



Feral Pigeons are one of our most frequent patients, closely followed by their distant relatives, Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves. These feral birds are descended from Rock Doves (*Columba livia*). True Rock Doves are now very scarce and are characterised by a dark head, a neck that has a green and purple iridescence, grey/blue back, a white rump and grey/blue wings with two dark bars.

These Rock Doves were domesticated for food and as racing/fancy pigeons and it is these “gone wild” domestic birds that we now call feral pigeons. This domestication and selective breeding also explains why, unlike any other species of wild bird, there are so many different variations in colour within the species.

Pigeon fanciers often try to distance themselves and their birds from Feral Pigeons species but not only are they the same species, the feral pigeons that display variations in colour from the original Rock Dove colours are as a direct result of domesticated birds that have escaped, got lost or been deliberately freed.

There is probably little that we can do or say to a person who is determined to be a pigeon hater, as no amount of scientific and factual information will sway their closed minded opinions. However, this leaflet is for those who are open to logical, accurate and fact based evidence.

There are too many pigeons:

The number of pigeons in any one place is directly proportional to the amount of food that they are able to find in that place. Generally, pigeons eat seed but most people will have seen them having a go at chips, bread and even chewing gum. The birds have simply adapted to and are living off of the mess that we humans create. In addition to the huge amount of wasted food that humans leave in their wake, there are many kind hearted people who believe that they are helping by going into town centres with armfuls of food for the pigeons. Unfortunately, these are formerly domesticated birds and as such they can come to depend on handouts very quickly. When this pattern of feeding becomes a frequent occurrence, the birds will begin to breed, knowing that there is enough food now available for them to rear their chicks (all year round if food is plentiful enough). If lots of pairs of birds do this, an increase in the population is inevitable. What happens then if the kind hearted feeders can no longer keep up with the feeds? Dead and dying birds and chicks or a visit from pest control? Businesses can be largely responsible for increases in pigeon populations in town centres where food and waste disposal is negligently carried out. Please don't feed pigeons and dispose of litter responsibly.

They cause damage to buildings and streets:

As Rock Doves evolved to live on the cliffs and rocks that their name implies, so their descendants the feral pigeons, are adapted to live on town “cliffs”, ie roof tops and building ledges. They are unable to sit in trees for long periods of time and definitely unable to roost in trees. Large amounts of pigeon droppings are blamed for causing erosion to buildings but this can also be blamed on pollution from traffic. Very simple modifications in a building's structure can

discourage birds from landing or nesting on undesirable parts of the building. Vents and gaps can be sealed to prevent pigeons from entering and nesting there and anti-landing spikes can be put on ledges. As for causing problems with mess on the street? When was the last time you heard of someone been taken to hospital as a result of slipping in pigeon poo? This is just anti pigeon propaganda by the media. At worst it is simply because shop owners do not find it aesthetically pleasing, but this is not a justifiable reason to kill all pigeons!!!!

They transmit disease to humans:

This is the reason that is put forward as most people's reason for disliking pigeons. It is also the most inaccurate. In *The Journal of Infection*, volume 48, 2004; a search of epidemiological studies over more than 60 years found so few cases of diseases transmitted from feral pigeons to humans that the researchers concluded, "Although feral pigeons pose sporadic health risks to humans, the risk is very low, even for humans involved in occupations that bring them into close contact with nesting sites".

We work with pigeons every day of the week and none of our volunteers have ever been struck down by a pigeon related illness! When bird flu was first reported on in the UK, the predictable pigeon killing question was raised again when in fact, the United States Geological Survey's Diagnostic Virology Laboratory at the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin have found that pigeons tend not to be readily infected by avian influenza (bird flu). Even when exposed directly to the virus, species such as pigeons are more resistant. The RSPB spokesperson, Mike Everett, has been quoted as saying "The whole 'rats with wings' thing is just emotive nonsense. There is no evidence to show that they (pigeons) spread disease."

David Taylor BVMS FRCVS FZS: "In 50 years professional work as a veterinary surgeon I cannot recall one case of a zoonosis in a human that was related to pigeons. On the other hand I know of, and have seen, examples of human disease related to contact with dogs, cats, cattle, monkeys, sheep, camels, budgies, parrots, cockatoos, aquarium fish and even dolphins, on many occasions."

The simple fact is that pigeons are not to blame for their bad reputation. Human beings have an impressive attitude of passing the buck when it comes to taking responsibility for our own actions. We should clean up our own messes and take care of our own surroundings instead of deeming the achievement of another species adapted to live off of our waste as a "pest" and "vermin" to be killed when they become too successful for our liking.

It is with some relief that local councils seem to be taking notice of the facts and evidence about pigeons instead of just calling in pest control companies. These companies, instead of be honest about the lack of success of their "control" methods, have an avid desire to secure an ongoing and lucrative contracts which sees them persistently returning to pigeon sites to kill flocks of birds that never seem to reduce in numbers. The simple fact is that the lethal control methods used by these companies do not work. They simply open up gaps in the flock to be filled by birds who would otherwise not breed due to competition for food and roosting space. The only methods that seem to have an impact on flock numbers are those used by The Pigeon Control Advisory Service (PiCAS) who specialise in humane control methods.

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