

STEALING FROM PIGEON FEEDERS: A PREVENTIVE MEASURE

A. CHARLES CATANIA

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Standard pigeon feeders lift a tray of grain within reach of the pigeon, which then has access to the grain through a small hole in the metal partition above the tray. An occasional problem with some of these feeders (*e.g.*, the Model B Pigeon Magazine, Ralph Gerbrands Company) is that a pigeon may learn to reach down through the hole with its beak and steal grain from the feeder even when the tray is not lifted. Presumably, this can occur because pigeons' head and beak sizes are variable. The problem is most likely with King pigeons, which are larger and longer-beaked than Carneaux or Homers. It usually begins when an equipment failure or an accumulation of spilled grain underneath the tray prevents it from dropping down fully between presentations, but the problem may persist even after the operation of the tray has been corrected. Once this has happened, on-going performances may be interrupted frequently by attempts to steal from the un-presented food tray. Any grain obtained in such attempts functions as a reinforcer for continued stealing and possibly for superstitious behavior (*e.g.*, pecking around the feeder instead of on the response-key). It thus competes with reinforcements experimentally programmed in the chamber.

A simple solution to this problem, illustrated in Fig. 1, is to weld or solder a piece of solid wire to the underside of the metal partition above the tray, so that it extends across the access hole to the tray. The wire

can be bent so that it is completely covered by grain when the tray is lifted. It therefore does not interfere with eating, but prevents the pigeon from getting its beak down to the tray between presentations even if the tray does not drop all the way down. The problem of stealing from the Gerbrands Model B Pigeon Magazine was completely eliminated by a 2-in. wire oriented perpendicular to the experimental panel and bent so that it extended down about 0.5 in. below the access hole above the food tray.

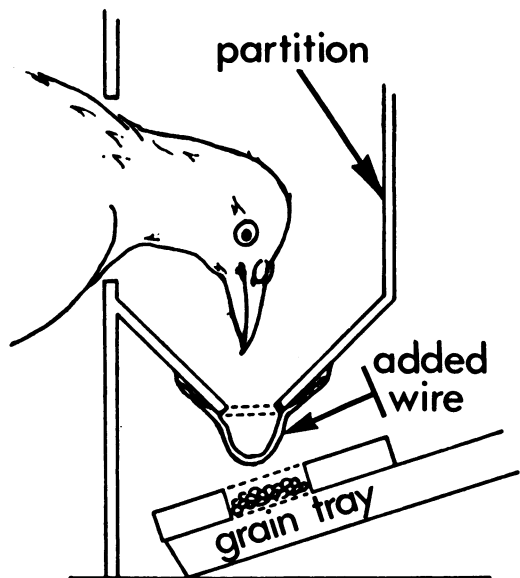


Fig. 1. Method for the prevention of stealing by pigeons.