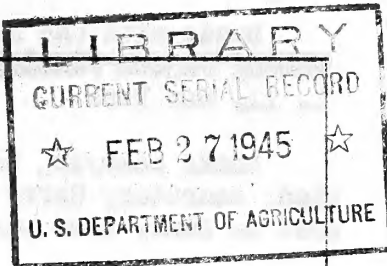


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United States Department of the Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service



Wildlife Leaflet 254

Chicago 54, Ill.

May 1944.

CONTROL OF VAGRANT DOMESTIC PIGEONS

Prepared in Economic Wildlife Investigations
Division of Wildlife Research

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ORIGIN OF THE DOMESTIC PIGEON

Pigeons similar to those now living in a semiwild state in the parks and streets of towns and cities have long been closely associated with man. The progenitors of these birds can be traced through medieval times, back to the histories of early Egyptian kings, and even to the realm of myth before the recorded word.

Evidence presented by the birds themselves, in form, coloration, and habits of even the promiscuously interbred pigeons that are now found in the streets, points to the likelihood that originally these birds came from the blue rock, or common pigeon (Columba livia), of Europe, Asia, and Africa. They may have been held in semidomestication by early man, or they may have taken advantage of easier living in human surroundings. Innumerable races, or strains, of pigeons have been developed by selective breeding and by the perpetuation of unique off-shoots from parent stock. When left to their own resources, however, as are the members of the "trap" flocks that make a living from the city streets, the birds tend to revert to a type suggesting the rock pigeon.

From accounts of the great flocks of pigeons in the public squares of the cities of Europe and Asia, flocks as old as the cities themselves, and from the numbers of their counterparts in our cities, it is evident that the urban pigeon

Bands with the letters "IF" are issued by the International Federation of Homing Pigeon Fanciers; secretary, John Boshler, 38 Long Beach Road, Hempstead, L. I., New York.

Bands carrying the letters "NPA" are issued by the National Pigeon Association; secretary Harry B. Baldwin, Box 502, Kansas City, Missouri. These bands are used on fancy show pigeons only, not on racing homers.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CONTROL

Discouraging the Birds from Remaining

An objectionable flock of pigeons is often the direct result of unintentional encouragement. A church tower may serve as an excellent nesting loft for dozens of the birds, or ledges protected by overhanging eaves may attract daily a flock that has reached undesirable numbers. Likewise, promiscuous feeding of poultry in open yards may be an incentive for pigeons to stay near such premises.

The logical remedy for troubles of this kind is to remove the attraction, if possible. Openings in church towers, lofts, and belfries can be screened with rust-proof wire; poultry runs can be covered; and sometimes ledges can be obliterated by installing sloping boards or wire netting that will prevent the birds from roosting there. Small crannies used as nesting sites can often be blocked so as to prevent the entrance of birds. Although the cost of screening may at first seem excessive, the results are practically permanent. The screen should be made of 2-inch-mesh galvanized poultry wire. In areas where starlings also are objectionable, 1-inch-mesh poultry wire should be used.

Frightening Devices

Sometimes pigeons may be driven from a favorite roosting place by frightening devices. Noise-producing contrivances which may also be disturbing to human beings, usually have little permanent effect on roosting pigeons that are accustomed to the varied noises of cities. Lights are of little avail. Sling-shots, with pebbles for missiles, may be used with good results on small groups of roosting pigeons, provided the birds are disturbed nightly as they are going to roost. Most attempts to dislodge roosting birds through the use of a sling-shot or other means depend for their success on the persistence with which the operations are carried on. These must be continued until the birds have definitely reestablished themselves in some other place.

When the birds are numerous, the city fire department may be induced to cooperate. If a stream of water from a fire hose is turned on the roosts for several successive nights, the birds will doubtless seek other quarters.

Trapping

Pigeons may be trapped readily when food is not overly abundant so that with the expenditure of a little ingenuity, patience and time, small groups of these birds can soon be eliminated. A trap of the "ash-sifter" type, with a frame 4 or 5 feet square and about 6 inches deep, to which is attached a "sieve" made of

1-inch poultry wire, will be satisfactory. This trap should be propped up on one edge by a stick 10 to 12 inches long to which a pullcord is fastened. When the pigeons have become accustomed to feeding on baits placed about and under the trap, the bulk of any small flock should be captured in one or two springings. The birds can be removed from the trap by driving them into one corner and taking them out through an opening made by loosening a section of the screen from the frame or through a small sliding door built into the frame itself. Similar traps of larger size may be used for catching larger flocks.

Shooting

The use of firearms is usually prohibited in cities, except under special permission of the police department. For this reason shooting cannot be recommended as a general procedure in controlling objectionable city-dwelling pigeons. Permission to shoot the pigeons, however, can usually be obtained from the police if the birds are few in number and are particularly objectionable. A 22-caliber rifle using ammunition loaded with fine shot, or a shotgun of small size (.410 gage), should be used in the control operations, so as to avoid both the danger of ricocheting bullets and the disturbance caused by the discharge of firearms of larger bore. Highly-powered air rifles also may be used.

Poisoning

Although the use of poisoned baits is effective and is reasonably safe when the operations are conducted by experienced persons, this method of pigeon control is not recommended for the general public. Most poisons are toxic to animals in general, and there is danger that cats or dogs may eat the freshly killed birds and obtain lethal doses from the grain in the birds' crops. Furthermore, the exposure of poison within the limits of towns and cities is, as a rule, prohibited by law.

Where municipalities employ men experienced in pest control, poisoning operations may be undertaken, but even then the procedure should be carefully supervised to prevent mishaps. Should conditions make the use of poison necessary, the Fish and Wildlife Service will furnish information concerning the best methods of preparing and distributing the poison.

Gassing

Many people believe that by the use of toxic gases pigeons can be satisfactorily controlled in a single operation. Under certain peculiarly favorable conditions such gases have given good results, but usually the objections, obstacles, and dangers to be overcome far outweigh the advantages. Only persons experienced in the handling of toxic gases, and properly equipped, should be employed in such work. Before undertaking such operations, permission should be obtained from the municipal authorities, and the work should be done under proper supervision.

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will continue to be a close associate of man and his works for years to come. Reasons for this are not hard to find. Observe the food offered by kind-hearted individuals on snowy winter days or by interested children on sunny mornings, and note also that other essentials for avian existence, as shelter and places to breed, are abundant. These factors and a sympathetic, or at least a tolerant, attitude toward the birds by a large part of the populace assure them a continuing livelihood.

The factors that favor the existence and the increase of these birds, however, also aggravate certain problems connected with their presence under modern metropolitan conditions. Those who have had to contend daily with the litter and disturbance of large numbers of roosting or nesting pigeons—including custodians of public buildings, dwellers in apartment houses, and even private-home owners—have at times been called upon in self-defense to take action to curb the numbers of the birds. Such conditions that afford pleasure and fascination to one individual may become an annoyance to another. When this happens, relief measures may be necessary. Suggestions for controlling vagrant pigeons and for preventing damage by them are given in this leaflet.

STATUS OF THE CITY PIGEON

The flocks of varicolored pigeons that frequent the larger cities are, as a rule, made up of semiwild, or "tramp" individuals to which no one claims ownership. The birds may breed, nest, raise their young, and live their entire lives without becoming dependent on man other than for the shelter afforded by some tower or portico or for waste food.

In suburban communities and in smaller towns there may be flocks which, while paying some allegiance to an owner by returning home to roost, obtain most of their food from the city street; or there may be well-cared-for flocks that are sheltered and fed but make daily flights near their cotes. These latter flocks can be controlled readily by their owners and do not, as a rule, become seriously objectionable.

Before taking any aggressive action against the semiwild flocks of larger cities, one should consult the local police regulations. There may be restrictions on the use of firearms, traps, poisons, baits, and other means of control within corporate limits. There is also the likelihood that individual pigeons of racing or show strains, usually recognizable by the numbered bands on their legs, may join the "city crowd". When such birds are captured uninjured, they should be given dry food and water and allowed to go on their way. If such a bird persists in staying with the flock, an inquiry addressed to some local pigeon fancier may help in finding its owner through the designation on its band. These birds, because they have been trained and are of value to their owners, should be given every opportunity to return to their lofts. As an aid in tracing the owners of these valuable pigeons, the addresses of some of the principal national associations that handle racing or show birds are here given. Pigeons recorded with these organizations usually are the only ones that it is possible to trace.

Bands bearing the letters "AU" (sometimes in monogram form so that they are misread "AJ") are used by the American Racing Pigeon Union; secretary, Edward Barnes, 214 Congress St., Jersey City, New Jersey.