

## History

Feral Pigeons have thrived in our cities by adapting to life, learning to roost and breed in the seemingly inhospitable environment provided by tall buildings, and to survive on the food available. Feral pigeons are sometimes called "the flying rat" - adapted to living and causing a nuisance in the borough. Over recent years there has been a marked increase in the numbers of Feral (wild) Pigeons.

## Appearance

The bird is about 33cm in length and weighs between 280 and 560g average about 350g. Its plumage can vary considerably, from a close resemblance to that of the original rock-dove (with blue-grey plumage, double black wing bars and a white rump) through various "blues", "reds" and chequered types, to almost pure black.

## Life cycle

The feral pigeon is capable of breeding throughout the year and nests may be found in any month, however the peak occurs between March and July. Usually, two white eggs are laid on consecutive days. Incubation lasts about 18 days with fledging taking place about 4 ½ weeks later.

A new clutch can be laid when the first young are 20 days old. Therefore up to nine broods may be produced per year by just one female pigeon.

## Disease risk and damage

Pigeon droppings are not only unsightly; their acid content can eat into soft stone and cause long-term damage to buildings. The nest droppings, and feathers also block gutters and rainwater pipes causing water damage.

Their droppings can lead to severe hazards on pavements, especially for the elderly, and can carry pathogenic organisms.

Pigeons can carry a number of potentially infectious diseases such as salmonella, tuberculosis and ornithosis (a mild form of psittacosis - pneumonia-like symptoms).

They are also a source of allergens, which can cause respiratory ailments like pigeon fancier's lung and allergic skin reaction.

There is potential for these illnesses to be spread to people through contact with pigeon droppings, dandruff and feathers; pigeon parasites; or where dead infected pigeons get into food or water sources.

## Proofing against pigeons

Total proofing against all birds can only be guaranteed by the closure of all openings bigger than 20mm in diameter.

Pigeon proofing includes simple tasks like sealing gaps under eaves and replacing missing roof tiles

Pigeons can be deterred from using common perching and roosting sites such as window ledges and roofs by fitting stainless steel wires suspended and sprung at the correct height to prevent the birds from landing.

Other commonly-available deterrents to the feral pigeon include barrier gel, spikes and bird repellent gel.

## Feeding pigeons

This is an unhygienic and anti-social practice. Feeding pigeons encourages them to gather in increasing numbers which leads to nuisance, and annoyance.

Pigeon feeding is harmful because it makes pigeons dependent on people. If they were less dependent they would arguably be less susceptible to disease and other health risks. Pigeons are wild birds and are capable of fending for themselves.

Feeding feral pigeons can deprive other birds of food and might scare them from your garden. Smaller birds such as thrushes and finches are often frightened away when numbers of much larger pigeons arrive. Feral pigeons can also carry viruses that can be spread to other birds causing death.

People who feed pigeons often end up feeding more than they bargained for. On occasions when food is plentiful, pigeons may not always eat everything left out for them. The remaining food goes bad and may attract rats and mice, which can spread disease to humans.

## Control

One of the most effective methods of limiting the size of flocks is by controlling feeding. Limitation of food availability will, by natural means, reduce breeding rates and discourage influx of pigeons from other areas.

The Council usually **does not**:

- shoot birds, for reasons of public safety;
- poison or bait birds, because it is not possible to guarantee that we can comply with our legal obligation to ensure that other animals are not inadvertently harmed;
- trap birds, because this is ineffective and costly.



Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*