

# PERMANENT AND HUMANE PIGEON- CONTROL SOLUTIONS



## Managing Pigeon Numbers

Feral pigeon populations in urban areas around the world become a concern for residents and property owners when the birds, seeking shelter and a place to nest, take up residence in city buildings and are seen as an inconvenience by the community. As “pest” control companies play to this intolerance as a sure-fire way to rustle up business, the public is often told that pigeons are a pest and a health hazard and that they spread diseases and parasites to humans and domestic animals. In reality, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and departments of health around the country agree that pigeons do not pose a threat to public health.

Cities and companies that perceive a “pigeon problem” traditionally resort to methods such as trapping, shooting, and poisoning as a way to reduce the population. These methods are ineffective and have even contributed to an overall increase in the number of pigeons in a given area.

The U.K.-based Pigeon Control Advisory Service (PiCAS) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) present a holistic, integrated plan below that has consistently proved to reduce pigeon populations by an average of 50 percent and keep them at that reduced level.

But first, here is a brief look at the conventionally employed methods of reducing pigeon populations and an explanation as to why they don’t work.

## Traditional Control Methods Don’t Work

Conventional methods of pigeon population control invariably involve killing adult pigeons and have proved unsatisfactory and ineffective. It has been found that the population in fact increases as a result of killing off part

of the population because once the adult pigeons are removed, younger birds no longer experience such fierce competition for food and are thus left to breed out of control. The reduced population also results in a greater amount of food for the remainder of the flock, and because pigeons breed in relation to the extent of available food, this also contributes to a buildup in flock size. In fact, population numbers have been shown not only to quickly rise to the original figure but in many cases to exceed it.

Lethal bird control is a multibillion-dollar business worldwide. Despite research establishing the ineffectiveness of lethal control and the continued success of humane control methods described later in this report, it is no surprise that many “pest” control operators (PCOs) still recommend lethal control as a viable option. Because these lethal methods ensure that pigeon populations not only return to original levels but also exceed them, this means return business for PCOs indefinitely. Operators thus have a vested commercial interest in marketing lethal control, such as the methods described below:

### 1. Trapping Is Cruel and Ineffective

Many cities address their pigeon problems by seeking to trap resident pigeons through a lure of a live bird or grain and relocating them to another region or killing them once trapped. Such a method ultimately proves ineffective because of the following:

- Relocation either transfers pigeons to other communities or results in pigeons’ returning to the original location (pigeons will almost always return directly to their roost because of their extraordinary homing instincts). If relocated far enough away, it

is, of course, possible that some pigeons may not return to their home, but to survive, they must be released near a source of food. If they are not released in close proximity to humans, they may starve. Transferring the overpopulation concern to another city is not the solution.

- Trapping primarily captures adult birds, which leaves flightless and orphaned infant pigeons (squabs) to die of starvation, and because pigeons breed throughout the year, trapping can lead to public relations problems. It also leaves the squab carcasses to rot and become maggot-infested, presenting a health risk.
- Cities employing programs that trap and kill not only exacerbate the overpopulation problem as outlined above but also are open to a public relations nightmare.

## 2. Poisoning Is Dangerous and Ineffective

In the U.K., poisoning pigeons has been outlawed as an indiscriminate cause of massive suffering and painful, often lingering deaths, not only to the pigeons but also to other bird species, including migratory songbirds who consume the laced feed and any birds of prey or mammals who consume contaminated bodies. Poisoning has also proved both in Europe and the U.S. to be ultimately ineffective in reducing pigeon numbers. Yet, despite their inability to provide long-term solutions, poisons are still used extensively in the U.S. on our pigeon populations and as a result have managed to increase pigeon numbers for the reasons outlined above.

## 3. Narcotic Baits and Hallucinogens Cause Suffering

Products such as Avitrol are often misrepresented to cities by PCOs as a way of moving birds away from problem areas without killing them. Treated grain is left for the pigeons in the same way that poison would be administered. The drug is intended to work as a “chemical scarecrow” to deter other birds who have not eaten the treated bait. The company claims that the drug causes affected birds to issue warning cries and show signs of distress that warn the others that the target area is not a safe place to be, and the birds move off.

There are several key problems with employing this method of control:

- The product was developed for birds who have a physiological ability to make distress calls, but according to the Urban Wildlife Society and the Animal Protection Institute of America, pigeons do not make a sound when in pain and cannot issue the loud alarm notes required for the product to be effective.
- Avitrol Corp.’s own president has explained that the product “causes the bird’s brain wave to go flat” and that the pigeon’s “distress cry” is, in fact, impulsive muscle twitches “that make the bird appear as though it is trying to communicate.”
- Pigeons who ingest Avitrol experience not only these muscle twitches, but also seizures, regurgitation, disorientation, rigidity, loss of muscle coordination, and cardiac arrest.
- Songbirds and birds of prey can also consume the Avitrol-laced feed. It is a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (with an attached \$15,000 fine per violation) to directly or indirectly harm any bird, with the exception of pigeons, starlings, grackles, and English house sparrows. Ward Stone, wildlife pathologist for the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, has proved that protected and endangered birds, including red-tailed hawks and peregrine falcons, die as a result of preying upon pigeons who have consumed Avitrol. Consequently, Avitrol was banned in New York in 2000 and in San Francisco. It has even led to the filing of a lawsuit by a family who was exposed to Avitrol around its Las Vegas apartment building and became ill as a result.

Narcotics are also administered to pigeons in an effort to induce stupor so that the birds can more easily be caught and killed. However, the vast majority of birds who consume the bait fly away to die of starvation, dehydration, or hypothermia, or members of the public find them flopping around on roads and pavements in a distressed state and complain to the mayor’s office and public works departments. Nontargeted predators who consume the drugged birds can die from the narcotic.

## 4. Shooting Is Cruel and Unreliable

Shooting fails to address overpopulation concerns. PCOs that employ shooting as a method of pigeon control rarely require their employees to undergo any formal training before taking an air gun or pellet rifle to typical roosting places. Because it is virtually impossible to kill a bird as large as a pigeon this way,

the majority of the targeted birds are merely wounded or maimed by the pellet rifles and left to die. PiCAS reports various cases in which wildlife rescue organizations have been called in to clean up the mass of dead and dying birds after a shooting, justifiably causing a public relations nightmare. In addition, discharging firearms is not legal in most urban areas. Although shooting requires minimal effort on the part of the control company, ensures return business, and is therefore frequently recommended as a viable method of control, it is inhumane and it does not address overpopulation concerns in the long term.

### Why Lethal Controls Are Ineffective

Lethal controls are ineffective because they do not address the cause of overpopulation. As noted above, killing adult pigeons in a feeding flock will favor younger birds who, without the employment of lethal control methods, would otherwise have a poorer chance of survival. Many older, nonbreeding birds are killed in lethal control operations, leaving the younger, healthy stock to breed.

Lethal controls therefore fail to deal with the source of the problem, which is the overabundance of food sources available to the pigeon population. As Guy Merchant, the director of PiCAS, explains:

Pigeons control their own numbers very effectively according to the volume of food available to them. An adult pair of pigeons will usually breed up to 4-6 times a year but can breed more frequently in optimum conditions, producing 2 young each time. If, however, the food supply is dramatically reduced and there is only enough food to support the existing flock, adult birds may only breed once or twice or possibly not at all. Pigeons will not produce young if there is insufficient food to support them. If, however, the food supply increases for any reason (following a cull, for example), pigeons will breed [continually] until the flock reaches the point where it is fully exploiting the food available to it.



Thus, “culling” pigeon populations has the same effect on flock size as does an increase in available food.

### PiCAS Integrated Management: The Humane and Permanent Solution

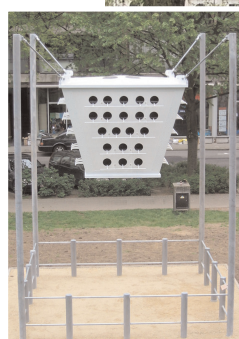
The solution to pigeon population control lies in controlling food sources and the places in which food is available to the pigeons. PiCAS can guide you through the best way to reduce pigeon numbers using such a method.

### What Is PiCAS, and What Can It Do for You?

PiCAS is the leading international authority on humane pigeon control programs. Merchant is recognized as the premier expert in reducing pigeon numbers and introducing permanent solutions to pigeon roosting and nesting problems and has 30 years’ experience in successfully doing so. The method created by PiCAS is widely used in Europe and is endorsed by the British Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

PiCAS provides total backup to cities and companies choosing to employ a humane method of control, offering a comprehensive, free, and knowledgeable service.





Kortrijk, Belgium



### The PiCAS Method: Consistent Success in Reducing Pigeon Numbers

PiCAS has had steady, proven results with integrated and humane management programs throughout Europe. This has garnered widespread recognition that this is the only effective method of controlling pigeon populations as well as praise and recognition from the community, commercial interests, and animal welfare organizations alike. Clients ranging from cities and counties to large hospitals, railways, corporate headquarters, heritage sites, and others look to PiCAS to put in place a solution to their pigeon problem.

On average, the PiCAS method reduces pigeon populations by about 50 percent, indefinitely. Some case studies of cities and sites where this has been achieved are outlined below, but first, the essential features of a PiCAS plan are outlined.

### The Secrets of Success

The key reasoning behind the PiCAS method acknowledges that there are two entirely separate problems associated with pigeons in urban areas: There is the overnight roosting for the purposes of sleeping and breeding, and then there is the

perching during the day to exploit food sources. Feeding and roosting areas will generally be separate, and the pigeons will migrate between the two at dawn and dusk. PiCAS favors an integrated approach focusing on the following complementary practices:

- Identifying areas to be used as designated feeding areas and on which artificial roosting and nesting houses (dovecotes) can be constructed. In many cities where notable monuments or buildings reside and there is a substantial tourist industry, these dovecotes can be fashioned in the image of a well-loved city landmark. Pigeon populations are then diverted to these chosen areas, and the amount of feed that is distributed to the population is controlled. PiCAS recommends selecting an area that is relatively close to established roosting sites and in which pigeons are already present to some extent.
- Removing eggs from the dovecotes and replacing them with dummy eggs to reduce pigeon numbers. Egg removal could be done by city staff or volunteers from local wildlife groups, and PETA is ready and willing to assist with such programs.
- Obtaining widespread media coverage to accomplish the following:
  - Make the public aware of the program and the existence of the new designated feeding sites
  - Discourage feeding other than within these areas
  - Explain why this control is desirable for the city and the pigeons by outlining how feeding is contrary to pigeon welfare in the long run and that the new designated feeding sites are part of a plan to reduce pigeon numbers
  - Emphasize to the city's property owners the importance of a citywide pigeon-proofing effort
- Encouraging property owners in areas of concern to pigeon-proof their buildings to discourage roosting and nesting by installing humane exclusion and deterrent measures and explaining why this is essential to addressing the pigeon problem. PiCAS is willing and able to become thoroughly

involved in helping businesses to find the most cost-effective and proven methods to ensure that property owners can address their concerns, and PiCAS can also help the city produce a leaflet to be distributed to property owners offering advice on how best to pigeon-proof. It recommends that local authorities be the first to pigeon-proof in an effort to lead by example.

The key benefit of this scheme is twofold: Not only does the method reduce pigeon numbers, it also works to relocate pigeons from key areas of concern into a less sensitive area (where, for example, there is a less dense residential population and/or fewer commercial properties affected by the damage caused by pigeon droppings).

Following is a more detailed outline of some of the key features listed above.

### 1. Designated Feeding Areas and Dovecotes: Moving Pigeons off Problem Areas

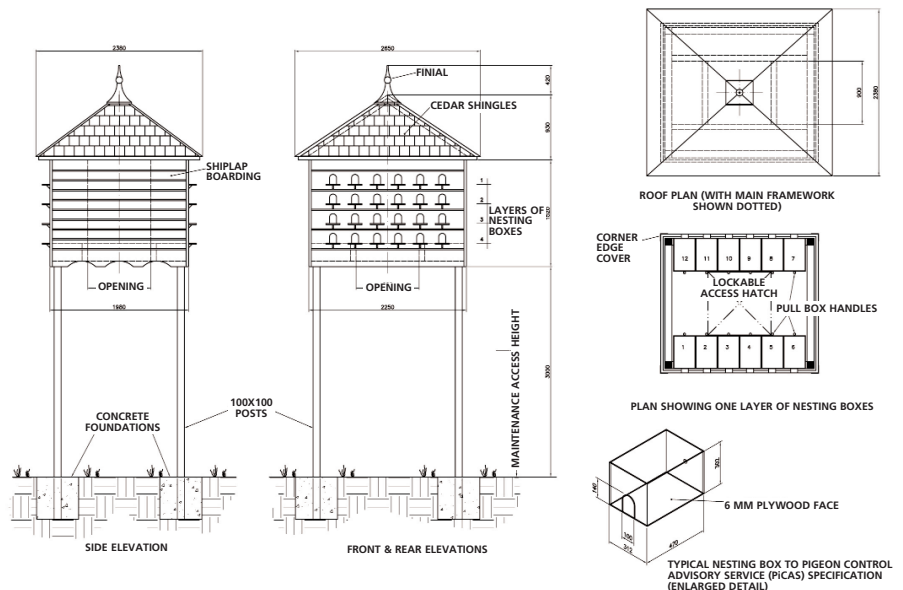
One of the key concerns for many cities that contact PiCAS for assistance is how to control public feeding. City councils have conventionally erected notices requesting that the public not feed pigeons in certain sensitive areas or, in some cases, notices prohibiting the feeding of pigeons. Public education literature, such as leaflets and signs, has also been used often in an attempt to educate the public about the issues. These are often successful with the general public but not with deliberate and persistent feeders. Prohibitive public education campaigns have often led to feeders' actually putting down more, not less, feed, and persistent feeders have resorted to feeding late at night or early in the morning to avoid detection. This, of course, encourages and sustains rodent and seagull populations as well as pigeon flocks.

PiCAS' method seeks to address the needs of persistent feeders by moving pigeons to less sensitive areas of the city and allowing, but not encouraging, feeding on these sites, rather than prohibiting feeding entirely. Feeders

are told by cities working with PiCAS that they can legitimately feed pigeons within the designated feeding areas but not, under any circumstances, outside of them and that, if this is violated, they will be prosecuted.

Once the pigeons have been attracted to the designated area by the food offered, the dovecote will provide them with a daytime perching facility that will draw pigeons away from their existing daytime roosts, and the birds will also begin to use the dovecote as an alternative overnight roost. When pigeons have become familiar with the dovecote, it is likely that they will start to use it not only for daytime perching and overnight roosting, but also for the purpose of breeding. At that point, any eggs laid can be removed and replaced with dummy eggs on a daily or weekly basis.

Juvenile pigeons will be the first to take up residence in the dovecote because mature adult breeding pairs will be reluctant to leave their existing overnight roosts, but once the existing large-scale roosts used by the adults (such as the lofts of disused buildings) have been pigeon-proofed or demolished and adult birds excluded, it is likely that these adult birds will start to use the dovecote as their new home, too.



## 2. Pigeon-Proofing and Deterrent Devices: Keeping Pigeons off Problem Areas

Because the feral pigeon is a direct descendant of the rock dove, a cliff-dwelling bird who roosted and nested on small ledges on coastal cliffs, the favorite roosting and perching places for pigeons are city center buildings that simulate cliff faces and windowsills and parapets that simulate ledges. Therefore, commercial property owners and leaseholders are normally the major victims of pigeon-related damage. However, these parties are often reluctant to spend money on pigeon-proofing their properties because many commercially available pigeon-proofing products break down and degrade very quickly, the installation quality is poor, or the products themselves are extremely expensive.

PiCAS emphasizes to property owners the importance of pigeon-proofing in an effort to reduce pigeon occupancy and offers free, expert, and independent advice on pigeon-proofing, often recommending alternative methods of pigeon-proofing that cost a fraction of the cost of the commercially available counterpart. More on this possibility is outlined below in the “benefits and costs” portion of the report.

PiCAS normally recommends that local authorities produce a leaflet or “round robin” letter for commercial property owners explaining that the city is working in partnership with PiCAS and that if independent help or advice on pigeon-proofing is required, they can contact PiCAS directly for advice. Obviously, once one property owner has successfully pigeon-proofed a property, it will be in the best interests of adjoining property owners to pigeon-proof also in order to prevent the pigeons from simply shifting residence.

Pigeon-proofing alone is not enough and must be used as part of the integrated strategy mapped above. If only pigeon-proofing is used, pigeons will merely move from one building to the next. For the program to be effective, pigeons must not only be excluded but also drawn away from key areas, and their numbers must be reduced through egg removal.

## 3. Public Education: Getting the Community to Help You

To ensure that pigeon numbers continue to decrease indefinitely, a vigorous public education and information

campaign is a must. Members of the public and the commercial interests in the community need to understand the purpose of the program and what it will achieve through their cooperation and support. Particularly, building owners need to understand the importance of pigeon-proofing their properties to discourage perching and to force pigeons away from existing roosts and onto artificial breeding sites. Members of the public need to understand why food for pigeons must be decreased and that any food offered must be given in the designated areas. The need for high standards of hygiene and upkeep outside fast-food outlets and food shops must be emphasized to the business owners to ensure that minimal commercial refuse is left lying in the streets. Support should also be sought from this quarter to display explanatory posters and hand out leaflets to customers.

The educational campaign should focus on the fact that a reduction in available food will not result in starvation for large numbers of pigeons; it will simply mean that pigeons will slow their breeding rate or stop it altogether. The PiCAS program, focusing on a reduction in feeding from the public’s perspective, must be understood to be a natural way to control pigeon numbers as an alternative to lethal controls. The literature should be designed for those who like and feed pigeons rather than for members of the public who consider pigeons pests and do not feed them.

In addition, PiCAS often recommends printing the PiCAS logo and contact information on distributed literature so that concerned residents can contact PiCAS directly for assurances that the program in place is the most humane solution. PiCAS also recommends stating that if the program is not complied with by the public and therefore proves ineffective, it is likely that lethal controls may be considered in the future.

## The Benefits and Costs of PiCAS

PiCAS’ integrated program saves money. It is useful to examine how much is spent on control methods now, whether a PCO is being paid to trap or shoot pigeons or widespread poisoning of pigeons is being conducted year after year. Over time, coupled with the cleanup costs for buildings and statues that are bombarded with droppings from populations that never seem to go down, the cost of using lethal control methods can quickly add up.

PiCAS provides  
free, expert advice  
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counterpart.



In contrast, there is no cost to a city or company to consult PiCAS and receive the benefit of its expert advice. PiCAS representatives do not take a fee for their time and effort—they are only interested in making sure that a solution is implemented that works for the people and the pigeons.

The only cost at the outset to explore how PiCAS can help permanently solve a pigeon problem is the cost of a round-trip ticket from the U.K. and accommodations for the PiCAS representative while in the U.S. (three to seven days).

Continuing outlay for the relative simplicity of the PiCAS program and its lasting effectiveness means that costs are

comparatively low, particularly for labor expenses because maintaining the dovescotes and feeding areas does not require much time. Furthermore, PiCAS offers to train and provide ongoing support and advice to staff assigned to monitor the feeding and nesting sites. PiCAS helps to keep the cost of the program low by working with the city to help locate commercial sponsors and funding in the community, which are often forthcoming because property owners are the prime targets of pigeon-related nuisance and are therefore the most enthusiastic to get on board. Individual commercially sponsored cotes are a good way to get businesses involved and can even be constructed, for example, as a replica of a business brand or icon.

### The PiCAS Method in Action: Proven and Ongoing Successes

Some examples of places where this method has worked and is working to reduce and manage pigeon populations in Europe include the following:

- ✓ **Basel, Switzerland:** From 1988 to 1992, Basel halved its street pigeon population through an integrated management program. The city had previously tried trapping, shooting, and oral contraceptives, all of which failed to effectively reduce pigeon numbers. Identifying the limitation of food sources as the only solution, the world's leading scientist in the field, Professor Daniel Haag-Wackernagel of the University of Basel, recommended that the city mount a public education campaign emphasizing that public feeding was the root of the problem and explaining the ultimate harm to the pigeons. Basel built lofts in city buildings and established areas where feeding was permitted near the lofts. Eggs were removed from the lofts, and during the four-year period of Haag-Wackernagel's oversight, the pigeon population was reduced by 50 percent.
- ✓ **Augsburg, Germany:** Augsburg currently has seven pigeon lofts in the city and is close to completing an eighth. The number of lofts is expected to grow to 15 by the end of 2006. In 2002 alone, 12,000 eggs were removed from the new lofts. Augsburg has seen a marked reduction in damage to buildings because the pigeon droppings are collected largely in the lofts.
- ✓ **Aachen, Germany:** After acknowledging that trapping and killing pigeons was not making "any noticeable change" to the pigeon numbers, Aachen has now installed seven pigeon lofts that are maintained by volunteer staff and activists. A spokesperson for the city said that the city wants to continue with the integrated program because the lofts are producing the desired results.
- ✓ **Paris, France:** The city had tried conventional control methods but did not obtain satisfactory results, so in 2003, Paris put up its first pigeon loft. Paris has chosen to addle (shake) the eggs to prevent them from hatching. The program has the support of the French Society for the Protection of City Birds. A spokesperson for the city said that the new plan works to "improve relations between Parisians and these birds" and reduces the damage caused by droppings.
- ✓ **Nottingham City Hospital, U.K.:** A good example of the effectiveness of the PiCAS method in a commercial setting, the 60-acre hospital started killing some of its 1,200-strong resident pigeon population in 1999 but stopped immediately because of a public outcry. The hospital then brought in PiCAS to devise a humane control program and reduced its pigeon population by 50 percent within a year. The population in 2002 was further reduced to 360 birds, and a recent survey has counted only 62 resident birds on site. This massive reduction was achieved exclusively by using nonlethal methods of control. The hospital won the 2003 Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (UK) Best Practice Award for its humane and effective program in association with PiCAS.

As an example of construction and maintenance costs, the German city of Augsburg found it more expensive, according to the city's finance officer, to employ lethal controls and constantly clean buildings than to introduce an integrated program. Currently, the city spends about \$2,000 on construction materials for each dovecote or \$15,000 if it contracts to have the dovecote constructed. The dovecotes are cleaned and maintained two to three times a week, which takes approximately three hours for each visit. Augsburg also uses community volunteers to keep costs low, and PETA can work with communities to locate and organize volunteers to aid in running the PiCAS program.

If the more intricate and picturesque dovecotes such as those found in Augsburg are not desired, simpler features such as wall-mounted nesting boxes that can cost as little as \$40 to \$60 each or pigeon "lofts" that cost \$400 to \$600 can be constructed. All these options are effective and can simply be tailored to suit the available budget and the aesthetics of the designated site. As long as the facility has been constructed with the needs and behaviors of the pigeons in mind and has been erected on an appropriate site, pigeons will begin to take up residence and can be managed from the site.

Perhaps the biggest benefit for cities in adopting a PiCAS program is the savings that PiCAS can arrange for commercial property owners in the city. As noted above, one of the key features of the PiCAS method is working with property owners to ensure that their buildings are adequately and properly pigeon-proofed in order to make that area as unattractive to pigeons as possible. Pigeon-proofing can be achieved through a range of deterrents such as anti-roosting spikes, and PiCAS has extensive experience working with property owners to determine how best to address their individual concerns.

PiCAS can offer the client sources for a wide range of control options and deterrents that will not only be completely effective in the long term but also can be obtained at a fraction of the cost that a commercial PCO would charge. For example, PiCAS has a noncommercial relationship with a U.K. producer of anti-roosting devices that, having established a presence in Florida, can supply top-quality stainless-steel anti-roosting spikes to U.S. clients for less than even the wholesale price. U.S. clients who confirm that they will solely use nonlethal controls to address pigeon issues can enjoy a further 15 percent discount on these products, making the humane pigeon control option even more cost-effective.

It is also worthwhile to consider the possibility of offering a franchise to sell high-quality pigeon feed adjacent to the designated feeding area. This would ensure that the right food was offered to pigeons (rather than large quantities of processed food that not only would be damaging to their health, but might also attract rodents and seagulls), and it would create revenue for the city to offset the costs involved in cleaning and servicing the site.

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