

# PROOF OF THE PUDDING



**Bird proofing can be a very valuable business but even the simplest spiking installations demand a completely different ‘one time only’ approach to other pest control jobs if very costly mistakes are to be avoided.**

This is the experience of Steve Mills of Manchester-based environmental service specialists, Pestproof Ltd whose installation teams undertake bird work throughout England and Wales for many of the country’s leading commercial property owners and managers.

“Spikes are quicker and easier to install than nets or bird wire,” he agrees. “But even these are easy to get wrong. And going back to put things right can remove all the profit from the job at a stroke – especially when it’s high up on the outside of a city centre building. After all, you’re talking about a good £300/day to hire a hoist as well as the extra labour.”

With labour and other non-material inputs representing 75% or more of the cost of a typical job, Steve Mills stresses the joint keys to success with bird work are making sure you get the job right first time and in the least time possible. Which, in turn, requires three things – an accurate initial quotation, quality materials and experienced installers.

“Our customers are paying us to solve their bird problems, so it’s up to us to ensure the solution we employ actually does so,” he points out. “Otherwise, we’ll have to pay the price either in expensive call-backs or in an even most costly loss of reputation.

“As time is our single biggest cost, we also need to ensure the proofing is installed in the most efficient way. And it has to last a good long time and, for most customers, be as inconspicuous as possible.”



“While spikes can very effectively protect ledges, window sills, gutters and beams, you simply have to have the right type for the task. Apart from having longer legs than pigeons, gulls are very much stronger. They can easily stand astride pigeon spikes and are quite capable of ripping them out with their beaks. So you need more robust spikes with longer wires and particularly firm installation for effective gull proofing.

“Equally, spikes can actually provide a convenient base for pigeons to build their nests around if they’re too far apart or wrongly located. I’ve seen pigeons flatten spikes too, so they must be rigid enough and well-fixed into their bases.

“We always go for top quality, steel Avipoint spikes to guard against these problems. As well as standing out like sore thumbs in the sun, plastic spikes are not things I would ever recommend. Nor are cheaper metal systems up to the task in my experience either. In addition to being reliable and long-lasting, you need the widest possible choice of spike angle and density to address different bird problems and pressures. You also need spikes that can’t easily be bent out of shape.”





Just as false an economy as failing to use the best quality spikes in Steve Mills' opinion is not using sufficient for the job. Ledges can be considerably wider than they appear from ground level, so he always tells his installation teams to take their initial specifications as a minimum and put in an extra row wherever they consider it necessary.

"The cost of a few extra spikes is so minor and they can be added with so little extra time when you're up there it's always worth a belt and braces approach," he argues. "Particularly so when a call back to add them could well remove all the profit from the fixed-price job.

"Getting it right first time with spikes is also about making sure you clean off the surface and prime it well enough to key-in the adhesive, employ an adhesive that will provide a strong bond regardless of the conditions and, every bit as importantly, use enough of it.

The birds will be back almost as soon as you've gone, so spikes that aren't firmly attached before you leave simply won't stand a chance.

"It's vital to appreciate that spikes must be drilled into gritty or flaky surfaces like old stone or brick," Steve Mills adds. "Extra time also needs to be built into quotes for preparing dirty or difficult surfaces."

With time so much of the essence in bird work, Pestproof have come to appreciate that speed as much as quality of installation is critical with spikes. A job that should take six hours, for instance, easily take 12 hours if it doesn't go right. This put the onus firmly on easy-to-install systems and experienced installers.

Insisting on two-man teams for every job means one person can do the preparation while the other fixes the spikes. It may be an additional capital expense, but their own hoist also gives them the greatest possible access flexibility.

Ensuring sufficient spikes of the right type are always to hand is equally essential to minimise the down time in replenishing stocks which can be very considerable when working at height.

"It may be a simple thing, but spikes that stack tightly together are a real boon," insists Steve Mills. "They allow you to get the greatest possible number up to the working face at a time. And stacks that fit easily to hand enable you to carry and fix the maximum length of spike strip at a time.

"Built-in glue guides, snap-lines for rapid strip-breaking, convenient gutter and beam clips and clip-on strip fittings all make installation easier and save time. As do adhesives that work as well on damp surfaces as in the dry. Together, these little things can add up to a lot of valuable time and cost-saving.

"We've developed a profitable business and great reputation in bird proofing over the past 10 years," he concludes. "Along the way we've learnt that getting it right first time is critical and nowhere near as simple as many people assume.

"We've also found that even when we do, our good work can easily be ruined by careless builders or scaffolders following on behind us. That's why we make a point of providing them with an emergency kit of extra spikes and adhesive for running repairs at the end of our work. This alone saves us countless call-backs, I can tell you!"

