

What's up with that?

Q What's up with the year-round squawking bird noises at the Howard El stop on the Red Line?



A Even in the midst of a Chicago blizzard and with no birds in sight, an almost eerie din of squeals and screeches hovers over the Howard El tracks. The noises come from the Super BirdXPeller PRO, a machine that imitates the calls of birds in distress and their predators. The sounds emanate from four small speakers attached to the adjacent building (above) at the western edge of the El platform. The device was installed a few years ago by the managing agent of the Gateway Centre to repel pigeons that flocked to the corner of Howard and Paulina, where people were feeding them. The intention was to keep the property free of pigeon poop.

"Their droppings are unhealthy and unattractive," says Barbara Muehl, vice president of real estate at Trident Developments L.L.C., which started managing the building in 2002. "We wanted to solve the problem without doing anything really harsh." After power-washing the awnings weekly to no avail, they tried "no bird feeding" signs, plastic spikes—and, finally, the Super BirdXPeller PRO. The \$575 gadget is working: Most of the feathered offenders have left the area for less perilous perches.—Willow Duttge