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Wildlife Leaflet 413
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CONTROLLING BIRDS -- VAGRANT DOMESTIC PIGEONS

Status

Pigeons similar to those now living in a semi-wild state in towns and cities have been closely associated with man since before recorded history. The form, coloration, and habits of the interbred pigeons that are now found in the streets, point to the likelihood that originally these birds came from the blue rock, or common pigeon (Columba livia), of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Most flocks of pigeons in urban areas are composed of individuals to which no one claims ownership. However, there may be occasional birds that are owned by individuals. City pigeons are not protected by Federal laws, but State and local laws should be checked before shooting, trapping or poisoning is attempted.

Why We Have Them

Feeding of pigeons by bird lovers and spillage of grains around elevators, railroad sidings, etc., are some of the sources of food for city pigeons. The abundance of shelter in most cities assures them ample places to roost and breed. These factors and a sympathetic or tolerant attitude toward the birds by a part of the populace are the reasons for their continued existence. While the presence of pigeons affords pleasure to many, excessive concentrations of the birds are a health hazard because they are carriers of diseases of humans, livestock and poultry. In addition, they offend esthetic senses by their contamination. When these conditions exist, control measures may be necessary.

Roost Elimination

Measures to eliminate roosting sites appear costly, but permanent methods of control are usually worthwhile in the long run. Openings in lofts, church towers, behind signs, and under eaves can be screened with rust-proof wire of 3/4-inch mesh which will also keep sparrows and starlings out. Roosting on ledges can be discouraged by covering them with wire netting or installing wood or metal sheathing at a sharp angle.

Products such as glues, wires, or electrical devices can also be used, but applications are usually expensive and not always effective. Most gluey substances stick to the feet, making the birds uncomfortable. These materials are spread in ribbons along ledges and copings and must be replenished frequently to remain effective. Somewhat more permanent products are those which utilize metal wires in the form of a bristling fence to prevent roosting. Buildings can also be fitted with electrical wires which, like an electric fence for livestock, give intermittent shocks to birds attempting to land on the wires.

Removal of Nests

Populations of pigeons can be reduced by destroying their nests and eggs at two-week intervals during the spring and summer months. Use a hook fastened to the end of a long pole to tear down nests under eaves and the like.

Frightening Devices

Noise-making devices have little permanent effect on roosting pigeons that are accustomed to city noises. High-frequency sound vibrations, inaudible to humans, or tape-recorded noises are not usually effective in scaring pigeons. Lights are also of little use.

Shooting Roman candles or firecrackers into roosts are temporarily effective in moving birds, but restrictive legislation against fireworks makes this method impractical in many areas. Streams of water from hoses will move pigeons from roosts. If streams of water or similar controls are to be effective, they must be persistently used until the birds have established themselves elsewhere.

Trapping

Pigeons may be taken in traps placed on buildings and other likely locations. One very effective trap operates by baiting the birds through a door made of swinging, light-weight rods. As these rods will move only inward, the birds cannot return through the trap door. Live decoys in the traps will improve trapping efficiency.

Shooting

Before shooting pigeons, local police regulations should be consulted. Where permissible, shooting with .22 caliber rifles using ammunition loaded with fine shot; with .410 shotguns; or with high-powered air rifles, will eliminate small numbers of birds.

Poisoning

Although poisoned baits are effective and reasonably safe when used by experienced persons, they are not recommended for the general public. Most poisons are toxic to humans and animals and should be handled with care. However, should conditions make the use of poison necessary, the following method will produce results. Winter is the best time to expose poisoned baits, particularly when the ground is covered with snow, and natural feed is scarce.

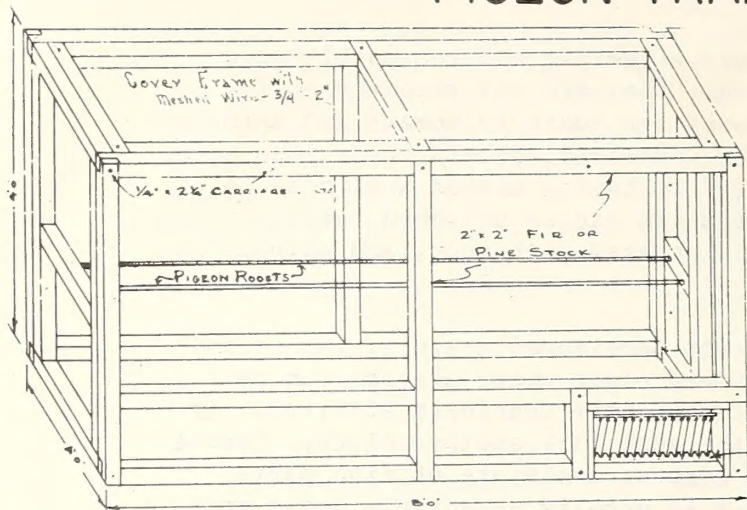
Prebaiting: Prebaiting with unpoisoned grain is important. Select a flat roof or other likely place where pigeons can be encouraged to feed. Distribute the bait sparingly at first. If pigeons are not attracted to the spot, try another place. Coarse scratch (poultry) feed, whole corn or a mixture of five parts whole corn to one part of wheat is usually acceptable under most conditions. However, observe their grain preference and be guided accordingly in mixing the poisoned bait. Prebaiting should be done, preferably by the same person with the same identifiable clothing, each day for a week or more. Follow with a liberal amount of poisoned material.

Preparation of Poisoned Bait: Make a paste of one tablespoon of laundry starch in 1/2 cup of cold water; add 1-1/2 cups boiling water and stir until free of lumps; add 1 ounce powdered strychnine alkaloid, stir well. Apply to 8 quarts of corn-wheat bait or 12 quarts whole corn. Shovel or stir. Spread out thinly and let dry. Place a "POISON" label on all containers.

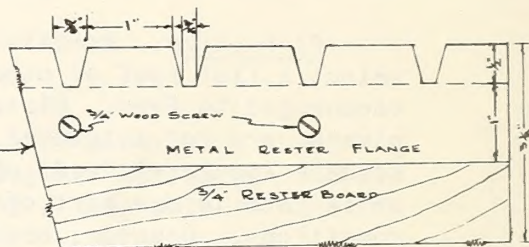
Caution: If other smaller birds, including songbirds, are attracted to the prebait, either shift to another location or use only whole corn, as the kernels are too large for them to eat.

Note: This leaflet supersedes Wildlife Leaflet 254, revised July 1948.

PIGEON TRAP PLAN



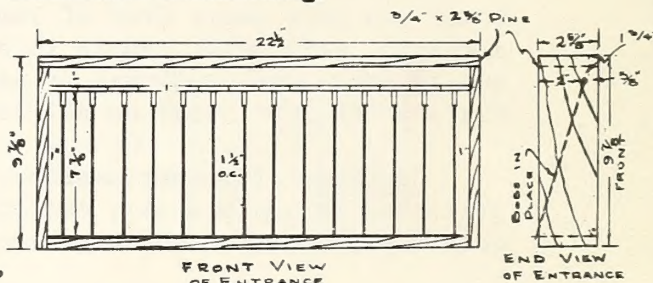
Pigeons can be caught in screened enclosures of various sizes and shapes. For large-scale trapping, it is well to use a trap of dimensions similar to those shown in this leaflet.



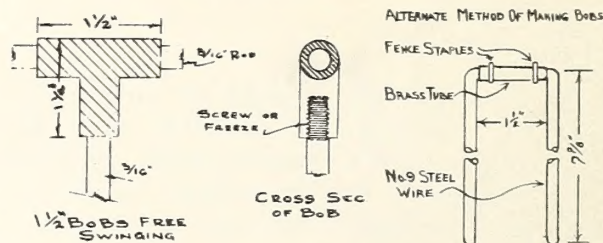
This size trap is capable of large daily catches and enables a person to enter and remove the birds through a small door constructed in the end of the trap. Although large traps are preferred, good catches have been made with poultry crates and other small enclosures.

The construction of a trap with 1 x 2 -inch material is desirable so as to reduce the weight, which is a factor if the trap is to be moved. The use of bolts and the construction of the trap in five sections will facilitate dismantling.

The door or entrance through which pigeons are lured is the principal feature of a trap. Individual, free-swinging "bobs," as illustrated, are most practical and successful. The bobs can be made of heavy aluminum wire or lightweight metal rods. It is important that they swing upward and inward easily and drop back smoothly into slots at the base of the door. For sources of readymade trap doors, write for leaflet entitled, "Manufacturers of Bird Control Materials."



A colony of pigeons will usually remain in one general area, which tends to simplify their removal. Set a trap in an inconspicuous spot, where its not apt to be molested, near the place where pigeons feed or roost. Leave a few birds in the trap as decoys, preferably the same individuals, so that they will become fairly tame and thus lure others. Birds with distinctive colors can be easily identified and seem to be better lures than the drab blue-grays.



It is important to bait the trap with the kind of food the birds are eating. Where they are used to miscellaneous feed, a mixture of one part wheat to five parts of cracked corn makes a good bait. Scatter a small amount outside the trap door to attract the birds. Keep a generous quantity of the bait on the floor inside and near the trap door at all times. Water should be provided except during periods when snow will furnish the necessary moisture. Visit the trap every day or two to remove the pigeons and to rebait.