

The San Francisco SPCA

Living With Wildlife Series



Humane Bird Deterrents

Birds provide a touch of nature in our urban environment. Development and other human actions remove habitat for some types of birds and create it for others. Many birds who call San Francisco home today are hardy survivors who have adapted to City life especially well. One avian city dweller we are particularly familiar with is the rock dove--also known as the pigeon.

Pigeons, long considered a symbol of peace, are intelligent, adaptable birds who will roost and nest on nearly any horizontal surface--not surprising since their ancestors, like today's wild pigeons, were cliff-dwelling birds. Pigeons mate for life, and both the male and female are protective and affectionate with each other and their young. Both build and sit on the nest during the 17-day incubation period. Take the time to watch, and you will notice their fascinating preening and courtship rituals. Pigeons are capable of speedy flight, have highly developed homing instincts, and keen eyesight--they have even been trained to help rescuers spot shipwreck victims in the ocean.

Watching birds is a relaxing and enjoyable pastime for many people. But for those who wish to discourage birds from roosting or nesting on their homes or buildings, there are many humane solutions:

Barriers

- Bird netting can be used to block access to nooks and crannies where birds like to roost. Netting is available at some hardware stores and through a company called Birdbarrier (800-662-4737). It comes in a variety of sizes for different types of birds. Many experts consider netting to be the best barrier available.
- Bird Wire consists of parallel strands of wire strung between pegs of various heights, preventing the birds from landing. It is also available from Birdbarrier.
- If birds are landing on a railing or narrow ledge, secure a stretched out Slinky toy or other wire coil. The birds cannot land on it.
- Cover the ledge with a board slanted at an angle greater than 45 degrees--the birds cannot keep their footing, and will stop landing there.
- Some buildings may be glazed with a coating that dries to a hard, slippery finish. (Not to be confused with sticky gel products). Check with painters or building contractors.

Deterrents

- Wind chimes.
- White balloons can be painted with black concentric circles to look like the eyes of predators, frightening birds away. "Scary Eye" balloons can be purchased at hardware stores and through Birdbarrier. Mylar balloons may also be effective.

Deterrents, cont'd...

- Garbage can liners cut in strips can be hung around the area you wish to protect.
- Hang strips of mylar flash tape on plants, trees, and ledges. Its holographic pattern reflects flashes of light and prevents birds from landing.
- Silhouettes of hawks (natural pigeon predators) can be placed in windows, on roofs, and other locations to scare birds away.
- A motion-activated sprinkler that sprays water at intruding animals is manufactured by Contech (800-767-8658).

Ideas that do not work

- Killing or trapping wild birds is against the law in San Francisco. It is also ineffective since the reason for the animals' presence remains-- e.g. habitat, food source, etc.
- Sticky gel repellent can glue birds' feathers together, causing them to lose body heat and die of cold, or plummet to the ground, unable to fly. Wildlife rehabilitation centers report receiving many birds every year covered in the gel. Sticky gel repellent is also ineffective because it quickly becomes covered in debris or washes away in rain.
- Sharpened metal spikes in some cases may accidentally cause birds to be impaled.

Nesting birds

State and federal laws restrict disturbing or destroying certain birds' nests. Before beginning any bird proofing, be sure there are no active nests. Birds become fully independent of their parents in approximately 4 to 6 weeks.

Also available from The San Francisco SPCA
2500 16th Street • San Francisco, CA 94103-4213 • (415) 554-3000
www.sfspca.org • email: publicinfo@sfspca.org

- Baby Bird Information Line
- Raccoon/Skunk Information Line
- How to Keep Cats Out of Your Yard fact sheet