

# Seagulls



The presence of gulls in urban areas has increased in recent years for a number of reasons such as the availability of good nest sites and discarded food. Most of the gulls that live near us cause no problems to residents, however, a small number are causing annoyance with noise, droppings and aggressive behaviour during the nesting season.

In West Dunbartonshire two species of gulls can be found nesting on buildings. These birds can cause considerable problems including noise, mess from droppings, fouling roofs, walls, windows, gardens, people and domestic washing. Gulls can also cause damage to property by picking at roofing materials and by blocking gutters and down pipes with nesting materials. Blockage of gas flues from similar materials can also cause serious problems. Gulls are also known to dive and swoop on people and pets, causing distress and alarm among the public.

## **Know your Gulls**

Herring gulls are large birds. Mature birds are on average about 55cm (22") from bill to tail with a wingspan of about 85cm (34"). They have silver/grey wings and pink legs.

Lesser black backed gulls are usually slightly smaller. Adult birds have slate grey back and yellow legs instead of pink legs.

Both species begin mating in April and commence nest building from early May onwards. In towns, the nest is constructed from straw and grass, twigs, paper and any other material the gull can conveniently use. The nest can be quite large and, if made of material accumulated over several years, very heavy.

Eggs are laid from early May onwards with two or three being the usual number. The eggs can take about three weeks to hatch so the first chicks are generally seen about the beginning of June.

The chicks grow quickly but generally do not leave the nest for 5-6 weeks and are quite active. They often fall from the nest and in towns this will almost certainly mean they cannot return to the nest.

Small chicks will die but larger chicks will be protected and fed by their parents on the ground. Parent birds protecting fallen chicks are often the ones which dive and swoop on people and animals who often do not realise a chick is down on the ground.

Chicks generally begin to fly in late July, early August and then take normally four years to reach maturity and breed.

Lesser black backed and herring gulls tend to nest in colonies and once roof nesting birds gain footholds other gulls nest on adjacent buildings. If left unchecked, a colony can start to develop.

### **Gulls and the Law**

This is a BRIEF GUIDE only and not meant as an authoritative source of information.

The principal legislation dealing with the control of birds is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Generally, it is illegal to capture, injure and destroy any wild bird or interfere with its nest or eggs. The penalties for disregarding the law can be severe. However, General Licences issued by the Scottish Government allow measures to be taken against certain common species of birds on grounds which include the preservation of public health or public safety. Any action taken must be humane and the use of an inhumane method which could cause suffering would be illegal. The use of poisons or drugs to take or kill any bird is specifically prohibited except under very special circumstances and with a specific licence issued by the Scottish Government. The list of birds against which humane methods may be used includes Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls. However, only the owner of a building or the occupier can take action against the Gulls on it, or they can give someone else permission to act on their behalf. Any work carried out must be reported annually to the Scottish Government.

In practice there are very few humane methods to kill gulls and skill and experience is needed to deploy them.

Shooting of roof nesting Gulls is considered neither humane nor safe.

Experts believe that a large-scale cull of gulls would not be effective. Indeed some believe that the gull population in the towns is different from that of local landfill sites and there is documented evidence to indicate that this is the case. Culling all the gulls at landfill sites would not result in a reduction in the number of gulls in the town and vice versa. In addition, the practical aspect of carrying out a cull in an urban area is extremely difficult.

## **What can be done?**

### Education

There is no legislation which specifically prevents people from feeding gulls; however, it is very undesirable to do this. Attracting gulls encourages them to foul the immediate area, causes disturbance from noise and encourages gulls to nest in areas they would otherwise not colonise. Gulls mainly forage in agricultural areas but will take food in urban areas too. Please dispose of unwanted food responsibly in a wheelie bin or bin with a lid.

### Nest Removal

Nests could be removed, however, this would have to be repeated a number of times during the season as the gulls will rebuild their nest very quickly if it has been removed or destroyed.

### Egg Removal

Eggs could be removed from nests, however, this would have to be repeated a number of time during the breeding season as they will be replaced once they are found to not to be viable by the parent birds.

### Egg Oiling

The treatment of gulls eggs, with liquid paraffin offers a cheap and effective way of preventing hatching. If done correctly and at the right time of year, this technique is 100% effective in preventing the hatching of eggs but does not reduce the adult population.

### NOTE

Culling, egg and nest removal are all measures which come within the scope of the general licences issued by the Scottish Government and such action must therefore be justified.

### **Disturbance of Birds**

There are a variety of methods of disturbing or discouraging birds from particular locations including birds of prey, birds scarers etc. For areas within towns none of these methods have yet proved successful in the long term.

## **Deny them Nesting Places**

Controlling gulls is extremely difficult. The best method is to deny them nesting places on buildings. All owners/occupiers of buildings, which have, or may attract roof-nesting gulls are strongly urged to provide the building with deterrent measures suitable to the individual building.

The principal methods of deterrence are:-

### Short Spikes

There are several spiking systems commercially available which incorporate a stainless steel spike fitted in a plastic base. The spikes and base come as an assembled unit in convenient heights, which can be cut to size. These spike systems may be useful for protecting small dormer roofs and other similar locations. The usual fixing method is to use screws or, where these would damage the structure, proprietary adhesives.

### Long Spikes

Long spikes can be used to prevent gulls nesting on top of a chimney – stacks between the pots and in the valley behind a chimney – stack where it meets the roof.

Gulls sometimes nest behind chimney – stacks where the chimney meets the sloping roof. The valley formed is often warm and sheltered from the wind and makes an ideal nest site. It is important to fix sufficient numbers of spikes to ensure that the nesting area is well covered.

### Wiring and Netting

Horizontal nets mounted sufficiently far above the surfaces to be protected and stretched tightly enough to keep them well out of contact with the roof even under the weight of several gulls landing on them may prove effective.

This method of proofing is however difficult and expensive as it has to withstand surprisingly strong and persistent efforts from the gulls to get through them.

If you have a problem with birds nesting on large flat roofs you may wish to contact a specialist company for advice or a quotation.

Because of the problems of fixing any type of proofing the Council considers these methods should always be done by a competent specialist.

## **Further Advice and Assistance**

The following professional organisation can be contacted for advice on specialist contractors.

### **British Pest Control Association**

1 Ground Floor  
Gleneagles House  
Vernon Gate  
South Street  
Derby  
DE1 1UP  
Tel: 01332 294 288  
Fax: 01332 295 904  
Email: [enquiry@bpca.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@bpca.org.uk)  
Web: [www.bpca.org.uk](http://www.bpca.org.uk)

### **National Pest Technicians Association**

NPTA House  
Hall Lane  
Kinoulton  
Nottingham  
NG12 3EF  
Tel: 01949 81133  
Fax: 01949 823 905  
Email: [officenpta@aol.com](mailto:officenpta@aol.com)

It is our aim to deliver an excellent level of service. For further information or to request any aspect of our service:

- Contact West Dunbartonshire Council Customer Contact Centre on 01389 738282 (Mon to Fri 8am to 6pm)
- Visit our website at [www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk](http://www.west-dunbarton.gov.uk)
- Email [environmental.health@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:environmental.health@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)