



## Facilities Management Special

### What is alexo?

alexo is BPCA's digital magazine designed to keep your business informed about public health pest control.

alexo is packed with professional advice from leading experts in the pest control industry, and is the only magazine you need to tackle your organisation's pest problems.

### Why choose a BPCA member?

By choosing a BPCA member you are ensuring the use of a contractor who can provide a professional and consistent service.

All BPCA members meet our strict membership criteria, hold the relevant pest control insurances, and are fully qualified and trained to deal with your pest problems.



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# Rats: ignore them at your peril

Talk of plagues of rats taking over our towns and cities, gorging themselves on takeaway pizza and kebab leftovers, is the stuff of tabloid headlines and, of course, an exaggeration. But, as the saying goes 'there's no smoke without fire'. There is actually plenty of evidence to suggest that the number of rats in the UK is increasing, which is a trend that facilities and buildings managers ignore at their peril.

Estimates of the numbers of Norway or brown rats (*Rattus norvegicus*), the predominant species living in Britain, range from 60 to 100 million – which is at least one rat per head of population. This compares with an estimated 45 to 50 million a decade ago, a rise of nearly 40 per cent. Calculating the number of rats in the country however is not an exact science and it is difficult to tell whether the numbers have increased or whether people are just reporting more infestations.

## Why control rats?

Whichever way you look at it there are a lot of rats out there. But should this be of concern? For facilities, buildings and estate managers the answer is a resounding 'yes' and for a number of reasons.

First and foremost rats carry many nasty diseases which they can spread to humans, normally through their urine. These include Leptospirosis or Weil's disease, Salmonella, Listeria, *Toxoplasma gondii* and Hantavirus.

Secondly, as well as being a health hazard rats can inflict a great amount of structural damage. They have caused serious fires by gnawing away the insulation around electrical cables, floods by puncturing pipes and even death by chewing through gas pipes. Sources in the insurance sector have estimated that rodent damage to wiring is responsible for 25% of all electrical fires in buildings. They can also decimate finished goods or supplies in store.

Just as importantly they can ruin an organisation's reputation. If clients and customers spot evidence of rodent infestation in the premises you manage, they are unlikely to want to do business with you.

Finally, all property owners have a legal obligation under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 to keep premises rodent-free, or, if rodents pose a threat to health or property, to report infestations to the local authority.

## Know your enemy

Like most living creatures, Norway rats require three things to



survive and thrive – food, water and shelter.

In the 'wild' rats would normally live in burrows under the soil but they will also nest in sewers, under buildings, in food stores, garden compost heaps and rubbish dumps. They can get through a gap of less than 25mm.

In urban environments food is rarely a problem as rats are true omnivores and will eat almost anything. Where there is a suitable concentrated food supply they tend not to wander extensively, often staying within 20m of their nest, although they will forage further afield when food is scarcer.

Norway rats are usually active at night. If conditions are suitable they can breed throughout the year. In the mild conditions in

cities, for example one female can produce 10 young, 10 times a year. To put that in perspective one rat is born every second in London or 3,600 new rats every hour.

Rats are generally neophobic, in other words they are very wary of new things and that can include bait boxes and the rodenticide baits they contain, making it essential to understand the rats biology and behaviour in order to gain control.

## Spotting the problem

There are several tell-tale signs of a rodent infestation. First and foremost look out for droppings – rats average 40-50 droppings a day, each roughly 13-19mm in length. In a large infestation a strong odour may be detected from the rodent's urine.

Nesting material such as shredded insulation, cardboard or paper is another indication as are signs of gnawing. You might also see evidence of rat runs – smear marks along skirting boards and around doors, footprints in the dust or corridors of flattened vegetation in the undergrowth outside buildings.

## Keeping control

Whereas 15 or 20 years ago local authorities and water authorities undertook planned rodent control programmes, today activities to control rats are largely driven by complaints. This means control is fragmented so you cannot rely on someone else to solve the problem.



### Good housekeeping is essential:

- Tidy up stored materials and locate them away from food areas
- Minimise the attractiveness of food preparation areas by ensuring all food spillages are cleaned and that any gaps between cupboards or behind working surfaces into which particles of food may fall are cleaned regularly
- Store food products in rodent proof containers and inspect them regularly
- Outdoors manage all waste disposal areas carefully. Rubbish should be kept in metal bins with close-fitting lids to prevent access by rodents
- Keep vegetation around buildings short and tidy to expose rat runs and burrows, thus making rats more vulnerable to predators
- Cut back on clutter around buildings such as piles of scrap wood, gathered leaves, boards, pipes and abandoned equipment where rodents can hide
- Rats can squeeze through very small spaces. Within a building perfect harborage areas include spaces between the floors and ceilings, behind skirting boards, ducts and conduits as well as timber and plastic casings to pipes and cables. To keep rodents from entering a building, fix and replace cracked or broken doors and windows and keep drains and drain covers in a good state of repair.

### Getting professional help

Appointing a professional pest controller is often the best way of preventing an infestation in the first place. Good contractors will regularly inspect premises for you and recommend improvements in housekeeping and proofing measures. Should the worst happen they will quickly be able to implement an effective control programme.



**“When it comes to contractors, if you want a good pest control job to be done, cheap is not always best!”**

It is essential however that the contractor appointed is suitably qualified and that is when it will pay to look out for the British Pest Control Association (BPCA) logo.

Simon Forrester, BPCA Chief

Executive explains, “Contractors who are members of BPCA have to prove that they and their staff are professionally qualified. They must also hold adequate liability insurance and abide by the Association’s Codes of Practice against which they are regularly audited.”

Mr Forrester adds “Another aspect to ask about is whether they belong to the BASIS PROMPT scheme. This scheme means that not only must staff hold a recognised industry qualification, but they must also keep their knowledge up-to-date.”

In the current economic climate, facilities management budgets can be the first to shrink, and you may be keen to cut your contractor costs. BPCA would strongly recommend this doesn’t affect your pest control budget, as Mr Forrester advises, “When it comes to contractors, if you want a good pest control job to be done, cheap is not always best.”

A professional pest control company should be able to fully survey the premises, provide a quotation, detail the pests found, outline the treatments to be carried out and the frequency of visits required to keep premises pest-free.

BPCA can help with:

- Designing effective pest control specifications
- Tendering: selection of a suitable company
- Drawing up contracts with your chosen supplier
- Pest control awareness training

Find out more and search for a local BPCA member

[www.bpca.org.uk](http://www.bpca.org.uk) or call 01332 294 288.



# Fowl Play

If you mention the words 'pest control' to most facilities managers, their first thought is more than likely to be rats and mice, or if in the summer months, wasps or other flying insects. Pest control today is a much more demanding industry, caring for a wider range of pests. However, one group of pests which is often still overlooked is birds. Some birds are no more than 'rats with wings', and can have a severe negative impact on your premises.

In the urban environment some bird species carry disease, can damage buildings, encourage insect infestations and have the potential to contaminate food. These are serious matters especially for facilities managers who want to maintain high standards of hygiene and presentation of their buildings, both old and new.

## Birds and buildings

Bird droppings are acidic and can corrode and erode metals and certain building materials such as stonework often associated with buildings of historical importance.

More commonly, bird activities (specifically nesting materials, droppings and food debris) often result in gutters becoming blocked, so that rainwater drains back into the building. Whilst in some cases this may only lead to minor damp damage or increase the chances of rot, in others the problems can be more serious. Water damage to computers or electrics can be catastrophic and can halt business or production – meaning the financial costs could be enormous.

In addition, any building covered in bird fouling looks unpleasant, can smell and projects a poor image of your business; – if the business cannot clean up its building, how well is it going to look after its customers?

## Birds can spread disease

There is evidence that urban birds carry a wide variety of disease-causing organisms such as Salmonella, Listeria and E.coli. The chances of catching diseases from birds are fairly remote, however poor standards of hygiene after contact with bird droppings significantly increase the risk.

Much more serious is the potential for inhalation of the airborne disease agents that these birds can carry. Such respiratory diseases can be fatal. In most cases, healthy people catching diseases like Ornithosis, Histoplasmosis or Cryptococcosis are hardly affected. For more susceptible individuals such as the very young, the elderly or those with damaged immune systems, these diseases can be much more serious - critical to know if birds are found around hospitals, nurseries or nursing homes.

Kevin Higgins, BPCA Membership Manager and previously a contractor for the NHS comments "The profile of the risks of disease in the NHS has heightened and people have become more



**“The chances of catching diseases from birds are fairly remote, however poor standards of hygiene after contact with bird droppings significantly increases the risk.”**

aware of the problems that pests bring to hospitals.” Mr Higgins adds “The age and construction of hospital buildings certainly does create problems as far as pest infestations are concerned. I have experienced a lot of issues with birds when site surveying and this can be a big issue with the associated health risks. Pigeons are often a problem in roof spaces in older premises and in the past we have found dead birds contaminating water storage tanks.”

Birds can also present a more localised problem. Accumulated, wet bird droppings such as those under bridges where birds are roosting are slippery, and subsequent falls can be very serious for the elderly. Many local authorities have to spend large sums cleaning up such areas to prevent prosecution.

## So, which birds are the culprits?

In the UK the main problem bird species which cause problems around buildings are the Pigeon, Starling, House Sparrow and, on occasion the Herring Gull.

It is not just buildings near the seaside which experience problems with gulls as they are increasingly moving inland. From a gull's point of view, the urban environment offers several advantages – there are no predators, little disturbance and plenty of roofs to nest on. In addition the ambient temperature in towns is three to four degrees warmer than the surrounding countryside, enabling earlier breeding, and street lighting allows the gulls to feed at night as well as during the day. The problems caused by these bird pests is now recognised by the scientific community but their control is far from easy. As Paul Burt, adviser from Natural England explains: “All birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. General licences allow action to be taken against listed species, their young, eggs and nests in circumstances such as where birds are posing a threat to public safety and health.”

However in February 2005 Defra announced changes to the general licences controlling so called 'pest' species of birds. House Sparrows and Starlings were removed from the general licences issued under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.



## Methods of control

As with any pest control problem, the starting point for urban bird management is to try to remove the reasons why the pest is present. This basically means denying the pest species access to food and harbourage.

Controlling food supplies may be the key to controlling a population of birds. However for facilities managers who may only be responsible for a group of buildings, or maybe even an individual property, this is no easy task. The best organisation to reduce the overall numbers of birds in an area is the local authority. They can attempt to educate the public not to feed the birds – probably the only option that will have a significant long-term effect.

Over the years a wide range of control methods have been created to deal with bird infestations. The first principle of any system is to cause the birds no lasting harm, but only to prevent or discourage them from landing on buildings. Most pest controllers will use methods such as barriers, spikes, nets and wire to great effect. Similarly visual methods such as mirrors, balloons, silhouettes or models of predatory creatures can also be an effective deterrent.

More recently active systems like shock strips, audible scarers and optical gels have been used to create negative associations in birds wishing to land or roost on buildings. These methods can offer some a stronger and more lasting deterrent, but as with any method of control, can become less effective over time.

## Selecting the right contractor

Your selected pest control contractor should prepare, in conjunction with the client, a full bird management strategy. Such a strategy may include, the continued control of hygiene and

housekeeping standards, proofing with exclusion systems to keep the birds out, and finally where absolutely necessary and only where it is legally allowed, culling specific persistent individuals.

Trusted contractors should fully survey the premises, provide a quotation and detail the pests found, outline the treatments to be carried out and the frequency of visits - you'll get all of this and more from any full BPCA member.

**You can find your local BPCA member either on the website at [bpc.org.uk](http://bpc.org.uk) or by calling on tel: 01332 294288.**


## BIRD CONTROL

### PROOFING TECHNIQUES AND DETERRENTS:

- Scaring – using other birds or imitations to mark their territory
- Netting – cover harbourage areas to prevent nesting
- Spiking – series of plastic or metal pins that prevent birds landing
- Optical gels – gels that make the building seem as if it is on fire in the birds vision
- Contact gels – contain an irritant that discomfort the bird if it contacts the gel
- Electric systems – give the bird a slight shock to deter them but not harm them
- Trapping – live capture traps set and visited by the pest controller on a regular basis
- Shooting – may not be appropriate in urban areas
- Food restriction – an essential part of any pest control measure



# Pest Infestations: the consequences and managing the risk



**Richard Moseley, Technical Manager for the British Pest Control Association (BPCA) highlights the risks that can affect your business, and steps you can take to protect your livelihood from pests.**

## Reputation

Reputations can be ruined and businesses destroyed if pest activity is allowed to develop in sites and businesses. Media and social networking sites rapidly pick up on and report about pest infestations, throwing organisations into the media limelight without always considering the facts.

Turnover and occupancy in hospitality-related businesses can be seriously damaged by adverse publicity, significantly reducing operating profits. Always remember that pests and pest activity is of general interest to many members of the public, and media coverage can be sudden and intense.

## Legislation

If it is your site or business, it is probably your responsibility to deal with the control and eradication of pests. If you do not control pest activity at your sites, you can be forced to control rodent pests by local authorities under the terms of The Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949.

Local authorities can also deal with insect infestations under the terms of the Public Health Act 1936/1961, and where infested or contaminated food is served by eating establishments, prosecution is possible under the Food Safety Act 1990.

## Disease

There is an associated health risk with many pests, and those that spread diseases are termed 'Public Health' pests. As well as rats and mice other pests such as common house flies carry a number of pathogens (germs), as do cockroaches. The damage done to a reputation from a customer's ill health, or possibly even death, is immeasurable.

## Damage

Not only can pests damage foodstuffs and stored goods, they can also damage the fabric and fixtures of building. Rodents are especially problematic in this respect, as their incisor teeth grow throughout their life, and they must gnaw to wear them down. Items that can typically be gnawed are electrical wiring and water tanks, leading to fires, flooding and the risk of electrocution. Insurers may be less than willing to pay out compensation for damage done by uncontrolled infestations.

## Risk Management

Know your limitations. Pests are incredibly difficult to deal with, and with some species such as bed bugs, rodents and



cockroaches; require skill and training that have been learned and perfected over many years of treatments by professional pest controllers. If you are faced with an infestation that is beyond your control, bring in a professional who has been suitably trained and has access to the professional products required to manage infestations.



programme; always ensure that you use a reputable contractor. Reputable contractors will be qualified and have the appropriate insurance to allow them to work safely on your premises.

**Be Proactive**

It is always better to be proactive and prevent an infestation before it becomes a major issue. The best way to do this is to invest in a routine pest control contract with a suitably insured and qualified company. A regular inspection by a pest control professional could literally be worth its weight in gold. But be warned, ignoring the advice of a professional pest controller would not be appreciated by an Environmental Health Officer if they are alerted by a customer complaint.

**“Insurers may be less than willing to pay out compensation for damage done by an uncontrolled infestations.”**

The British Pest Control Association recommends that you employ the services of a BPCA

**Use a Professional**

Always use a reputable professional – whether it’s for a one-off infestation (such as wasps) or a proactive pest prevention

member, as you can be assured that a BPCA member is suitably qualified, suitably insured, and that they are visited and assessed by a BPCA staff representative on a regular basis.



If you are searching for a professional pest controller, then look no further!



# BPCA online

If you are searching for a professional pest controller, then look no further!

Searching for a professional pest controller?

Our database of hundreds of UK pest control companies with thousands of branches across the UK allows you to search by:

- Domestic or commercial contract
- Pest type – bed bugs, wasps, rats, mice, birds, mammals, and many more
- Distance from your premises
- Area covered



## Worried about what you've read in this issue of **alexo**?



- Have you bought pest control solely on price?
- What criteria did you use to select your servicing company?
- Are you convinced it will protect your business?

We can help with...

- Producing pest control specifications, contracts and tenders
- Pest awareness training
- Associate membership of BPCA
- Consultancy services
- Pest identification
- Finding you a professional contractor
- General pest advice



Find out more at [www.bpca.org.uk/advice](http://www.bpca.org.uk/advice)