

A customer waits for an order outside a food truck as pigeons fly around the area.

Colin Murphey  
The Daily Astorian



## Pigeons: Species came from Europe

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potential of accumulated droppings to lead to infectious diseases. He and other citizens urged the city to ban the feeding of pigeons, concerned about how the birds' acidic droppings might also damage buildings.

There was the house in Uniontown a lot of people called "the Tippi Hedren house" after the actress who played the ill-fated heroine in Alfred Hitchcock's classic 1963 horror film "The Birds." One, if not both sides, of the house's gable roof were constantly swarming with pigeons — not the best look for an area that was, at the time, looking to rebuild and rebrand itself.

Historian John Goodenberger had just returned from college in the late 1980s, hoping to make his way in his hometown. A new ban on feeding pigeons was in effect. The city was not under siege, but pigeons were definitely on people's minds.

"I remember an unnamed leader of an unnamed institution chasing a poor old woman with a walker down the waterfront because she was feeding pigeons," Goodenberger said.

Berney, in a memo to the City Council in 1981, wrote "I see very little difference between encouraging pigeons and feeding rats. One difference, of course, is that some people like pigeons, but no one likes rats."

In news articles and letters, some people shot back, proclaiming their love of the pigeons and the joy they felt in feeding them, while others said enough was enough.

"You were either for them or against them," Goodenberger recalled. "There was no middle ground."

Astoria, neither truly urban or truly rural, has long maintained uneasy relationships with its local wildlife, suffering occasional panic attacks about

whether a particular population of animals is growing too large and might overrun the town.

This year, some Astorians have wondered about the deer — another animal that evokes strong love-hate emotions. They feel like they've seen even more wandering through neighborhoods. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the city declared a war on the rats. In the 1980s, it was the pigeons' turn.

### Rock pigeons

Oregon is home to a native pigeon, the band-tailed pigeon, a swift-flying purple and gray bird found in forests in the west Cascades. But the pigeons in downtown Astoria are no different from pigeons found in any other U.S. city. They are rock pigeons, an invasive species introduced from Europe.

A white, calico or tan pigeon might show up in flocks from time to time, likely an escapee or the descendant of an escapee from someone who keeps homing pigeons. But rock pigeons are, for the most part, blue-gray with bronze, green and purple necks. Red of eye. Pink of foot. They bob, strut and coo. They peck at questionable leftovers on sidewalks. They are prone to startling up in a heart attack of furiously beating wings and scattered feathers.

Several years after Berney asked city leaders to declare pigeons a nuisance and as more complaints about the birds rolled in, the City Council looked at its options.

They could put interlocking spikes on tops of buildings to discourage pigeons from landing or roosting there, but that would only push the birds elsewhere. They could hire someone to routinely trap and kill pigeons in a humane way. Maybe they could give them feed laced with a birth control pill.

Or, they could cut off the obvious source of food: the people who scattered crumbs.

In December 1984, the city

established a six-month moratorium on feeding pigeons in one section of downtown. One month in, the owner of Shallon Winery on Duane Street begged the City Council to extend the boundaries of the no-feeding zone to 16th Street.

People had started traveling to the outskirts of the ban area to feed pigeons, he told the council. The Clatsop County Historical Society planned to turn a building near the winery into the Heritage Museum, but Mayor Edith Henningsgaard was concerned about future problems around the building if people continued to feed pigeons nearby.

Nearly five months later, the City Council would pass an emergency ordinance banning the feeding of pigeons from Eighth Street to 16th Street, adding an extra six blocks to the original area. People who continued to feed pigeons, or any birds, in this area risked landing a \$25 fine.

The rule would be modified again to include Uniontown and the Tippi Hedren house. It later morphed into a general prohibition against feeding wildlife in the city limits.

### Not the end

Of course, the feeding prohibition was not the end of the pigeons. Flocks still flash overhead between downtown buildings and coo from their roosts. One pigeon walked right into the Bridge and Tunnel Bottleshop and Taproom on Duane Street this summer while owner Dwayne Smallwood watched. It wandered through, checked things out and left without buying a thing.

Micha Cameron-Lattek, co-owner of the nearby Street 14 Cafe, suspects it's the same pigeon he's seen patrolling outside the cafe door.

"It would just bob around, left to right. In the summer, when the door was propped open, it got courageous and walked in a few times," he said. "We had to ask it to leave."

## Homeless: 'Where has everyone gone?

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Crews ended up removing 5 tons of stuff and garbage from campsites, enough to fill four large dumpsters donated by Recology Western Oregon. The operation cost the city \$4,679.

Before the sweep, Police Chief Geoff Spalding said any personal possessions recovered from campsites would be held at the police department for up to 30 days for people to claim. But nothing was saved.

City employees and leaders present at the sweep told Mayor Arline LaMear's homelessness solutions task force Tuesday it was difficult to distinguish between trash and personal possessions. Besides, Spalding said, the police department had nowhere to store possessions.

Crews did leave two camps untouched, hoping to contact the people they knew had been living there before they went to move anything.

Vernon Hall, an advocate for the homeless who had been living in the woods until he found housing, said he could see the different sides of the issue. He helped police communicate with the homeless this summer when the city felt it could no longer ignore the extent of the camping.

Hall also helped city crews clean up sites in November, but he was upset that nothing had been saved from the camps. Bicycles and tents were tossed along with other possessions. Meanwhile, the one or

two campers he believes were causing most of the trouble in the woods are still out in the community.

"You guys can say you did good but nothing good came out of that sweep," he said.

Advocates had worried the sweep would simply displace people in time for winter, when access to shelter is even more crucial.

Annie Martin, president of the Astoria Warming Center board, noted the sweep happened well before the emergency shelter opened. Up to the day of the sweep, a number of homeless campers said they still didn't know where they were going to go, while others simply moved deeper into the woods.

On Tuesday, Spalding told the task force he was calling the camp cleanup a success, but he knows people were displaced — something he feared would happen despite efforts to connect people to services.

"And that's the big question," he said. "Where has everyone gone?"

He asked the group how the city should move forward on future cleanups.

City Councilor Cindy Price, who was present at the sweep, suggested there might be a better way to communicate about or sort through items left at camps to determine what was a personal possession that should be saved and what was trash.

Still, she praised the cooperation the campers showed and the partnership between groups

to clean up the sites and assist campers.

Since July, Clatsop Community Action has had around 98 homeless people come through the doors seeking help. As of this week, the agency was able to place about 44 percent of them into housing.

"We move ahead one household at a time," said Elaine Bruce, the group's executive director.

An estimated 30 people were living in the woods around Astoria this summer, social service groups have said. After police began tagging camps with cleanup notices, seven people who said they were living in the woods visited Clatsop Community Action.

Three of them were referred to Helping Hands, which offers a variety of services to homeless people at its new facility in Uniontown. Helping Hands was a day away from opening the new facility when the cleanup occurred.

Two of the three people referred there, including a man in need of hip replacement surgery, are still at the facility and participating in programs.

But some of the others who initially sought help have not returned to Clatsop Community Action.

"It's not unusual," Bruce said. "In fact, it's the norm for sort of a progression of engagement, especially with those that have been chronically homeless. It's an issue of choice. It's an issue of trust."

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