



Feral pigeons can be public health pests. They can accumulate wherever there is food and shelter, and can take up residence almost anywhere, including around houses, tall city buildings or schools. As well as being a nuisance and causing extensive damage to property, feral pigeons can also pose a risk to human health.

Why the concern?

Feral pigeons are common in the urban environment and although they are generally considered to be no more than a nuisance, they can potentially pose a risk to human health. Pigeons and their droppings can also cause damage to the buildings they reside, perch or nest in or on. Potential health risks and examples of damage include:

- Transmission of diseases such as histoplasmosis, cryptococcosis and psittacosis (ornithosis)
- Attraction of ticks, mites, cockroaches and rats.
- Unpleasant odour and noise issues.
- Damage to buildings and monuments due to the highly corrosive nature of pigeon droppings.
- Extensive damage to air-conditioning units and other roof top machinery.

About Pigeons

Feral pigeons are descendants of domestic homing pigeons that were introduced to Australia from Europe. Increased urban development has resulted in an increase in the number of feral pigeons due to the large number of accessible nesting spaces and readily available supply of food and water.

Pigeons are capable of breeding throughout the year and do not migrate far from their birthplace; this can make it difficult to remove them from their location.

Identifying feral pigeons

Feral pigeons can be grey, brown, or white, but are usually grey in colour with two black bars across each wing and iridescent feathers around the neck. There are no visible differences between males and females. Domestic pigeons, such as those kept as pets or for racing, are essentially the same birds as feral pigeons; however, domestic pigeons can be identified by the presence of a tag around one of their legs.

Control techniques

If you have a pigeon problem, there are many techniques that can be used to reduce or remove the population. Implementing non-lethal control techniques will provide the most effective long term results. The best way to minimise or prevent the nuisance caused by feral pigeons is to control where they roost, nest and feed.

Non-Lethal control techniques:

Removing food sources

- The most effective way of discouraging feral pigeons from infesting houses and public areas is to not feed them and remove any potential food source (eg. pet food).

The number of pigeons in an area is determined by the availability of a sustainable food supply. A plentiful food supply encourages year round breeding; therefore, the removal of the food source will result in less breeding and will also encourage the pigeons to move to another location.



Proofing

- Pigeon proofing your building will prevent pigeons from gaining access to potential nesting or roosting sites. This includes sealing any gaps into buildings and under eaves with physical barriers such as mesh or timber. Pigeons commonly perch on sites such as eaves, roofs and window ledges. A licensed pest control operator can install products such as mesh, wires, spikes and gel in these locations to prevent pigeons from landing.

Nest removal

- Regular removal of nests will, in the long term, help to discourage persistent pigeons from nesting in a particular area.

Scare devices

- Scare devices such as audio or visual deterrents can discourage pigeons from roosting or nesting.

It is important that other members of the community also adopt pigeon control techniques, otherwise the pigeons may simply relocate to a neighbouring property and the flock size will not be reduced.

Lethal control techniques:

Trapping

- Pigeons caught and killed by trapping can be replaced by new populations rapidly. As with any control technique, the source of food must be removed otherwise trapping may have minimal effect in reducing pigeon numbers.



Shooting

- A licensed pest controller will assess each situation and determine if shooting is a suitable option. Retrieval of the pigeons may not always be possible, so it is important that shots are accurate to achieve a quick kill and prevent birds suffering unnecessarily.

Poisoning

- This process must be carried out by licensed pest control operators. A painless narcotic is added to the food source and, once consumed, causes the birds to overdose and go to sleep. The birds should, in theory, consume the narcotic and sit and wait to be picked up; however, some birds may feed and fly off, and as a result can die an inhumane death. The poison is not specific to pigeons and consequently other non-target birds may be affected.

Protecting yourself

When dealing with pigeons and/or pigeon droppings it is important to ensure that you are properly protected.

The following personal protective equipment should be worn:

- protective clothing
- gloves
- goggles
- face mask/respirator

Further information

For more advice and for the control of feral pigeons you may seek the services of a licenced pest controller.

For more information

Health Protection Programs

SA Health

Telephone: 08 8226 7100 Fax: 08 8226 7102

Email: HealthProtectionPrograms@health.sa.gov.au

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au