

FERAL PIGEON FACT SHEET

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Find out why a true animal friend doesn't feed pigeons.

Latin name: Columba livia livia

Appearance

The colouring and markings on their feathers vary greatly, depending on the race of domestic pigeon they descended from. The head and neck are dark grey, the chest is mid-grey and gets lighter around the belly. Neck feathers shimmer a violet-green. Their wingshields show two black, almost parallel bars. Their flight feathers are dark grey, and their tail feathers are blue-grey with black parr marks. Beak and claws are dark and their eyes' iris is orange-red with a narrow blue-grey ring.

Middle European males weigh approximately 350 g, females approximately 310 g, depending on the food they find, sometimes less.

Habitat

Feral pigeons descended from the rock doves that mainly breed on rocky coasts but also in deserts or mountainous regions. Cities are built from rocks and remind the feral pigeons of rocky coasts, that's why they feel comfortable there. Feral pigeons were once domestic pigeons that escaped and then became wild. Being near people provides them with shelter (on roofs) and food (mostly city waste).

Life expectancy in the city

On average 2-3 years, maximum age up to 14 years.

Sexual maturity

Female pigeons at the earliest of 4.5 months, male pigeons 5.5 months.

Fertility

Decreases after the fifth year of life.

Brood

They breed all year, depending on food supply and can have a yearly reproductive success rate up to 12 young per couple. The normal reproductive rate is about 2 young per couple per year. The incubation time is 17.5 days. Nestling time until flying out is approximately 30 days.

Food

They are granivores and eat, for example wild herb seeds, but also seeds that remain on fields after harvesting. In the city they also eat food scraps that lie around on the streets as rubbish.

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Most relevant predators

Humans, stone martens, brown rats, house mice, carrion crows, seagulls, peregrine falcons, hawks, female sparrowhawks, larger owls.

The issue of "Feeding pigeons"

Some people feed pigeons because they want to help them, but this is not good because then they reproduce excessively. Pigeons can lay eggs all year round (see section on brood). So, they reproduce really quickly. The more pigeons there are, the bigger the rivalry over breeding spots and food and so they occasionally hurt each other badly. Parasites and therefore illnesses, can quickly spread when there are many pigeons in narrow quarters. Furthermore, bread is not an appropriate food for them. A pigeon produces around 12 kg faeces per year, in their sleeping areas on attics or facades. Their faeces damage the brickwork of houses. With the help of spikes and nets, walls are protected against pigeons. When there are a lot of pigeons, they even breed between the spikes. These are no nice places for young pigeons.

Please spread the word!

When there are fewer pigeons, they have better living conditions. This is why true animal friends don't feed pigeons!

