Controlling Vertebrate Damage: Domestic Pigeon
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Cooperative Extension Service
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CONTROLLING VERTEBRATE DAMAGE

domestic pigeon

(Columba livia)

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See also the first in this series: Extension Bulletin E-860 on "General Considerations."

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THE WILD DOMESTIC PIGEON, or rock dove, a native of Europe and Asia, exists in wild flocks throughout most of Michigan. Although an interesting addition to both urban and rural areas, its numbers can increase to the point where its droppings create a nuisance and potential health hazard, deteriorate structures and equipment, and contaminate stored foods and feed. At this point, damage control is often desired.

EXCLUSION

Pigeons often become a problem on homes and other buildings when the architecture of the building or improper maintenance creates ideal roosting and nesting spots. Pigeons often roost and nest on ledges where roofs and eves join and sometimes on wide window sills. Prevent roosting and nesting by boxing in these areas with plywood or lumber, or by enclosing them with hardware cloth to eliminate roosting sites. In many older buildings, grain elevators and feed mills, broken windows, doors, and damaged woodwork and roofing allow pigeons into buildings where they roost and nest. The only solution is to make the necessary repairs.

REPULSION

Many of the materials available for repelling pigeons from buildings are usually worthless. In general, any auditory or visual repellant for pigeons will only be effective for a few days. Pigeons soon learn that plastic owls, aluminum foil twirlers and flashing lights are harmless or can be avoided. Pigeons do not seem to respond to exploding noises, flares or electronic calls. The one exception is a simulated electronic call which after a period of time will drive pigeons away. However, this device is quite expensive, limited in range and affects human beings as well as pigeons. Thus, it is not suitable in a densely populated area. See "Sources of Supply."

Several commercially available wire barriers will prevent roosting and nesting. Stiff wires project in various directions, making it impossible for pigeons to land where the wire barriers are affixed. If roosting surfaces are numerous, however, installation costs can be quite high. See "Sources of Supply."

Glue-like, sticky repellents are applied to roosting and nesting surfaces. Their extremely sticky, gluey consistency makes such surfaces unpleasant to pigeons, and they abandon them. Sticky repellents come in spray, aerosol and tube jelly forms, and can be applied to metal, stone, wood, masonry and vegetation. The spray is best suited to use on vegetation; the tube form may be best on rafter or ledges.

Pre-treat porous material with silicone or strips of tape to prevent absorption. It is essential to treat **all** roosting surfaces. Otherwise, pigeons may be repelled from one roosting surface to another on a partially treated structure. Where roosting surfaces are extremely numerous and access is difficult, application costs can be quite high. In dusty areas, application may be necessary as often as every six months. See "Sources of Supply."

A psychochemical, Avitrol (amino-4 pyridine), is available to pest control operators and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This material, in grain bait form, is applied to pigeons' roosts, such as on ledges, cornices, window sills, flat roofs, etc. The bait is diluted so that only one kernel in 30 is treated. The few pigeons that pick up the treated pieces of bait go into wild, erratic behavior before dying. This eratic behavior frightens the entire flock and it leaves the baited structure. Reapplication is sometimes necessary on a semi-annual basis, but it is not uncommon for flocks to be repelled from a treated structure for a year or more.

Avitrol is ideally suited for removing pigeons from one structure in an area with a large pigeon population. Persons other than pest control operators may obtain Avitrol from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and **use it under special permit and government supervision.**

POPULATION REDUCTION

Trapping

Pigeons are easily trapped by a wide variety of traps, but the most effective is the walk-in trap with a one-way wire bob door. This trap may be large or small, but in general, large traps are most effective because both grain and water can be used as bait and the large number of already trapped pigeons will decoy additional pigeons. The trap may be of any desired design, shape or size large enough for pigeons as long as it includes a one-way bob-wire door.

Bobs are individual, free-swinging, heavy-gauge 8 in. long wires or metal rods spaced 1½ in. apart and suspended from the top of the door into the trap. The bottom ends of the bobs rest against the inside edge of the sill on the bottom of the door so that they swing freely and easily inward, but not outward. Pigeons will walk into the trap, pushing the bobs inward as they go. When the bobs drop back into place, the pigeon is trapped.

Placement of the trap is extremely critical. Place it where pigeons normally feed. If this is not possible, prebait the pigeons to a trap site. Once the pigeons begin to feed heavily on the prebait, place and bait the trap on that site, but wire up the bobs so that the door is always open. This accustoms the entire flock of pigeons to going in and out of the trap to obtain food. As soon as the pigeons feed heavily in the trap, unfasten the wire bobs so that they now swing down into place. The entire flock should be caught within one or two days.

If all the pigeons are not trapped, wait two or three weeks and repeat the entire operation. Trapped pigeons can be destroyed by quickly wringing their necks, or by drowning in a small cage or burlap sack. It is futile to transport the birds to a new locality and release them, since

they probably will return to the capture site before the person who released them.

Shooting

Several cities have found that a strictly controlled shooting program manned by carefully selected volunteers can quickly reduce pigeon populations at the minimum cost with minimum hazard. Operations in large cities have had no accidents or damage other than a few broken windows due to falling pigeons. Shooting is usually done early on weekend mornings. However, public acceptance of such a program is highly variable.

In smaller areas, such as a farm, a shooting should be done quickly and intensively by several shooters. Occasional shooting soon makes the surviving pigeons extremely wary and difficult to eliminate.

Poisoning

Strychnine-treated poison bait is available to pest control operators and government agencies to eliminate pigeon populations. These poisoning programs can be very effective and inexpensive, but must be strictly controlled and supervised to eliminate hazard to non-target species. Persons other than pest control operators can get 0.6% strychnine treated whole kernel corn from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service **for use under special permit and government supervision.** Use with extreme caution. Strychnine is poisonous to all warm-blooded animals; pigeons killed by strychnine are poisonous if eaten by other animals.

Pre-bait pigeons with untreated, whole kernel corn. Prebaiting is essential because it gets the pigeons accustomed to feeding vigorously at a time and place where poisoned grain can be safely exposed. Pre-baiting also permits selection of the best sites. Do not expose poison bait on any site where pigeons do not feed vigorously or where protected birds consume the pre-bait. Acceptable sites include flat roofs on low building or sheds, fenced storage or parking areas, or bait troughs especially constructed and placed for pigeon control.

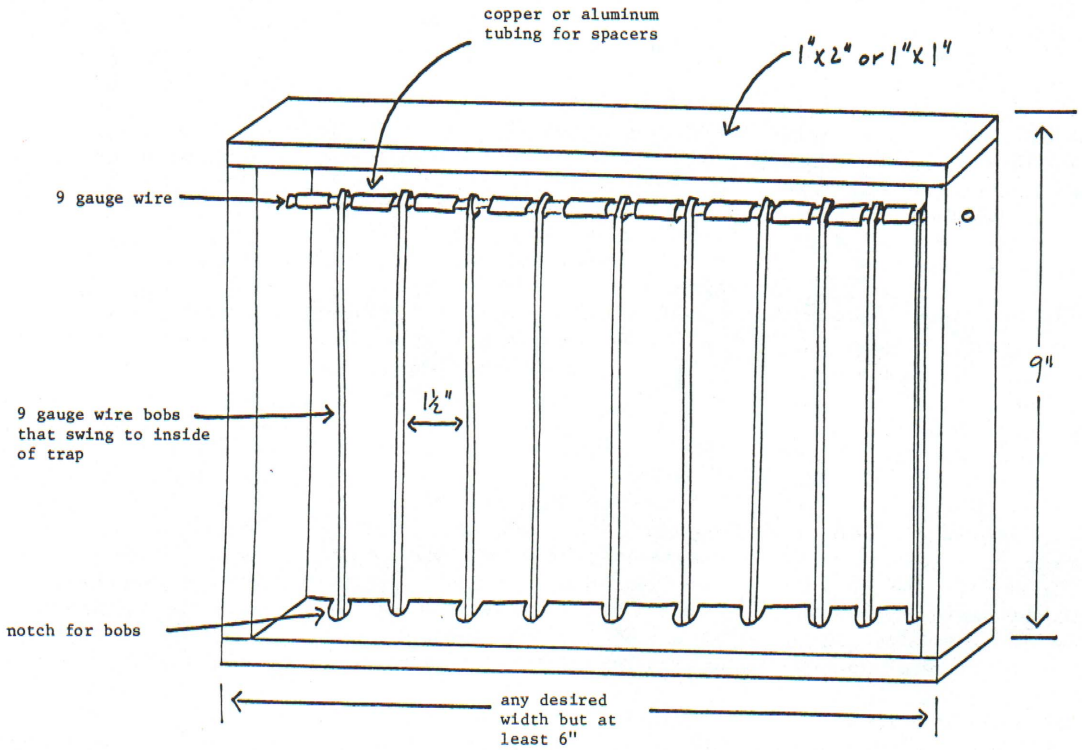
Once pigeons consume all the pre-bait exposed daily, place the poisoned bait at night or very early in the morning. Pick up all dead pigeons and the poisoned bait at the end of the day. If additional treatment is necessary, wait 2 weeks to begin pre- baiting. Repeat the operation.

Chemosterilization

A commercial chemosterilant, trade name Ornitrol, is available to government agencies and pest control operators in grain bait form. When ingested by the pigeons, the chemosterilant prevents them from reproducing, thus allowing natural mortality to reduce the pigeon population gradually over a period of a year or two. This method is most applicable where residents desire pigeon control, but strongly object to any direct, lethal conrol.

A chemosterilization program must be conducted on a total area basis, such as an entire town, city or even a township, because it is futile to sterlize one flock. The natural mortality in the treated flock will be quickly replaced by juveniles produced from surrounding flocks. Thus, it is absolutely imperative that all flocks within the given area of control, such as a city, be fed the chemosterilant treated bait.

Pigeons must feed for 10 days twice a year on the preparation before it takes effect. Site prebaiting is necessary, and a chemosterilant control operation may require intensive and widespread baiting. Unfortunately, such an intensive widespread program, if not carefully regulated, may be more dangerous to non-target species than an intense, localized, lethal control that can more easily be confined to the pigeon population. See "Sources of Supply." *A permit is required from Law Enforcement Division, Michigan DNR.*



Example of Bob door for any size pigeon trap.

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