

Pigeon or rock pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Size:

This exotic species is about 11" long, and 13 ounces.

Signs of their presence:

- The bird itself is the most obvious sign.
- Sounds: Distinctive cooing, clicking as wing tips touch during take-off.
- Droppings: May accumulate on rafters, building ledges, public areas.
- Nests: Crude-looking platform nests of sticks, twigs, and grasses. Find them near dormer tie-ins (the joint where the dormer meets the roof), on building ledges, in steeples, attics, and lofts, on top plates of pole barns, on the girders of bridges, and on ornamental architectural features of classic buildings.

Diet:

Mostly herbivorous. Pigeons eat mostly seeds and grains, but will eat garbage, livestock manure, insects, and the bread and crackers that people feed them.

Typical activity patterns:

Social style: Sociable, nesting and foraging in large flocks.

Daily activity: Diurnal.

Hibernator? No.

Migrates? No.

Where found:

Distribution in NY and the Northeast: Common in cities and around farms and certain agricultural businesses.

Habitat: Prefer domestic environments such as town and city parks, buildings, and bridges; grain elevators, feed mills, and farm yards.

Territory and home range: Pigeons will defend a small area immediately around their nest site.

Breeding habits:

Pair bonding style: Monogamous, but both sexes may occasionally mate with others, too. The male guards the female and nest. Both sexes feed the young.

Breeding dates: Year-round, with peaks in the spring and fall. Females lay more eggs even before the young leave the nest.

Clutch size: 1–2 eggs. Young hatch in about 8–12 days.

Fledging dates: Young leave the nest about 10 days after hatching.

Amount of time young remain with parents beyond fledging date: Very little, if any. If the young return to the nest

site when the parents are raising a second brood, they will be driven off.

Common nuisance situations:

Time of year: Any time of year.

What are they doing?

- Droppings deface and corrode building facades and may kill plants. They're unpleasant on park benches, statues and cars. Under certain conditions, the droppings can promote the growth of the fungus that causes histoplasmosis, an airborne disease that affects people.
- Eat or contaminate stored grain.
- One of their parasites, the northern fowl mite, is also a major pest of poultry. Other pigeon parasites (mites, fleas, lice) will bite people. Some of their parasites destroy fabric or stored foods.
- Like other birds, pigeons may cause plane crashes.
- May transfer disease from one livestock facility to another.
- Disease risks: histoplasmosis, salmonellosis (food poisoning), cryptococcosis, pigeon ornithosis, encephalitis, and Newcastle disease, among others.

Legal status in New York:

Unprotected. The pigeon is an exotic species; an exemption to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act allows for its control without a federal permit. Local ordinances may prohibit certain control measures. From ECL 11-0513:

"1. No person shall at any time, by any means or in any manner capture, kill or attempt to capture or kill any Antwerp or homing pigeon, wearing a ring or seamless leg band with its registered number stamped thereon; nor shall any person remove such mark. No person except the lawful owner shall detain, possess, or transport Antwerp or homing pigeons wearing a ring or seamless leg band with the registered number thereon.

2. Notwithstanding any other law to the contrary, the local legislative body of any city, town or village, or in the city of New York the Department of Health may take or issue a permit to any person to take pigeons at any time and in any humane manner in such municipality, whenever such body or administration finds that pigeons within such municipality are or may become a menace to public health or a public nuisance; provided, however, that no pigeon may be taken in a manner which will endanger other animal life, persons or property."

Best practices

Remove artificial food and water sources (bird seed, pools):

- If anyone’s feeding the pigeons, persuade them to stop. This can be challenging because many people love to feed pigeons.
- Clean up spilled grain around feed mills, grain elevators, railcar clean-out areas, and barns.
- Clean up spilled bird seed around feeders.
- Eliminate pools of standing water.

Make outdoor roosts less appealing:

- An overhead grid-wire system will keep pigeons from landing in a courtyard. Use 80-pound monofilament wire spaced in a square grid, with the wires one to two feet apart.
- To keep pigeons off support cables, narrow ledges, conduit, and other narrow areas, use a commercial “post-and-wire” system (Bird Barrier, Birewire™). With care, you can create a homemade version, but it will probably be much harder to install, so it’s probably not a practical approach. But if you’d like to try, here’s how. Stretch steel wire (16- to 18-gauge) or monofilament line (80-pound) in parallel lines across the area. The lines must be very tight, so fasten the wires to L-brackets with turnbuckles to remove slack. Attach the brackets to the wall using cable clamps or aircraft hose clamps, which can handle the high torque load on the wires.
- Some NWCOs report great success repelling pigeons with the Avian Dissuader®. This laser is powerful and can damage your eyes; seek proper safety training before using this product.
- Dousing the birds with water from hoses or sprinklers that are mounted near their roost may work. Be persistent.

Keep them out of, and off of, buildings:

- Seal all openings to eaves, lofts, steeples, and vents. Many materials work: metal, wood, glass, masonry, galvanized 1/4-1” hardware cloth, and plastic or nylon netting.
- To keep them out of sheds, barns, garages, hangars, and warehouses, staple 1/4-1” polypropylene netting to the underside of the roof beams.
- To keep them off ledges:
 - install a “post-and-wire” system, as described above.
 - fasten wood, stone, sheet metal, styrofoam, or plexiglass “plates” to the ledge at a 45° angle so the birds can’t comfortably perch there.

- attach a sharply pointed steel device to the ledge. There are a few variations, including porcupine wire (prongs point out in many angles), ECOPIC™ (vertical rods), and a steel coil that looks like a slinky. Pigeons don’t like to land on these objects because they hurt, but some will foil these devices by layering nesting materials over them. If that happens, remove the nest. (If the prongs are too widely spaced apart, the pigeons will find it easier to perch on them.)
- install electric shock devices on the ledge (Avi-Away™, Flyaway™, and Vertebrate Repellent System™). When the bird lands, it receives a nasty shock but is not killed.

NWCOs with a commercial pesticide applicator license: There are pesticides registered for use against pigeons in New York:

- Nontoxic repellent: Polybutenes are sticky and pigeons don’t like to land on ledges, signs or other surfaces that have been treated with them. Polybutenes can affect other species, and they can be messy and hard to remove (they won’t earn you a holiday card from the window washing crew). For these reasons, consider restricting your use of this tool to indoor applications.
- Toxic repellent: Avitrol® is registered for use against pigeons in New York, except for New York City, where it cannot be used. This restricted-use pesticide is available in a whole-corn bait mixture. Here’s how it works. Pigeons that eat the treated grain will behave erratically or gives warning cries, frightening the others in the flock. The birds that eat the Avitrol usually die. Like any lethal technique, this pesticide must be used carefully. Make sure there are no threatened or endangered raptors feeding in the area because if they ate a poisoned pigeon, they might also die.

Trapping strategies:

The pigeon is an exotic species, so please do not release any into the wild in large numbers (chapter two explains why). If a few pigeons are causing some trouble and your customer prefers nonlethal techniques, rest assured that releasing a few birds is not going to make a significant difference in New York’s pigeon population. Unfortunately, they are both abundant and well-established.

Live traps:

- Pigeon traps vary in size. If you need to capture more birds, use a bigger trap or several smaller traps.
- Trap near roosting, loafing, and feeding sites. If they're roosting in a barn, you can trap them at night using nets.
- In hot weather, trap near their water sources, such as a rooftop air-conditioning system.
- Pre-bait the traps for 3–4 days by placing corn or milo around the outside of the trap.
- Commercial pigeon trap. Various sizes. This is basically a box trap with a one-way door.
- Cage trap designs include the funnel trap, lily-pad trap, and clover-leaf trap. The name describes the shape of the trap. These portable traps are made from screen and directs the birds inwards. They work best if you leave 4–5 pigeons inside as a decoy to attract other pigeons (of course, leave food and water for the birds daily, and partially cover the trap to protect them from weather extremes).
- If the birds become trap-shy, leave the traps open for 2–3 days, then reset for 4–5 days. If it's still not working, choose another site.
- For construction details on these traps, see the "Pigeons" chapter in *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage*. Full citation in resource list.

Lethal techniques:

- Shooting, with a .22 caliber rifle, shotgun, or air rifle, can be used to remove a small flock.
- Destroy nests and eggs. If you're persistent, this may be effective. Make a sweep of the area every two weeks, and use this technique in conjunction with other management methods.
- USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services staff are authorized to use a drug called "alpha-chloralose" to capture pigeons. This is a federally controlled, highly restricted-use drug. Pigeons fed alpha-chloralose will become comatose in about an hour and a half. Chances are that you'll never use this product.
- Avitrol[®], the toxic repellent mentioned previously, does kill the birds that eat the treated bait. There is a risk of poisoning birds of prey, too, if they eat poisoned pigeons. Use the product carefully.

Preferred killing methods:

- CO₂ chamber
- Cervical dislocation
- Shooting, using an air rifle, a shotgun, or a .22 caliber rifle with bird shot

Acceptable killing methods:

- Stunning and chest compression

Control strategies that don't work well, or aren't legal in New York:

- Ultrasonics don't work—the birds can't hear them.
- Pigeons quickly become accustomed to noisemaking devices of many types. After all, they live happily under eight-lane bridges. At best, expect only a short-term effect.
- Lights, flags, balloons, rubber snakes, and owl decoys may amuse your neighbors but they won't scare the pigeons for long.