

## Pigeons Are Becoming A Problem

Normally in cities this far south, large flocks of pigeons are not a common occurrence. This is partly because of the abundant food supply (grains, berries, refuse, etc.) in the fields, forests, and yards that surround our city and the relatively warm climate that pervades our part of the world during most of the year. It is however annually noted that there seems to be increases in the sighting of pigeons in the downtown area during the winter months and early spring when traditional food sources are scarcer and the warmth of the city lights and buildings attract them.

Something appears to have changed this year. We are seeing more and more pigeons in the downtown – especially along the waterfront. Our beautiful new Plaza de Luna at the foot of Palafox Pier on many days looks and smells more like a bird bathroom than a park for people. At first glance, one would ask why so many pigeons are hanging out on the lawn and in the parking areas of this relatively flat and open waterfront park. It most definitely has lots of warm sunshine for our “cold weather” days. But where are the grain fields, the berry bushes, the Bradford pear trees, or the fresh trash piles that pigeons love so much? No such food sources can be found nearby. But then the food source becomes apparent. It’s a young boy, an older lady, or a whole family throwing it up in the air or scattering it on the ground. The food source is bird seed or bread crumbs – bags and bags of breadcrumbs. The pigeons love it. The fifty or sixty regular pigeon residents move in for lunch as do the dozen or so opportunistic gulls. With such an easy meal being served that way every day, it’s not hard to see (or smell) why this lazy species of bird is being drawn to our new park and other waterfront areas during the daytime hours.

Unfortunately, many people think feeding a pigeon flock is harmless fun or entertainment. That assumption could not be farther from reality. People who would never allow a colony of rats to openly populate its pristine city parks are more than willing to ignore this winged and feathered version of the same disease host. Pigeons carry a number of serious diseases (histoplasmosis, cryptococcosis, salmonellosis, etc.) that are transmittable to humans through ingesting or breathing the wind-blown dust and spores of their waste products. Some of these diseases can readily become life-threatening if not diagnosed and addressed early or create serious health problems for the remainder of the infected person’s life. People especially at risk are the very young, the very old, and all of those with any type of reduced or compromised immune system.

In addition to the lasting damage that these “flying rats” can do to human health, their droppings are extremely acidic and will literally ruin ( i.e. create significant damage, corrode, permanently stain, or discolor) painted surfaces, metal surfaces, and plastic surfaces. Their droppings in large proportions also kill southern grasses like the kinds used in most of our parks. Pigeon droppings on automobile paint must be immediately removed and cleaned in order to prevent fading or discoloration of the spots where the waste landed. In addition to all the property and health damage that these birds do, they also make our parks and buildings around them look like no one really cares because the facility looks ( and smells) unkept.

But we can reverse this unnatural attraction of pigeons to our waterfront downtown. We can stop providing them a food source in our public parks. Pigeons are birds of habit and lazy gatherers. As long as an easy meal is available in the warm sunshine each day, they will keep coming in larger and larger numbers and keep leaving behind that destructive, smelly and dangerous waste product. Let's all pledge to leave the bread and bird seed at home and stop feeding the pigeons in our public parks so that the bird by-products don't ruin the physical appearance and potential for widespread human use and enjoyment.

Franklin D. Kimbrough  
DIB Executive Director