

## KILLER PIGEONS

### From Pest Control News 47 - May 1999

Anyone working in bird proofing and control services runs the risk of catching ornithosis from pigeons or their droppings. This disease is a killer unless it is identified quickly. The disease is often referred to as psittacosis, however, this is the version of the disease caught from psittacine birds, such as parrots and budgies. As ornithosis can easily be mistaken for 'flu, especially in its early stages, it is important that the possibility of being exposed to the disease is recognised and a doctor consulted.

Just before Christmas, one of Network Pest Control's customers, who to protect his identity, we shall refer to as Tony, came down with 'flu - but was soon to realise that things were rather more serious.

Tony started with standard 'flu-like symptoms, then developed a high temperature, yet felt very cold and he began sweating badly. He began to suffer extremely bad headaches and found that light started to hurt his eyes. After two days, he called out his doctor who diagnosed it as 'flu. "Drink lots of fluid and take paracetamol," was his prescription. However, Tony's condition became progressively worse.

The doctor was called out a further three times before the possibility that he could be suffering from a more serious disease was considered. By this time, Tony's chest started to get clogged up. He was admitted to hospital and given large quantities of intravenous antibiotics. A chest X-ray showed that his lungs had partially filled up with fluid. After three days in hospital, he was allowed home but had to continue taking antibiotics for a further two weeks and, after three weeks, he began to feel much better, although he was to suffer tightness in his chest for another three months.

Tony is a strapping 6'2" farmer's son in his early 30s. It is easy to imagine how someone of a rather less robust constitution could have been affected much worse ..... or could even have died, which has happened in the past.

It is also interesting to note that the doctor had failed to diagnose the condition until it was obviously something more serious than 'flu. Perhaps PCOs should make a point of notifying their doctors of the possibilities of diseases such as ornithosis and Weil's disease.

In Tony's case, although he had been involved in clearing out a roof space shortly before the onset of the disease, as he had been wearing full protective clothing, he did not consider the possibility until later on. So how did he come to contract the disease if he was wearing protection? The problem is that it does not take much infected dust to kick off the disease. Tony thought that the dust in his hair or on his overalls could have fallen off in his van and be responsible, proving that proper safety procedures must be adopted both during the work and clearing up afterwards.

- Wear coveralls with a hood to protect the hair.
- Use respiratory protection with a P2 or P3 grade dust filter for work indoors.
- Leave your respiratory protection on whilst you remove your coveralls, boots, gloves etc.
- Wash dust from your hands before removing your respiratory protection.
- Place all soiled clothing in a bag and carefully seal it.
- If dirty clothing is to be cleaned for wearing again, remember that the person laundering the clothes is also at risk and needs to wear respiratory protection.
- Ideally, all soiled clothing should be thrown away or disposed of with the bags of guano (which could be classified as clinical waste in your particular area).

If you consider this procedure to be a little "over the top", remember that "Tony" is a real person and his story true. On this occasion, the story had a happy ending. Not all do.