



## **Pigeons perpetually plaguing properties: Those who prepare and spend will be spared - by Heath Waldorf**

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Heath Waldorf, Bird Control Advisory

Ask three people how to deal with a pigeon problem in N.Y.C. and you will get three different answers and three different prices. Why can't you get a straight answer? Over the years, there has been a shift in how facilities managers, property owners, and exterminators handle pest birds in and around the N.Y.C. area. Whereas some may love the "ahem" charm of city pigeons, for building owners and managers pigeons are a plague and a plight to be reckoned with.

The urban environment is ideal for both terrestrial and flying rats. With lots of food, sun, and shelter in places that are relatively inaccessible to people, pigeon populations are thriving. While no neighborhoods are entirely safe, some pose a greater threat than others such as adjacent to the High Line those near elevated roadways where birds retreat to nightly.

In addition to simply having ledges on a building, there are numerous environmental considerations promoting likelihood of a bird problem. These include:

- Evidence of a problem on neighboring buildings.
- Open space or parks (particularly in urban areas).
- Food sources in the vicinity.
- Knowledge of deterrent systems installed on neighboring buildings.
- Landscape.
- Garbage storage/collection.
- Rooftop equipment design.

The remedy for pest birds used to be relatively cheap and relatively simple with pest control operators deploying various poisons. That all changed in 2000 when Avitrol was outlawed in N.Y.C.

and became taboo in the public eye in surrounding areas. This led to a shift from a focus on elimination of birds to protection of buildings. For the past 16 years, pest management companies have been busy installing barrier deterrents (spikes or raised wires), exclusionary devices (netting), and behavior modification systems (electric track) on buildings all over the area.

When well thought out, suitably designed, installed by qualified trained professionals, and appropriately maintained, you can rest assured that these current methods of bird control, though costly, are generally effective and are more aesthetically pleasing than most in the real estate industry would expect. These systems which cost, on average, tens of thousands of dollars to install have proven a worthwhile investment in response to existing and more and more often as a prevention of potential pest bird problems.

Mitigation (prevention) of problems can be accomplished through integration of systems, but costly as these systems can be, is a tough sell to those who have not previously been through remediation and responsive bird control. Often the preventative systems are only instituted as part of some larger project such as façade rehabilitation, repointing or local law 11 inspections when scaffolding is in place thus reducing the cost and increasing the value of the bird deterrent installation.

The next shift in how to deal with pest birds is upon us now. Just as architects, in part inspired by LEED, have paid attention to birds with respect to collisions, thought leaders within the industry are becoming more considerate of how to prevent pest bird problems in the design process of new construction or renovation.

This effort is twofold. First by integrating the available deterrent systems into construction documents and coordinating the integration with other trades, decisions are made in the architectural process, rather than by pest control companies. This increases operability functionality of these measures and lessens the invasiveness of installations post construction. For example, an architectural mesh could be used in lieu of bird netting that accomplishes exclusion but may also yield an aesthetic value.

Second, architects are considering how their designs will impact the likelihood (inevitability) of a future bird problem. With more important elements of design that owners and architects must worry about, they too frequently overlook the details that can exacerbate a potential bird problem. Often, both the problems of pest birds and expensive systems installations can be averted by making simple design changes identifiable as early as the conceptual design phase.

Getting good answers about how to handle a bird problem has been a tough task. The only info available has come from the suppliers and installers of expensive systems. This is comparable to the healthcare industry with drug manufacturers and pharmacies as your only sources for information about how to treat an ailment. Utilizing an independent resource such as an expert consultant is akin to seeing a doctor in the above analogy.

Bird problems are a reality in and around N.Y.C. Where they roost and reside, however, is up to you as a real estate owner, developer, or architect. Those who prepare and spend will be spared.

Heath Waldorf, MS, CSI, CDT, GPRO CM, is a principal consultant at Bird Control Advisory, Pine Brook, N.J.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540