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What to Do if You Find a Pigeon in Trouble

By Guest Author Elizabeth Young, Founder and Executive Director of MickaCoo Pigeon & Dove Rescue



*Pigeons mate for life.
Photo courtesy of Ingrid Taylor*

Though MickaCoo Pigeon & Dove Rescue's mission is to save the lives of domestic (unreleasable) birds that would otherwise be killed in shelters by providing vet care and homes, we are frequently contacted by Good Samaritans who have found a feral pigeon (Rock Pigeon, "city pigeon") in need of help and, because help for a pigeon can be hard to find, we always do our best to help counsel the caller on the options.

Here's what we advise:

If a pigeon can be caught by you, he almost certainly needs help and would benefit from rescue. They have no defenses beyond flight and when grounded are killed by hawks, gulls, ravens, dogs, cats, raccoons, owls and sadly, mean people.

Some people fear touching pigeons will make them sick but you're at much greater risk of getting sick from eating eggs or chicken than you are from handling a pigeon. ([Click here for more information on disease risk.](#))

Catch the pigeon with your hands or by throwing a jacket or towel over him. If he's in the open, walk-herd him into a corner or against a wall to make capture easier. You won't give the bird a heart attack or frighten him to death. Pigeons are very hardy, habituated to people and incredibly smart. Once caught, speaking softly and gently to the bird will reassure and help settle him. If he has any thin, pointy little yellow feather threads or squeaks/peeps, he's a fledgling and will have an excellent chance for rehabilitation and release. Please do not keep and hand-raise young pigeons yourself (and discourage others from doing so). A bird that can live free should live free and needs expert care to have the best chances for survival. And there are more than enough unreleasable pigeons (babies included) that need homes.

Safely confine the rescued pigeon in a box, crate, or paper bag with the top folded over and connect ASAP with a pigeon-friendly wildlife rescuer. ([Click here for detailed information on helping a rescued pigeon.](#))

In the SF/Bay Area, I recommend taking a rescued pigeon quickly to WildCare in San Rafael, Medical Center for Birds in Oakley, Montclair Vet Clinic in Oakland, Peninsula Humane Society in Burlingame, Wildlife Center of Silicon Valley in San Jose or Wildlife Care Association in Sacramento. All will accept him as a surrender from you, all provide avian vet care and all will try to get him rehabilitated and released. Never assume that a wildlife rescue, animal shelter or avian vet will help a pigeon. They are "non-natives" and many facilities will accept the bird but kill it with no effort to rehab. The best hotline to call is WildCare at (415) 456-SAVE. They take calls 24/7 365 days a year, are very helpful and pigeon-compassionate and they are experts.

If the pigeon is unreleasable, most facilities will try (officially or sometimes unofficially) to rehome him but odds aren't great and he may be killed. Get the name of whomever you surrender the bird to as well as the bird's intake number and, if possible, tell them that you don't want him euthanized and will take him back if need be. They'll usually try and work with you.

If he is unreleasable, a rescued feral pigeon makes an awesome, very smart, easy and pleasing pet. If you are willing to take responsibility for him, MickaCoo will gladly coach you on how to care for a pet pigeon. ([Click here for more info about pigeons as pets.](#))



Blinded by a hawk strike, this feral fledgling pigeon named Lucky was unreleasable. He lives today as a cherished pet.