

Animal Rights Group Asks Pope to Stop Releasing Peace Doves

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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An Italian animal protection group has appealed to Pope Francis to stop sending out peace doves after two birds released by the pontiff in a call for reconciliation in Ukraine were attacked by larger predators.

Italy's National Agency for Animal Protection, or ENPA, has published an open letter to the Pope, saying that animals born in captivity are unable to recognize predators and "cannot escape dangerous situations," Italy's GeaPress news agency reported on Monday.

The Pope set free two doves from a balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square on Sunday after a prayer calling for an end to violence in Ukraine, where anti-government demonstrators have clashed with police troops in a protest movement that has been ongoing since November.

A seagull and a black crow pounced on the two white doves, pecking and grabbing the peace

birds as thousands of people watched.

While some people interpreted the attack as an ominous sign for Ukraine, ENPA said that the doves were probably attacked because of "their white color, very eye-catching in nature because it is rare in wild animals," which attracted the predators' attention.

National Geographic offered a similar explanation on Monday, noting that тхоусандс of pigeons — the darker-colored relatives of doves — live in Rome without getting into much trouble.

ENPA said that even if the doves were lucky enough to escape the predators, the cage-raised birds would have trouble surviving in the city, where they would be unable to recognize other dangers, such as cars.

ENPA was planning to organize an online campaign to gather signatures in support of its appeal to the Pope to end the practice of releasing peace birds from the balcony of the Vatican.

The white dove is often used as a symbol of peace and reconciliation in the Christian tradition because of its role in the Genesis narrative of Noah's Ark, where a white dove carrying an olive branch in its beak marked the end of the flood.

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