



SEASCALE PIGEONS:



In February 1998, pigeons roosting at the Sellafield Nuclear Reprocessing plant in Cumbria, England, were found to carry levels of radiation, which were described by a BNFL¹ spokeswoman as "significant".

The revelation followed an RSPCA² Inspector's visit to a pigeon sanctuary in the village of Seascale just a few miles south of the reprocessing plant. The Inspector had been called in to cull a number of pigeons where a flock, estimated at around 700 birds, was causing public health risk concerns. Worried by rumours that the birds might be radioactively contaminated, the RSPCA took the culled pigeons to Sellafield for analysis.

Although the RSPCA inspector underwent monitoring at Sellafield and was told by BNFL that he was in no danger, it was discovered that the birds were contaminated with Caesium 137. The RSPCA has stated that in future all its inspectors would wear protective clothing when dealing with birds around Sellafield.

¹ British Nuclear Fuels Ltd

² Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

On 14th February 1998, following the initial cull of pigeons from the sanctuary at Seascale, MAFF³ published advice to the general public not to handle, kill or consume any pigeon found within a ten-mile radius of the Sellafield plant. The advice was given on the basis of preliminary monitoring of the mainly feral pigeons by BNFL and on the supposition that feral pigeons were unlikely to travel more than that distance in their feeding habits. Culled birds are now known to include some racing pigeons.

Taking note of BNFL's preliminary analysis of radioactive contamination levels in some of the culled pigeons, MAFF stated that the consumption of the breast meat of around 6 birds would give a radiation dose equal to the annual public dose limit of 1mSv. They pointed to Caesium 137 being the radionuclide concerned and that this contamination of the pigeons resulted from their habit of roosting at the Sellafield site.

To ensure an independent analysis of the pigeons' contamination levels, six culled birds were obtained from the sanctuary on behalf of Greenpeace who had made arrangements to have them analysed at the French ACRO laboratory. The results published by Greenpeace revealed significantly high levels of internal and external contamination of the birds, their flesh and feathers and faeces, and contaminated soil from the sanctuary garden. The analysis identified a range of radionuclides including Americium 241 (and by implication, plutonium) as well as Caesium 137. Also found was Cerium 144 which, as a relatively short lived radionuclide, casts doubts on BNFL's claim that the contamination was coming from old buildings at Sellafield that are no longer operating.

ACRO confirmed that 90% of the contamination came from Caesium 137 on the pigeons' feathers with a reading of 403,000 Bq/kg being recorded as well as 21,300 Bq/kg for Americium 241.

In a press release on 12th March 1998, Greenpeace highlighted the serious health risks posed to the public by these pigeons, and pointed to the requirement for the birds to be classified as Low Level Waste.

"How can BNFL pretend that they have their plutonium factory under control when they have nuclear waste flying over the fence?" said Dr Helen Wallace of Greenpeace.

Following the Greenpeace press release, MAFF released their own analysis results, revealing levels of Caesium 137 in pigeon breast-meat of 50,000 Bq/kg. Both MAFF and BNFL have confirmed that their own monitoring of the Seascale pigeons is in line with the Greenpeace results. BNFL confirmed, in a local radio broadcast, that culled pigeons were disposed of in canisters at the Drigg Low Level Waste Dump.

In early March 1998, BNFL were ordered by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate to initiate a cull of a wide range of wildlife around the Sellafield site for testing. The cull

³ Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

included herring gulls, starlings, rooks, crows and sparrows together with rabbits, mice and other small animals and even mosquitoes.

Despite their acceptance of the Greenpeace analysis the pigeons' classification as Low Level Waste and the Company's determination to wipe out the entire flock because of the contamination levels, BNFL maintained that there was no risk to the public.....

Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s) Seascale Pigeon series made over the past thirteen years commemorate this event. A number of different compositions of the plant have been produced as prints, then juxtaposed on a variety of plates and platters. The images on any one piece are made up of collaged decals - engraved detail with altered digital photographs. No more than five prints of any one view of the re-processing plant are made, then each is individually collaged on differing forms of tableware.

Scott's Cumbrian Blue(s) power station series has included nuclear plants from Sweden and Switzerland, as well as coal fired buildings in Denmark. Most recently works have included landscapes with wind turbines.

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