

# The Answer For Pesky Pigeons

**M**ORE than an annual migration, it was permanent "squatters' rights" for pigeons in Clearwater, Florida. Glenn Weaver, supervisor of maintenance for the city's 140 traffic signals, decided he had to do something about the infestation of pigeons under the overpass at the intersection of U.S. 19 and State Road 60. The birds were roosting atop ledges along the wall directly above traffic control signal equipment and other electronic equipment boxes. The droppings were creating a mess for Weaver and for Clearwater, a city of more than 100,000 people.

The overrun of unwanted birds had to be stopped. "The droppings were causing concern about the health hazard," Weaver says. He did not want his crews working in an unhealthy environment, which they were forced to do periodically while checking and maintaining traffic equipment.

The health hazard that Weaver sensed was not imaginary. Besides being unsightly, bird droppings often harbor fungi that can trigger serious—even fatal—lung diseases (namely, histoplasmosis and cryptococcosis) when the spores are transmitted to humans who may breathe in the harmful fecal dust.

The buildup of bird droppings under the Clearwater overpass covered the concrete walkway almost completely. According to Weaver, "It was a dirty environment. The droppings could contain mites. I didn't want to send people into that mess to service the equipment."

To get rid of the droppings, Weaver's crew used a water truck and hose to blast the mess. The buildup was blown off with a jet stream of high-pressure water. This got rid of the mess, but not the birds. Two months later, it had to be done all over again.

## Driving the Birds Out of Town

The problem with pigeons was old and entrenched. Weaver has worked in city traffic maintenance for ten years, the past three of which have been in his position as Clearwater's Chief Traffic Signal Technician. "We had the problem ever since I'd been with the city," he says. "We tried a number of remedies."

First, Weaver and his crew strung a network of cords, creating a web intended to keep the pigeons off the ledges. No such luck. But there was no positive effect; the birds just flew between the strings.



■ SHELTERED roost beneath overpass attracted pigeons and created a mess below. Many deterrents were used but nothing worked until a gel was applied.

Next, Weaver tried plastic owls—to no avail. The pigeons would sit right next to them. Weaver ventures a guess that city birds had never seen an owl, explaining why the owls were totally ineffective in scaring away the pigeons.

Then Weaver and his crew tried blaring sound as a deterrent to roosting. They placed a loud, time clock controlled siren similar to a smoke-alarm horn on the ledge. The siren was programmed to go on at 15-minute intervals for 10-second bursts. The wailing sound was effective only temporarily. The birds got used to it in a couple of weeks and came back to roost again, right next to the siren. Weaver theorizes that the pigeons were so accustomed to the traffic noises of the two highways that the siren was just one more noise component. Furthermore, he says, the birds quickly realized the sound would not hurt them.

The pigeons were not about to give up their cozy, convenient roosting spot under the overpass, sheltered from the weather. But Weaver was not giving up either. He contacted the Florida Department of Transportation, which understood the problem, but offered no solution.

## They Went That-Away

About that time, Weaver saw an ad for a product called Bird-Proof, a bird-deterrent gel made by Bird-X, Incorporated, Chicago, Illinois. It is a transparent gel that repels bird pests from their normal roosting areas. When applied on ledges, beams, rafters, cornices, ornamental copings, and similar favorite landing sites, the gel compound discourages birds from alighting and nesting—usually for a year or more, even under extreme weather conditions. The gel has a tacky feeling that birds shun; yet it is harmless, odorless, non-poisonous, and environ-

mentally safe. It is easy to apply with any standard caulking gun. Bird-Proof is also available in liquid form for easy spraying on trees and over other large surfaces or less accessible areas.

Here at last was something Weaver had not tried before. He ordered a case of the gel and put it along the ledges on both sides of the overpass and on the street light luminaires—anywhere birds were roosting. It was easily applied using a caulking gun, a two-man crew, and a bucket truck to reach the ledges.

The effect of the gel was instantaneous and total. The compound irritated the birds' feet. As soon as they landed, they were affected. City crews saw no more birds roosting afterwards.

After some months, however, the gel began to lose some of its tackiness. "The area beneath the overpass gets soot, dust, and dirt from the cars whizzing by," Weaver notes. "Birds began returning, so we applied it again and the results were the same."

Birds simply do not appreciate the gel. The tacky substance sticks and they struggle to lift their feet. But there is no indication of it causing them pain; the discomfort keeps the birds away. The city has also used liquid Bird-Proof, too, on some ledges that were hard to reach, with the same positive results. The liquid version is applied using an ordinary spray bottle.

"Probably every city faces this kind of problem with birds," Weaver notes. He suggests that cities could use the product in parking garages as well, where ledges and rafters are similar to an overpass. "We used it on a service area, where birds were roosting above a retracting metal garage door. We applied Bird-Proof on the seal of the garage door. It worked instantly." □□□