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Ghent Seeks Humane Solutions for Urban Pigeons.

Ghent, Belgium, 16.06.2026 [ENA]

Ghent is testing a humane way to manage its pigeon population. Through a pilot project using contraceptive-treated maize, the city hopes to reduce pigeon numbers while limiting animal suffering. The initiative reflects a broader shift toward more ethical urban wildlife management.

Pigeons are becoming less visible in Ghent, partly due to long-standing efforts to reduce their numbers and partly because they seek cooler places during warm weather. To further limit the population in a humane way, the city is launching a pilot project with the so-called "pigeon pill." Dispensers at 2 locations will release maize kernels containing a contraceptive substance. The project is run in partnership with Vets For City Pigeons. Ghent is also increasing awareness campaigns, enforcing feeding bans, and reducing nesting opportunities. While trapping may still occur in exceptional cases, the city aims to promote a more balanced and animal-friendly coexistence with a bird that has long been part of its history.

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Historically, pigeons held a very different role in Ghent. For centuries they were valued companions to humans, especially as carrier pigeons used for communication in times of war. During the First World War, pigeon lofts were established in the city under German occupation, a legacy documented in historical archives such as the Kriegalbum. Belgium also developed a strong tradition of pigeon racing, turning the bird into both messenger and sport icon.

Today, that relationship has shifted. What was once a symbol of connection and utility is now managed as part of urban planning and public space maintenance. Ghent's current approach reflects this tension between heritage and modern city life, seeking ways to coexist with pigeons while minimizing nuisance and preserving animal welfare.

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