

Maggots, fly strike

A couple of years ago I was told that there was a fledgling dove on the ground near my office and that flies had been crawling over her. I picked her up, took her home and did a quick check for injuries and fly eggs. I didn't find any.

The next morning I checked her again before carrying out the rest of my morning chores , she was fine then but two hours later as I was about to leave for work I checked her yet again : This time her tail area was a heaving mass of maggots and pulpy half eaten flesh , some of the maggots were already entering her vent . She had her eyes closed , was gasping and visibly going into shock. I realised that the flies that had been seen crawling over her had laid their eggs at the base of the feather shafts and that she was being eaten alive.

Contrary to popular belief the maggots that you might find on a pigeon, dove or any other wild animal are neither harmless nor beneficial, nor do they feed only on necrotic flesh. They are deadly.

Flies will lay hundreds of eggs in damp areas and orifices of vulnerable animals. The eggs look like tiny grains of rice which hatch very quickly into maggots. Because of the sheer quantity of maggots they will immediately start to feed on both healthy and necrotic flesh whilst they produce large quantities of toxins and toxic waste. Failure to remove the maggots will lead to the death of the bird.

During hot weather we should examine any sick or injured birds that come into our care for fly eggs and remove them with tweezers, forceps or with a stiff brush like a nail brush. If the maggots are hatched they must be removed immediately because every second the damage to the healthy tissues will increase.

In this particular case I used sterile saline to flush as many of the maggots as I could off the dove and out of her, then picked off stragglers with eyebrow tweezers. I dosed her with Moxydectin to kill any that I had missed and gave her Metacam for the pain . I also treated her for shock by keeping her warm and giving her Hartmann's Fluids because she was so close to dying. After that I put her on a course of antibiotics.

Later I found out that it is possible to make a solution that kills maggots by mixing 1 part Ivermectin to 9 parts of water and using it in small quantities directly on the maggots. It must be applied as soon as it is mixed and any of the solution that is left over must be discarded, because it is unstable.

The confusion about the effect of maggots on birds has been caused by the publicity given to Maggot Therapy, which is a different matter altogether. This involves using small quantities of sterile maggots from the greenbottle fly for the debridement of wounds. These particular maggots are necrophagous (they only eat necrotic flesh) and are applied in a clinical environment under medical supervision.

My dove lost a few tail feathers, all but one grew back. Other than that she made a full recovery and was released into my garden with two other rescued doves.