

## Trial underway to control pigeon population

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*Pigeons in the trial are given a corn-based feed containing nicarbazin, a drug which functions as an oral contraceptive for birds. (Photo: Sherlyn Goh)*



SINGAPORE: The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) is piloting a new trial to control the pigeon population at Palmer Road. The trial, which started in October and which will take a year to complete, involves feeding the pigeons a corn-based feed containing nicarbazin, a drug which functions as an oral contraceptive for birds. It can stop female birds from producing eggs, but even if they are laid, they may not hatch. The feed will be just another form of consumption for male birds, as they do not produce eggs. According to the AVA, it will not harm other animals or humans if accidentally consumed in small doses. It would take 40kg of the feed to see toxic effects in dogs and cats, and 60kg for a child. The pigeon population at Palmer Road has grown in recent years. Today it stands at around 400, compared to 200 in 2013. This has caused hygiene and environmental issues in the area.



"It's very challenging for us to deal it with very quickly," said Mr Mohamed Idris, secretary of the management board of Masjid Haji Muhammad Salleh mosque, which is located in the area. "We have to mobilise our volunteers to deal with it immediately, and this is especially a problem on Fridays when we have prayers at about one o'clock." Volunteers from the mosque will assist the AVA during the trial, and they will give the pigeons the feed once a day.

The main reason for this population increase is members of the public feeding the pigeons. The AVA has been taking enforcement action against feeders, and 13 feeders were caught at Palmer Road between January to October this year.

If the results are successful, the AVA said it may use the feed to control the pigeon population in other parts of Singapore.

This method has been trialled overseas, in countries including Italy. "They have seen 30-40 per cent reduction in the pigeon population size over four years," said Ms Janet Chia, executive manager of operations, wild animals section, at AVA. "Even if other birds accidentally eat them, the effects will be rid off in one week, because the product will be eliminated from their system. Most importantly, it doesn't cause any ill effects to the birds in the long-term." The number of bird-related complaints across Singapore has gone up in the last three years. There were 4,400 in 2013, as compared to around 6,100 so far this year. As for pigeons, there were 2,100 cases in 2013, 2,500 in 2014 and 3,400 from January to October this year. The AVA has also been piloting a bird deterrent gel in Choa Chu Kang. It also said it may use either of these methods in other parts of Singapore if results are successful.