

Going Coo-Coo Over Pigeons?

Pigeons (*Columba livia*), also called rock pigeons, are often found roosting and nesting on school buildings. The rock pigeon was introduced into the United States as a domesticated bird, but many escaped and formed feral populations. It is now the most common bird pest associated with people. They are in Utah and throughout the United States (including Hawaii), southern Canada, and Mexico. Rock pigeons and mourning doves are sometimes confused.

What do they look like?

Rock pigeons have a larger and plumper body than a mourning dove. Both have short legs and small heads. Rock pigeons are variable in color, but most birds are bluish-gray with two black bands on the wing and a black tip to the tail. Most birds have iridescent throat feathers. Wing patterns may include two bars, dark spots, or can be plain. The tail is usually dark tipped. Mourning doves often match their open-country surroundings. They're delicate brown to buffy-tan overall, with black spots on the wings and black-bordered white tips to the tail feathers.

What are their nesting habits?

Pigeon nests consist of sticks, twigs, and grasses clumped together to form a crude platform. Breeding may occur at all seasons, but peak reproduction occurs in the spring and fall. In urban populations, however, pigeons seldom live more than 3 or 4 years.

What do pigeons eat?

Pigeons are primarily grain and seed eaters. They also will feed on garbage, livestock manure, insects, or other food provided for them intentionally or unintentionally by people.

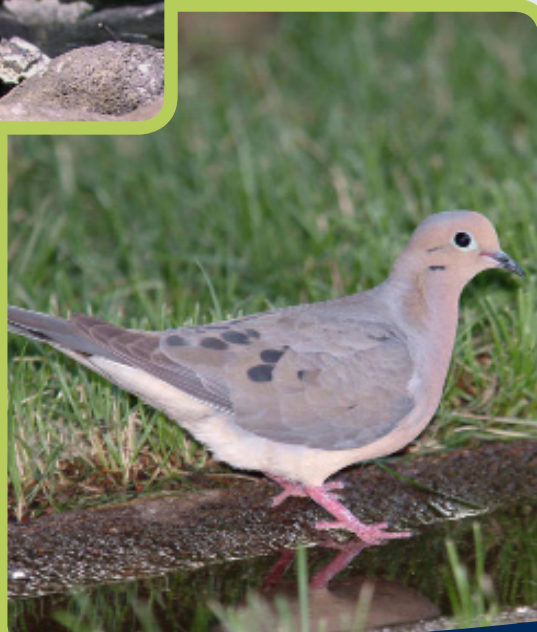
Did You Know?

- An adult pigeon has approximately 10,000 feathers.
- Racing pigeons can fly at speeds of 50 to 60 miles per hour.
- Over the years, the pigeon adopted many roles including symbols for gods or goddesses, sacrifice victims, messengers, pets, food, and war heroes.
- Pigeons were originally called rock doves and are closely related to doves.
- A pigeon's nest is often constructed of small twigs on sheltered building ledges that resemble cliffs.



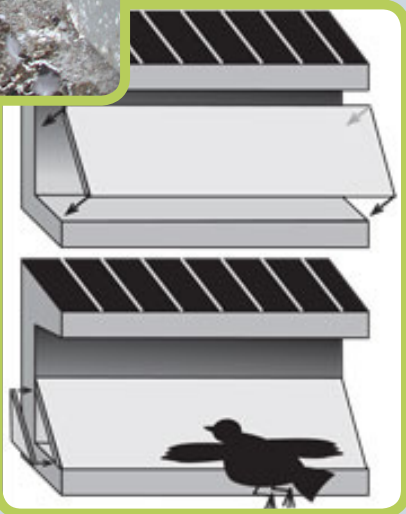
Above:
Adult rock pigeon
(Terry Spivey, USDA
Forest Service,
Bugwood.org)

Right:
Adult mourning
doves (right) can be
mistaken for rock
pigeons (Joseph Berger,
Bugwood.org).





Left: Pigeon droppings can be a health hazard if allowed to accumulate (Kevin McGrath, University of Missouri).



Right: Increasing the angle of a surface to at least 45° discourages roosting (Kevin McGrath, University of Missouri).



Techniques For Eliminating Roosts

- **Habitat modification:** Eliminate feeding, watering, roosting, and nesting sites for long term population control.
- **Frightening techniques:** Noise-making devices and predator models vary in effectiveness and often fail to provide long-term control.
- **Exclusion:** Block indoor roosts or nesting areas with wood, plastic, glass, or netting. Install porcupine wire on ledges or increase the angle of a ledge to at least 45° to discourage pigeons from roosting and nesting.
- **Contraception:** Nicarbazin is distributed as a bait in urban areas where large populations of pigeons gather. It helps control the hatchability of pigeon eggs, but requires a licensed pesticide applicator.
- **Dummy eggs:** Replacing real eggs with dummy eggs can reduce pigeon reproduction and population size.



Managing Pigeons with Integrated Pest Management

- Pigeon feeding should not be allowed on school grounds or anywhere nearby, if possible.
- Keep outdoor areas clean by providing an adequate number of trash cans and emptying them often. Teach the children to throw their food and garbage away.
- Determine the pigeon's water source and get rid of it. Fix leaky pipes and drains.
- Close openings with wood, metal, glass, or rust-proofed iron mesh in buildings that allow access to indoor nesting sites.
- If pigeons are "loafing" on the building, deterrents such as spikes, coils, sloped surfaces (pigeons cannot land on a surface that is steeper than 45°), and netting can be useful.
- Before physically modifying any area where birds are commonly present, make sure you sanitize! Histoplasmosis is a disease of the lungs caused by a fungus which grows in aged accumulations of bird droppings. Spray wash areas frequented by birds before maintenance.

For more info, check out:

University of Arizona Fact Sheet:
http://cals.arizona.edu/apmc/docs/Pigeons_at_School.pdf

EPA IPM in Schools:
www.epa.gov/pesticides/ipm

**Wildlife Damage Management--
"Pigeons":**
<http://lib.colostate.edu/research/agnic/pigeons.html>