How a bunch of bird brains led to the development of touch screens

August 31 2017

There was a time during World War II when pigeons almost became the next war heroes... until scientists at NIST grounded them -- thanks to some other winged friends. Credit: NIST

Did you know that the origin and development of touch screen technology can be directly tied to one of the world's most famous behavioral scientists and a bunch of pigeons? This strange and fascinating part of science history is highlighted in the latest NISTory video from the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

At the peak of World War II, the U.S. government asked scientists of all backgrounds to find a solution to a tough defense problem: There was no

really effective way to bomb important targets deep behind enemy lines without putting American pilots in grave danger.

Psychologist B.F. Skinner was convinced that he could train pigeons to become glider pilots. Working with NIST scientists, he began a series of scientific experiments to see if the animals could accurately hit targets with bombs. The results of this work would later lead to what we now take for granted in touch screens on our phones and tablets.

The video about this part of science history can be viewed and downloaded at NISTory: Pigeon Pilots

You can also read the background information on this recent post to the NIST blog, Taking Measure:Saga of the Bird-Brained Bombers

Provided by National Institute of Standards and Technology

Citation: How a bunch of bird brains led to the development of touch screens (2017, August 31) retrieved 8 February 2023 from https://phys.org/news/2017-08-bunch-bird-brains-screens.html