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Pigeon Experts Condemn the Use of ‘Pigeon Pill’

PiCAS UK (the Pigeon Control Advisory Service, UK Division) has today condemned Argyle Civic Association, based in Hollywood, USA for agreeing to undertake a pilot programme to put resident feral pigeon flocks on the contraceptive pill. Pigeon flock size is currently maintained by the huge volumes of food provided by some residents who are feeding the birds every day; Argyle Civic Association hopes to reduce the artificially high number of pigeons in the neighbourhood by taking this action.

Animal welfare organisations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PeTA) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) have hailed OvoControl P as a ‘ground-breaking pigeon family-planning project’, but experts at the internationally renowned Pigeon Control Advisory Service (UK Division) are not convinced for the following reasons:

- Innolytics (the manufacturer of OvoControl P) has confirmed that the product can cause irritation to humans’ eyes yet no comment has been made about avian eyes.
- Innolytics has also confirmed that based on its size and shape, the product is unsuitable for smaller, non-target species birds yet there is no further detail available as to what the risks are for larger, non-target species birds.
- The product has been trialed for only 2 years in Italy, where the manufacturer suggests, pigeon flock size was reduced by 50% during trials. As OvoControl P is not suitable as a standalone pigeon control, what other complimentary methods of control were used to reduce pigeon flock size during the trial? No detailed information about the trial has been provided by the manufacturer.
- Innolytics has also confirmed that the product cannot be used within 20ft of any body of water (including lakes, ponds, and rivers) and cannot be used in wet conditions. Additionally, the manufacturer advises that the human applicator of the product should be protected with gloves, long-sleeved shirts and trousers with all contaminated clothing requiring washing before re-use. What then are the health and safety implications to human health should the local water system become contaminated, for instance?
- Probably the most restrictive element of the way in which the drug must be distributed is the requirement for the human applicator not only to have ornithological expertise but also the need to be on site for between 1 and 2 hours, every day, 365 days a year early in the morning. The operating restrictions

- imposed on the use of the drug render it prohibitive in terms of the cost alone, irrespective of its ability to reduce breeding in the target species.
- The application of OvoControl P is far more limited than people realise; property owners will not want to use it based on the fact that even if it was 100% effective, it would not stop pigeons from using their particular properties. Local authorities will not be able to afford to use it based on the fact of budget alone. Local authorities often struggle to pay for a member of staff to service artificial breeding facilities for 10 minutes a week to remove and replace pigeon eggs, let alone providing an ornithological expert for 2 hours per day, every day to distribute the food safely and to analyse local flock activity.

Emma Haskell, Director of PiCAS UK, said: “While we would applaud any pigeon control programme that is non-lethal and humane, the contraceptive OvoControl P has a long way to go before it satisfies PiCAS UK that it is wholly non-lethal, humane and cost effective. There is absolutely no need to use a pharmaceutical product to reduce pigeon numbers; PiCAS UK’s internationally renowned programme using artificial breeding facilities combined with egg removal and replacement is non-lethal, humane, affordable and sustainable. Every single egg laid in one of our recommended artificial breeding facilities is removed and replaced with a dummy egg resulting in a system that is 100% effective; the same cannot be said of OvoControl P. During OvoControl P trials in Italy the drug only provided a 50% reduction in flock size and other, possibly more invasive and unspecified controls, were used. An example of a PiCAS UK control system operating as intended and as recommended is Nottingham City Hospital where PiCAS UK was brought in as consultant to the trust in 1999. At the time there was a total of 1,200 pigeon’s resident on the site. The trust then installed artificial breeding facilities as part of a PiCAS UK approved pigeon control programme and in 2002 the flock had reduced to a total of 350 pigeons; this number was then further reduced to 62 in 2005 without killing or removing a single bird. Not only that, but the trust also won the RSPCA’s Best Practice Award in 2003 for their work with PiCAS UK.”

For more information on PiCAS UK visit the website at www.picasuk.com or contact Emma Haskell on 02392 583540 or 07903 011715

* Editors Note:

Please see attached pigeon control bulletin from Nottingham City Hospital.

The predecessor to OvoControl P was a pharmaceutical called Ornitrol which was removed from the market in the 1990’s due to the fact that the drug was found to cause muscle tremors in pigeons when used for prolonged periods. OvoControl P has only been tested for 2 years in Italy where animal welfare laws are extremely relaxed relative to similar legislation in the UK.

Pigeon Control Bulletin, December 2000 (Source: Nottingham City Hospital)



ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
PIGEON CONTROL UPDATE

Since contact has been made with PICAS and a visit made by Guy Merchant (Director of PICAS), several new schemes have been in progress.

Firstly, lethal culling has been suspended indefinitely. We have now employed an on-site Pest Controller, Mr. Martyn Belcher to control the pigeon population.

Having taken advice from PICAS, and from the catalogues recommended, Martyn has pigeon proofed many areas, at a greatly reduced cost, as opposed to using private contractors.

Martyn has developed the concept of pigeon coups by using old staff single lockers turned on their side and compartmentalised them into nest boxes. The sites chosen are large bird populated flat roofs on 3 buildings in the Trust.

Martyn leaves food, water and nest materials to encourage the birds to nest, and then removes the eggs. He has also mapped out the nest sites on the Trust and visits these areas daily to collect eggs. Obviously if the eggs have hatched the young are left alone to fledge.

The impact on the Trust has been dramatic. In less than a year, the bird population has reduced by an estimated 50%. The cost of cleaning fouling has also reduced significantly.

Future plans include the roll-out of more coup areas, which have no cost or maintenance as we are recycling old lockers. We are however, having a wooden coup made by our Estates Department, which will be near to our wildlife corridor. Here again, the eggs will be collected.

This approach is both user friendly and non-lethal. We will continue to develop our strategy and monitor the effectiveness of the scheme. A further report will be sent to PICAS in the Autumn.

Clive Young

Environmental Services Manager