



## **FERAL PIGEON** *(Columbidae)*

### **APPEARANCE**

The feral pigeon is a descendant of domestic pigeons which have escaped and racing pigeons which were too exhausted to continue flying. Plumage can be of many colours due to fresh selectively bred birds constantly escaping and joining the feral population. There is no visible difference between the sexes with both birds being about 33 cm in length and weighing between 280-560 grammes, the average being 350 grammes.

### **LIFE CYCLE**

Breeding can occur throughout the year reaching a peak between March and July. As many as nine broods can be produced by one pair in a year with 2 eggs being laid in each clutch and usually both young are reared. Eggs are laid 10 days after mating and incubation takes a further 18 days. The young are fed by both parents



and fledge at about six weeks old, often with the next clutch in the nest before this occurs. Adults may live up to 15 years with birds in captivity often reaching over 30 years, although a more realistic life span in feral populations is around four years.

### **FEEDING HABITS**

Grain is the main diet of these birds and in feral populations food availability is the governing factor for survival, most being provided by well intending people. Populations can be reduced dramatically by the proofing of buildings containing a food source or the elimination of spillages at grain handling premises.

## **SIGNS OF INFESTATION**

Large numbers of birds will occupy town buildings where food is available and they can be seen descending rapidly when regular feeders appear with their daily supply of nutrition. Large accumulations of droppings can cause considerable nuisance and insect infestations, blocked gutters, and deterioration of ornamental masonry and brickwork may arise.

## **CONTROL**

In recent years the public health significance of feral pigeons has become more apparent and they have assumed equal status with rodents in their potential for transmitting harmful bacteria to humans. Trapping is a good form of control but is very labour intensive and may only reduce the numbers slowly. Narcotic treatments may also be implemented but this is done on a strict licensing basis. Another means of reducing the numbers is by the safe use of a gas operated air rifle in the hands of a trained marksman.

There are also various products available to proof buildings and to deter pigeons from roosting on window ledges and masonry.

If you have a feral pigeon problem our Pest Control Officers will be able to offer detailed advice, and in certain circumstances may assist in discrete control measures.

If you would like an explanation of this fact sheet in your language or to obtain copies in Braille, on audio tape or large print please contact 01509 634560.

For further information contact:

Pest Control Service  
Environmental Health Services  
Southfields  
Southfield Road  
Loughborough  
Leics LE11 2TX  
Tel: 01509 634628  
Email: [occupational.health@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:occupational.health@charnwood.gov.uk)