional PCO on a continuing basis.

DISCUSSION

Comment: You said you were going to bait in the summer to begin with but decided to bait in the winter. Would one have preference over the other as far as a good baiting time?

Franke: I like the winter much better. In Kansas City we have harsh winters, and the birds need that feed very much to keep their systems going.

Comment: Is strychnine still registered?

Franke: Still registered at this time, but it won't be long and it will be gone. This is why I wanted to say that other items should not be eliminated. We picked strychnine at the time, but I would also be interested in trying Avitrol.

Steckel: Your program did not have a recurring base to it. Is there some reason you did it only annually?

Franke: Yes, I was the reason. I went at it with the idea that it could be done on a once-a-year basis. There were a couple other factors which kept it that way. One was public opinion. The city health people would leave town on New Year's Eve, because they didn't want to be around when the program was being done in case somebody found out about it. There was concern about having it happen too often with the public. The other was that I really felt that once a year, with a good follow-up, would do it. I think if you can do it a little more often, you probably could speed up the effects.

Comment: You indicated that there was about $3,900 in the initial job from the city but that there was a lot of other outside contractual work. As a percentage, what part of the overall job did the $3,900 comprise?

Franke: It was probably about 20% of our total income for the city bird program each year.

Comment: One other technique that I heard of but I am not recommending is anti-freeze. Where you have a cold winter, little water is available for the pigeons. Some of your bright up-start P.C.O.s put out trays of anti-freeze. Pigeons will take it. It doesn't matter whether it is red anti-freeze or blue anti-freeze; it will do the job.

Comment: I would like to hear the industry response to that, because it has to be registered for pigeon control in order to control pigeons. To do otherwise is not legal, am I correct?

Chairman: That is right; it is not registered, so you better be careful. But it is a very interesting point; I think we should be very careful in how we use it.

Comment: You start your prebaiting a month ahead of time?

Franke: No, we do it every other day for two weeks and use our own corn.