



Feral Pigeon Control Environmental Health Guide

The feral pigeon is a descendant of the domestic homing pigeons introduced to Australia from Europe in the 1600's. Several traits have allowed feral flocks to increase in numbers and dominate the urban landscape due to the availability of food, fresh water and secure breeding sites.

As a result, there has been an increase in feral pigeon numbers in certain areas of Western Australia. Action needs to be taken to help rectify the feral pigeon problem before the problem escalates.

Pigeon Facts

- Life span of 3-4 years in the wild, up to 16 years in captivity.
- Pigeons are monogamous and a mating pair will have 3 to 4 broods per year of 1-2 eggs each.
- Eggs are a solid white colour and hatch in 18 days, and the young leave the nest within 35 days.
- Pigeons do not migrate, staying near their birth site (which may be your home).

Identifying a Feral Pigeon

The standard feral pigeon is generally:

- Blue-grey with a white rump.
- Has iridescent feathers on head and neck.
- Two broad black bars across each wing.
- A broad dark band across the end of the tail.
- They can also display white, brown or grey plumage.



Problems and Health Risks

The presence of pigeons can result in a range of problems. These can include:

- Attracting ticks, cockroaches and rats.
- Damage to buildings and monuments due to the highly corrosive nature of acid in pigeon droppings.
- Damage to properties by pigeons roosting/breeding in roof spaces, rolled steel joists and inside factory units.
- Debris from roosting flocks building up, causing gutters and drains to block, damage to roofs and other structures, and creating potential fire hazards.
- Extensive damage to air-conditioning units and other roof top machinery.
- Hygiene concerns due to pigeon droppings in/on industrial, commercial, and domestic buildings.
- Providing a vector for the introduction of weeds and disease.
- Increasing the risk of disease and parasite transmission between feral, domestic and seabird populations.
- Escalating costs through public liability insurance from slipping on dropping build up.



Does your Property have a Pigeon Problem?

Many property owners do not realise their building has a feral pigeon problem. Factors which indicate a pigeon problem on your property include the following;

- Do one or two pigeons frequent the building?
 - Do flocks of pigeons regularly frequent the building?
 - Is there an accumulation of pigeon droppings on or around the building?
1. Once you have recognised that your property has a pigeon problem action will need to be taken to prevent pigeons from roosting and nesting on/in the building. If no action is taken the problem may escalate and more cost will be involved. In majority of cases, if corrective action is taken, the property should be pigeon proofed indefinitely.

Control Techniques

Research has shown that simply using lethal methods of pigeon control (culling) is not effective in the long term. Implementing non-lethal control techniques is the most effective long term solution to reducing the pigeon population. These include;

Food reduction

Remove sources of food and water (outdoor pet food bowls, bird baths, bird feeders). Ensure that refuse, especially from a food premises is properly stored and food spillage is kept to a minimum.

Destruction of nesting sites

Pigeon nests are very simple and often consist of a few stiff twigs. Look for nests along building ledges, bridge supports, air-conditioning units, window sills etc.

Pigeons are very persistent and destruction of the nest at regular intervals is needed with a combination of other control methods.

Proofing / Deterrents

It is important to prevent pigeons from gaining access to roosting and possible nesting sites by sealing doorways, windows, open eaves etc. This may require extensive renovations or may be as simple as closing a window or sealing a crack or crevice using materials such as mesh or wooden panels.

Products such as *netting* (bird wire or mesh), *wire coils* or '*pigeon spikes*' prevent pigeons from landing or roosting on building surfaces. Please note that poorly designed or maintained pigeon proofing can lead to birds becoming fatally trapped. It is important for such products to be installed by a professional.

Other methods include; *scare devices* such as a combination of audio or visual deterrents, or the application of *gel products* that pigeons find sticky and uncomfortable to stand on.

It will also be in the best interest for neighbouring properties to proof their property otherwise pigeons will quickly take up residence and simply move the problem around without reducing the flock size.

Lethal Control Techniques

Lethal control techniques only ever achieve short-term reduction (in most cases only 4-6 weeks). The vacancies left by the removed pigeons can quickly be filled by juvenile birds and after a few weeks the flocks may reach their earlier size or are even larger than before. Examples of lethal control techniques include;

Trapping

In many incidences trapping does not have a long term effect on the pigeon population. The number of birds caught and killed during trapping operations can be replaced as quickly as the birds are removed. If the food source remains in situ the culling may act to increase pigeon numbers in a given area above the pre-cull number.

If you decide to implement a trapping program to remove resident pigeons, you must remember that the source of food must be removed otherwise the trapping exercise may be pointless.



Eradication

Licensed pest control operators use a painless narcotic agent (Alpha-chloralose) which causes the bird to overdose, and go to sleep.

The theory is that birds take the bait and sit and wait to be picked up and despatched. Unfortunately in many instances many of the birds feed, fly off and can die an inhumane death. Large numbers of non-target species (garden birds etc) may also take the bait and die in the same way. It is important that if this control option is used professional advice is sort. Again, you must remember to remove all sources of food otherwise the exercise may be pointless.

Shooting

Licensed pest control operators kill pigeons with an air weapon to reduce pigeon numbers. Every situation will be assessed by the pest control operator to determine if shooting is a viable option. It is important to realise that if birds are shot on high inaccessible ledges they cannot be retrieved to be humanely despatched. As with all the above control methods, killing adults may also leave juvenile flightless birds in nests to die of starvation.

Remember to wear protective equipment

Licensed pest control operators and “do-it yourselfers” must take proper precautions when tackling bird control projects. Respirators, goggles and protective clothing should be worn when cleaning bird sites, particularly those shaded with large amounts of droppings present.

Further Information

For advice on feral pigeon control, contact your local Environmental Health Officer.

or

For the control of feral pigeons you may seek the services of a licensed pest control operator.

or

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