

# DEPARTEMENT OMGEVING

## Government of Flanders

Strategy, international policy and animal welfare division  
Koning Albert II-laan 20 box 8  
1000 BRUSSELS  
T 02 553 15 08  
[www.omgevingvlaanderen.be](http://www.omgevingvlaanderen.be)

## **Flemish Animal Welfare Council – OPINION 21/02/2018**

# The management of pigeon populations in towns and cities

This Flemish Council for Animal Welfare opinion is a rewritten and updated version of the 2012 opinion from the then Federal Animal Welfare Council.

Pigeon population management is a key point of concern for many towns and cities. It therefore exclusively concerns urban and municipal authorities. Information pertaining to the operation and efficiency of existing methods is rather limited.

Pigeons do not present a nuisance in towns and cities in themselves; however, the size and density of the population in certain places does. The greatest nuisance is due to excrement (and the resulting corrosion of buildings), the damage caused by nests and the pathogens that pigeons spread.

Towns and cities can deploy various strategies for reducing the nuisance and controlling pigeon populations, such as relocating the population, euthanising pigeons, reducing the number of births and restricting food sources.

The greatest impact on the growth of urban pigeon populations is the availability of food sources: if the pigeons have access to sufficient food, natural selection no longer occurs and an overpopulation is artificially maintained.

Towns and cities must therefore remain clean (and as free from food remains as possible) and must restrict the amount of feed that people provide. A ban on feeding, with offenders subject to large fines, is already effective in the majority of Belgian cities. Nevertheless, some people appear so intent on feeding pigeons that they fail to comply with the ban. Citizens must therefore be better informed.

The methods for controlling pigeon populations must not be aimed at eradicating a city's pigeon population entirely. Indeed, practical experience in various European cities shows that this approach is neither budget-friendly nor efficient.

Successful pigeon population management requires an integrated policy that restricts the population size to an acceptable level. Cities will need to combine various strategies to accomplish this.

Although the situation differs per city, a general action plan comprising 5 steps is available. In order to maintain a stable urban pigeon population, the following consecutive steps must be performed quickly and in their entirety:

1. **Execution of a study and communication.**

A complaint analysis must first be performed in order to objectify the problem. This must consider both the actual nuisance and the sentiments of certain citizens in relation to the pigeon population. The city must communicate clearly with its citizens, both during the implementation and after the realisation of the plan.

2. **Inventarisation of the places where specific measures are immediately required.**

An example of a specific measure is the relocation of a pigeon population. This concerns the protection of monuments and buildings used as perching or breeding grounds, but also airport surroundings, neglected buildings, bridges and areas with a high population density. Preventative measures to combat nest building can be integrated into town planning regulations.

3. **Restriction of food sources**

The cleanliness of the city and a ban on feeding "without official authorisation" are key. It is equally important to communicate this to citizens. The following step (point 4) must also be explained during this stage.

4. **Installation of contraceptive pigeon coops.**

These are specific types of pigeon coops that are used to sterilise a portion of the pigeon population by replacing the eggs with artificial eggs or by dispensing contraceptive feed. These pigeon coops can also be used to manage the relationship between the pigeons and those who feed them. The monitoring and maintenance of such pigeon coops must be conducted in a professional manner.

5. **Monitoring and regular evaluation of the situation.**

This is an important measure in maintaining a stable population over the long term.