



City of Westminster

Pest Information

**FREE PHONE:
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Urban Birds



Urban free-living birds could be called companion animals, especially for children, the elderly and lonely people. They are often watched or fed with pleasure. However some urban bird species congregate at too high population densities and can produce droppings that harm buildings and cars, be extremely noisy, harm urban vegetation or cause pollution problems with their droppings.

In urban areas, nests of feral pigeons in lofts can result in invasions of soft ticks into high density flats and apartments. Their bites often lead to allergic reactions. Other parasites that live on pigeons and can occasionally attack humans include the chicken mite, which may produce allergic reactions, especially in children and susceptible adults.

Wild birds and human diseases

Wild birds, including those living in towns and cities, can harbour pathogens and spread them to people.

- West Nile virus infected at least 19,655 people and killed 782 in US cities in 1999 – 2006 and affected hundreds in Bucharest in 1996 – 1997 and Volgograd in 1999 – 2000
- At least 500 Cases of ornithosis acquired from feral pigeons have been reported worldwide since 1966
- There have been epidemics of mosquito-borne Saint Louis encephalitis virus in North American cities
- Blackbirds in urban parks are carriers of infected ticks and are amplifying hosts of the agent of Lyme disease
- Hundreds of human cases of Histoplasmosis have been acquired near communal roosts of blackbirds and starlings in North American city parks

Other birds-related pathogens which cause human disease include Campylobacter, E.Coli and Salmonella.

The risk of infection

Bird-related pathogens can be spread by the air, ingestion, direct contact with birds or blood-feeding insects like mosquitoes and ticks. The ability of some pathogenic fungi and bacteria to grow in bird faeces and nests could pose a public health hazard in mass communal roosts or large nesting colonies at urban or suburban sites.

Bird species that have high population densities, nest in colonies, roost gregariously or congregate at water and food sources or in other places in urban areas are important due to frequent contacts that enable effective transmission of disease agents.

Aquatic birds, even in urban situations, attract higher numbers of blood-feeding insects such as mosquitoes than do terrestrial birds, while woodland, ground-foraging birds are parasitized by ticks. Bird mobility and migratory habits are other crucial factors; they make the transport and spread of agents more effective.

Overpopulation of infected urban birds and insect vectors and intimate contact between people and infected urban birds or their habitats all increase the risk of bird-borne infections.

Monitoring and surveillance

Public Health surveillance should involve monitoring based on reports of disease, surveys of urban birds and city dwellers, examination of blood-feeding insect vectors and avian hosts and investigations of habitats as sources of disease.

Control Methods

The control of wild bird populations in urban and suburban areas is difficult and sometimes ineffective. However, a few 'public friendly' methods are available.

In circumstances of established risk, feeding the birds can be restricted at public sites and scavenging birds can be controlled on landfill sites and at harbours and airports.

Proactive and reactive control measures include removal of birds through trapping methods (as per Natural England License), habitats can be modified, for example by thinning or clearing vegetation or by preventing birds from breeding on buildings, by blocking loft spaces and perch sites using netting, spikes, repellent gels or electroshock deterrents.

Other Control methods include collecting and inactivating eggs and trapping and killing or sterilising birds, if permitted.

Controlling and sanitising large communal roosts of birds may be necessary in city parks.

For all bird control treatments and proofing requirements, please contact Westminster City Council Pest Control to receive a quotation.