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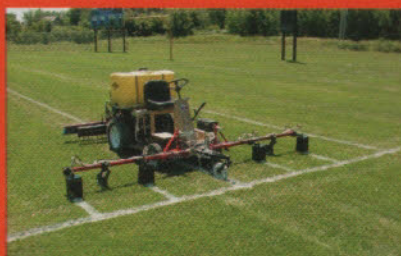
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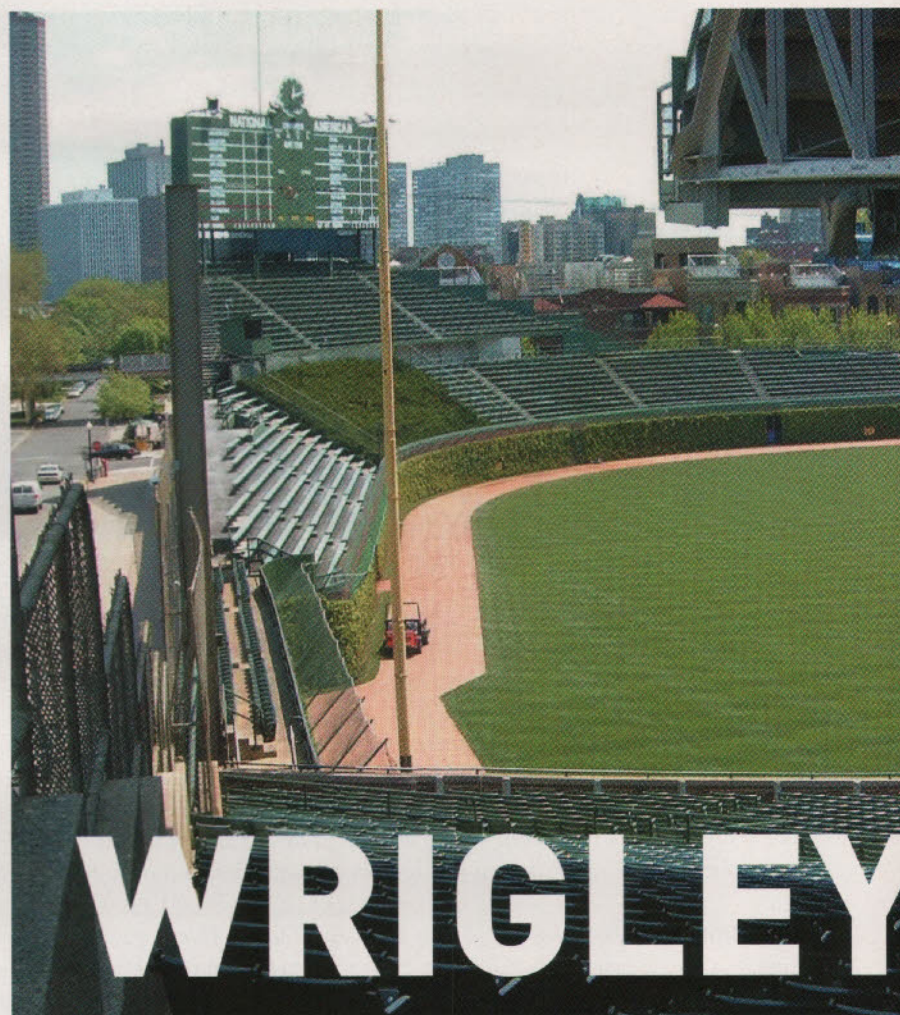
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around the grounds



During 2002 Rathje tried a few tricks to defeat the pigeons. "First, we tried using treated corn," he says. The kernels contain a substance that is supposed to annoy the pigeons by disrupting their equilibrium. The effect, if any, was undetectable. Next, Rathje and his crew tried applying a sticky gel on the trusses to discourage landing. But, says Rathje, there were too many trusses and beams to get sufficient coverage. They tried plastic owls to bother the birds to no avail.

In spring 2003, Rathje investigated a sonic device for deterring birds manufactured by Chicago-based Bird-X, Inc. Bird-X in turn referred Rathje to a bird-deterrence consultant, Kevin Connelly, GM of Premier Pest Elimination.

"Food service and pigeon excrement don't mix," Connelly says bluntly. Health issues abound. "When 40,000 fans come to an outdoor venue and you have bird droppings, the probability rises geometrically that someone will be affected by contaminants," he says. Also, he adds, the cost of cleaning up resistive bird residue on the seats and in the stands before and after each game is considerable.

Connelly met on-site and explained the options, including installing extensive netting in Wrigley Field's vast superstructure to restrain the birds from roosting. This would require much longer than 2 weeks to install properly. Even more to the point, it would break Rathje's budget.

Rathje preferred Connelly's other proposal: installing ultrasonic devices to get the most bang for Wrigley Field's buck, and the most coverage considering the expanses to be protected. The two men worked out a plan to install seven Bird-X Ultrason X units and seven Super BirdXPeller PRO units in the trusses under the upper deck and in the lower deck corners.

The double whammy on the birds was deliberate and logical. As Bird-X president Ron Schwarcz explains, "The area to control was large enough to require several sonic units. We selected two different types of units to produce greater variety of sound. This would provide immediate results while helping prevent long-term acclimation, since birds don't like surprises and unpredictable changes."

The Ultrason X product uses ultrasonic sound waves to repel birds and other nuisance critters. The basic technology isn't new; Bird-X incorporated it into its product line 40 years ago to deter birds in enclosed areas like warehouses and



loading docks, where walls and roofs could magnify the impact of the sound. In a recent breakthrough, Ultrason X is the first device to take ultrasonic sound OUT of doors.

The second type of deterrence device, Super BirdXPeller PRO, pushes the sound much farther and is ideal for large, open areas. It works on the bird's psychological state, as Ron Schwarcz explains: "The machine incorporates the birds' own distress calls to repel the 'usual suspects'—pigeons, sparrows, starlings and other common pests. Then we added the sounds of two predators, knowing that these cries would scare all birds universally." For maximum effect, the Super BirdXPeller is programmable to produce random timing, volume and frequency.

The big day came in late May 2003. When the Bird-X units were turned on, "The birds flapped out," Rathje says.

"About 90 percent of the birds left for good," says Connelly. It wasn't a total elimination, both men agree, but it forced the bird problem to fall within an acceptable tolerance range. That was the goal,

Connelly says, noting that realistic expectations and budgetary constraints are always factors in choosing solutions for large facilities.

"We're changing the habits of an animal," Connelly says. And sometimes that involves reasonable compromise. For example, the sonic equipment at Wrigley Field is turned off during home games because it was felt that the audible portion of the sound would disturb the fans. Consequently, some pigeons return while the units are turned off. Immediately after the game, the units are turned on again, to good effect. It's a compromise that works for Wrigley Field.

From the professional's point of view, bird deterrence pays for itself rapidly in reduced clean-up costs; but, says Connelly, the benefits of bird control go far beyond economics and into intellectual values of improved aesthetics, environmental safety and positive public relations. You can't put a price on those. **ST**

This article was supplied by Bird-X Inc., www.bird-x.com.

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