



LIVING WITH... PIGEONS

First domesticated by humans over 5000 years ago, pigeons are now a common sight in cities, towns and parks around the world.

The pigeons most commonly seen in towns today are descendants of the rock dove, originally domesticated by humans for food and for carrying messages. These “feral pigeons” have reverted to their wild state, yet still live closely among humans and exploit the inherent advantages of urban living. Other species, such as woodpigeons, collared doves and stock doves are also present in increasing numbers in urban and particularly suburban environments. The turtle dove is Britain’s rarest pigeon species and is only found in rural areas and in increasingly declining numbers.

Pigeons are social birds and their numbers can range from pairs up to large, loose flocks. They have become ‘generalists’ through urban adaptation and will feed on seeds, buds, berries, small invertebrates and any human food scraps they can find. Pigeons usually have two eggs per brood and in urban setting can potentially breed the year round (around 1-3 broods a year), thanks to an abundant and constant food supply.

Humans have not always held such a bad opinion of pigeons; they were often praised as heroes during World War I and II, for carrying crucial messages across the battlefield. Many have even been awarded medals and Cher Ami, a homing pigeon during World War I, has a permanent exhibit in her honour at the Smithsonian Institute in the US. Today many pigeons are also highly valued as racers, so much so that in 2013 a champion racer named Bolt was purchased for almost £300,000!

With such a heritage then, why do some consider them a problem when they move into towns and cities? This is partly due to them using ledges and other structures on buildings to perch, roost and nest and the associated mess they make. Many people also enjoy feeding pigeons, which has led to large flocks congregating in these areas, often seen as a risk to public health.



Are pigeons and their nests protected?

Yes, all wild birds in England, Scotland and Wales are protected under the **Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981** (as amended). Under the Act it is an offence, subject to certain exceptions (such as the control of a species for permitted reasons under licence) – to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built. It is also an offence to take or destroy an egg of any wild bird or to kill, injure or take them.

I have found a pigeon with a ring, what should I do?

A ringed pigeon is likely to be an owned pigeon used for racing.

The best thing to do with an uninjured racing pigeon is to contact the Royal Pigeon Racing Association (RPRRA) as they have a dedicated team to help reunite lost pigeons with their owners. They can be contacted by telephone on (01452) 713529 or via the on-line form (<http://www.rpra.org/stray-reporting/>).

Racing Pigeon Associations have rules and guidelines that make it clear that it is the owner’s responsibility to ensure their pigeon is returned to them.

If the pigeon appears sick or injured, the best thing to do is to confine it and take it to your nearest vet; it will be the vet’s responsibility to contact the owner through the RPRRA. If you cannot transport the pigeon please call the RSPCA on the number overleaf.

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How can I deter pigeons?

FROM MY GARDEN:

Pigeons may sometimes be perceived as a nuisance and members of the public might wish to deter them from an area or a building for various reasons. The most humane way of doing this is **to reduce food availability**, as this is a major reason why pigeons are attracted to an area.

If you feed birds in your garden, it is often difficult to feed them without feeding pigeons as well; you will have to find ways to prevent pigeons taking the food or stop feeding birds altogether. You should also ask your neighbours not to feed them either. **Make sure to dispose of edible litter carefully** – put it in secured bins with lids to prevent it being accessible.



FROM NESTING IN MY ROOF:

- Simple wire-frame structures around chimney pots have shown some success, as has the use of bird deterrence wire. These impede the pigeons from settling on flat roofs or chimney stacks by ensuring they cannot fold their wings once they have landed.
- Anti-perching devices, such as spines, are considered to be one of the most humane ways of trying to minimise the problems these birds can cause. The spines are usually angled so that they are awkward to land on but will not impale the bird but some may also be designed to bend but be firm enough to provide an uncomfortable perching or roosting place for the bird. **However, it is vital these are installed appropriately by trained professionals and inspected regularly.**
- When installed properly, netting can provide humane, long-term solution to controlling birds. However, problems can appear when the netting is incorrectly installed or insufficiently maintained, which leaves gaps where the birds are able to enter and then become trapped, often suffering a slow and painful death. When installing netting, always check to ensure the pigeons are not breeding so that young do not get separated from their parents. **As with anti-perch devices, netting should be installed and inspected regularly.**

If you are having problems with pigeons nesting on your property, the RSPCA has produced a leaflet on 'Living with... nesting birds' which contains more information and advice

Can pigeon numbers be legally controlled?

Some species of pigeon or dove can be legally controlled under licences issued by Natural England or Natural Resources Wales. These include General Licences, but these can only be relied upon by authorised people for certain activities and only if there is the possibility of controlling the numbers humanely. Wherever possible, the RSPCA would always prefer non-lethal solutions and only if there is a serious problem and non-lethal means are ineffective or impractical should killing be contemplated.

Reasons for control include: preserve public health; reasons of air safety; to prevent serious damage to agricultural crops; or to protect other wild birds. However, it remains illegal to do anything that will cause unnecessary suffering to the birds. If breeding is taking place, but there is a risk to public health or safety, then it is possible for an authorised person to remove the birds, nests and eggs under one of these licences.

Details of these licences are available on Natural England's website (www.gov.uk/wildlife-licences).

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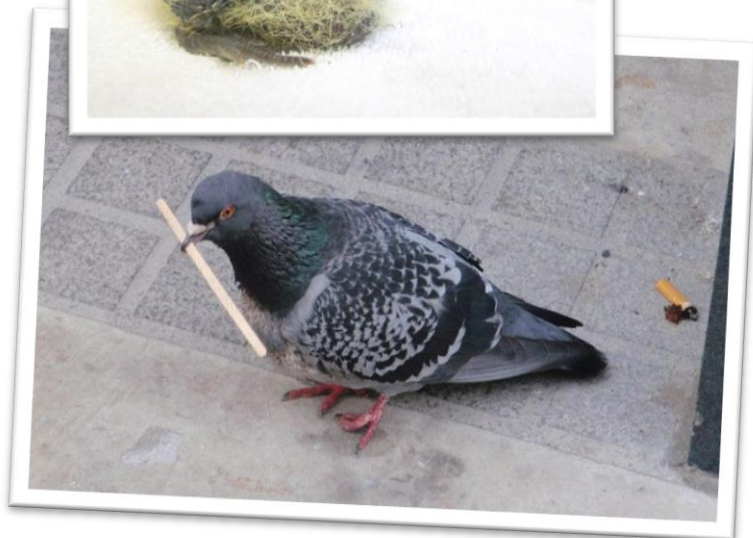
I have found a young pigeon out of its nest, should I put it back?

No - do not attempt to return a bird to the nest as this could disturb other young or any foliage that was providing valuable camouflage; it may also be illegal.

If the young bird is found in the open and is not fully feathered (a nestling that should still be in the nest) – either take it to your local vet or contact the RSPCA on the number below.

Anyone finding a **fully feathered young bird** (fledgling) on the ground should leave it alone. If the bird is injured or sick then contact the RSPCA or take the bird straight to a local vet. Otherwise, the golden rule, as with all wildlife, is to withdraw and observe. Consider the situation carefully before taking any action. If the fledgling is in danger move it to a safe place a short distance away. Retreat from the area and return an hour or so later to see if the bird is still there. Its parents are probably nearby waiting for you to go and will continue feeding it once you have left.

Most birds found in gardens leave their nest at about two weeks and will then spend some time on the ground being fed by the parent birds as they gradually learn to fly and fend for themselves. Each year between April and July as many as 20,000 fledglings are picked up and passed on to the RSPCA by people who think the bird has been abandoned or orphaned.



What should I do if a pigeon becomes entangled in netting on buildings?

If a pigeon becomes trapped in or behind netting, the owner of the building where the netting is situated should be informed. The owner should then take action and contact whoever erected the netting, as it is their responsibility to ensure that the netting is installed appropriately to prevent birds gaining access.

Under the **Animal Welfare Act of 2006**, an animal is protected when it is temporarily under the control of man and a bird trapped and suffering as a result of poorly maintained netting may constitute an offence. We always encourage the owner of the building to repair the netting and put in place a system of maintenance and checking to prevent any further problems.

If a live bird or other animal is found entangled or trapped in or behind netting, we would recommend that you contact the RSPCA on the number below.

To report an injured or sick pigeon to the RSPCA please ring the 24-hour cruelty and advice line on
0300 1234 999

If you see a dead wild pigeon please report it to
www.gardenwildlifehealth.org

