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Pigeons Lose Battle of Trafalgar Square

LONDON (Reuters) - Thousands of pigeons in London's famous Trafalgar Square enjoyed their last free municipal lunch Monday.

London's authority forced out the last of the square's pigeon-feed sellers earlier this year and have been giving the birds diminishing rations in hopes of getting them to move on.

Despite being an avowed animal lover and noted newt fancier, Mayor Ken Livingstone wanted to rid the square of what he dubbed the ``rats with wings'' because of the mess they caused.

Animal rights activists gathered in Trafalgar Square on Monday to protest against the mayor's decision, saying the semi-domesticated birds would starve.

The Pigeon Alliance, a loose grouping of animal charities, collected hundreds of signatures on a petition to send to Livingstone and whipped up a feathered frenzy as they distributed corn to the pigeons.

But the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds said the plan would probably be successful without harming the pigeons.

``They're likely to disperse and look for food elsewhere,'' a spokesman said.

There was an eerie lack of pigeons in the square after Monday's bird-feeding ballyhoo. But tourists did not seem upset about the possible disappearance from the square of some of its best-known residents.

``I'm glad I don't have to worry about being pooped on,'' said American Greg McPartlin. ``I was a little scared yesterday.''

In fact, it was Londoners who appeared most distressed.

Norma Fuller, who feeds the pigeons every day, denied they were a health hazard and castigated Livingstone for calling them winged rats.

``It takes one to know one,'' she said.

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