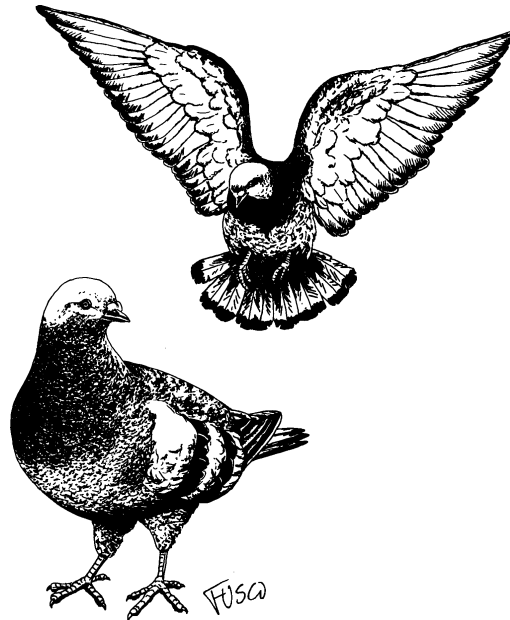


WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

INFORMATIONAL SERIES

ROCK DOVE (PIGEON)

Columba livia



Habitat: Pigeons are commonly found around barnyards, parks, and city buildings. In natural environments, pigeons usually occupy sea cliffs or caves.

Weight: 1.25 pounds, on average

Length: 13-14 inches

Food: Primarily grain and seed eaters; many subsist on unnatural food such as bread, popcorn, and peanuts in urban environments. Also, weed seeds, succulent greens, garbage, seeds found in livestock manure, and insects.

Identification: Although there are many races and forms of pigeons with variable color patterns, everyone is well-acquainted with the slate blue-gray color of the rock dove. Rock doves have iridescent green, bronze, and purple feathers, two black wing bars, a white rump patch, a distinctive broad, black band on the tail, and red feet. Their wing tips collide on takeoff, and the birds, once airborne, glide with their wings raised at an angle.

Male and female pigeons are difficult to distinguish as both are similar in coloration. Female pigeons, though, have a tendency to hold their tail higher and waddle when walking, and are somewhat smaller in size.

Range: Found throughout Connecticut, the range of the rock dove includes most of North America from southern Canada south, as well as Hawaii. Normally the home range of a pigeon flock is less than one square mile; however, pigeons will travel 10 or more miles from their roost sites in search of food. Despite gregarious traits, individuals have been known to live apart from any flock.

Reproduction: Pigeons are monogamous and mate for life, but with the disappearance of a mate, they may choose another. Although breeding may occur in all seasons of the year, peak reproduction occurs in the

spring and fall. Male pigeons are more aggressive and strut. In a mating display, males fluff up their neck ruff, drag their tail on the ground, and make loud, cooing noises. While the male selects the nest site, both sexes are involved in nest construction. Nests consist of twigs and grasses and are often located on building ledges and rafters or in eaves, steeples, and vents. Both male and female pigeons exhibit a strong territorial defense of the nest site and share in incubating the eggs (the hen taking most of the day and night shift while the cock sits for a few hours around midday). Clutch size is generally one to two and the incubation period is 17-19 days. Newly-hatched pigeons or squabs are fed a substance called pigeon milk, which is produced inside the crop of both parents. At four to six weeks of age, the young leave the nest. More eggs may be laid before the first young are fledged.

History in Connecticut: Pigeons were brought to the United States by the first European settlers in the early 1600s. They have been abundant in Connecticut throughout the past few centuries.

Interesting Facts: Common names for the rock dove include domestic pigeon and homing pigeon.

Pigeon flocks are typically made up of equal number of both sexes.

Ancestors of the rock dove originated from North African birds and European species that hybridized with Asiatic varieties.

The flight speed of the pigeon is 15 to 35 mph; trained pigeons have been clocked up to 97 mph. The pigeon's alarm note is recognized as an anxious-sounding grunt.

Rock doves were apparently the first birds to be domesticated (around 4500 B.C.), being raised first for their meat and later for their message-carrying ability.

Management of Nuisances: While some urban dwellers enjoy having friendly pigeons within sight, pigeons can be a nuisance, especially around roosting sites. Their acidic feces eat away gutters and other metal structures, erode stone buildings, and burn lawns. Pigeon droppings are also known to harbor a variety of diseases and parasites, and large accumulations may present a human health hazard. Precautionary measures such as wearing gloves, a dust mask, and washing with disinfecting soap during and after clean-up of pigeon droppings is highly recommended.

A number of options exist for managing or preventing nuisance situations involving pigeons:

Pigeon proofing: Pigeons often prefer to use the interior portions of buildings to nest and roost if an opportunity for access is provided. Openings to lofts, steeples, vents, and eaves can be blocked with 1/2-inch galvanized wire mesh, wood, sheet metal, or other solid construction materials to prevent pigeons from entering. Controlling pigeons on the exterior surfaces of buildings often requires considerably more effort. The most effective and permanent methods of control involve structural modifications which either physically exclude pigeons from the preferred surface or make it difficult for the birds to rest comfortably on the exposed building surfaces. Physical exclusion can be accomplished by installing weather resistant netting, wire screening, sheet metal, or other materials in a manner that will restrict access to the roosting sites. A grid of heavy gauge monofilament line spaced at six-inch intervals may also be used to create a fence that will interfere with the birds' normal flight pattern to the roosting area.

One of the most effective, although expensive methods for preventing roosting pigeons is the use of a commercially available bird barrier system consisting of a series of metal prongs or "porcupine wires" along a metal base that can be attached to a horizontal roosting surface. The needle-like strips of stainless steel act as a prickling fence to exclude birds permanently without harm.

Pigeons prefer to roost on level surfaces. Roosting areas can be modified to create a sloping surface, at a 60 degree incline or more, by installing wire mesh or other material to eliminate the level surfaces. There are also a number of non-toxic sticky substances registered as tactile repellents for bird control efforts. Birds tend to avoid landing upon treated areas but the effectiveness is usually lost over time.

Nest removal: Although time-consuming and unpleasant, removing nests will help depress populations. Nest destruction must be followed by pigeon-proofing the structure to achieve maximum population control.

Shooting: Feral pigeons are not protected by state or federal laws or regulations. Local municipal ordinances should be consulted prior to any control effort that will involve the discharge of firearms.

Toxicants: There is only one product registered for lethal control of pigeons in Connecticut and can only be used by a certified pest control operator under a special permit from DEP Pesticides. The product is generally not appropriate or feasible for most nuisance situations experienced by the average homeowner.

Trapping: Pigeons may be live-trapped on buildings and other likely locations with permission of the property owner. A DEP permit is issued without fee for the purpose of removing birds which are damaging structures or have become a nuisance. Live-traps for pigeons are available commercially from major trap suppliers. Pre-baiting the traps with grains that the birds are accustomed to will increase success. A variety of baits, including cracked corn, millet, popcorn, sunflower seeds, peas, bread, and peanuts can be used. Water should be available in the trap at all times. Trapping in any given area is usually slow, labor intensive, and only a **temporary** reduction measure.

Repellents: Acoustical and visual repellents are other means of reducing pigeon usage, but pigeons usually become accustomed quickly to these scare devices. Some homeowners have reported limited success using helium-filled eyespot balloons, predator (owl) decoys, and reflective mylar tape in roosting areas. The same limited success is achieved by the use of noisemaking devices such as tape-recorded bird distress calls, firing of blank cartridges, and the use of propane-fired cannons in agricultural areas. Combining a number of techniques and frequent changes in the duration and location of the repellent may increase success.



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