



Information sheet – licences for the control of gulls

We understand that gulls can cause problems for people, particularly when they nest on or near buildings. All breeding birds are protected by law. While it is better to try to prevent a problem occurring in the first place, there are things you can do if deterrent measures fail and problems arise. We offer a licensing system which allows somebody to carry out an action in relation to gulls – including breeding gulls – that might otherwise be against the law.

Licences can cover control actions such as killing or taking certain wild birds and taking, damaging or destroying the nests or eggs of certain wild birds.

There are two types of licences available – general and individual – depending on the species of gull and the purpose of the actions you want to take.

General licences

General licences cover situations where there may be no other satisfactory solution to the problems caused by gulls. Even if it is unlikely there will be any great conservation impact, they should only be used as a last resort and you must be able to explain what other alternatives you have tried.

You do not need to apply for a general licence but in order to use one you **must** ensure that you meet all of the criteria, terms and conditions stated in the licence. You can only use a general licence for the purpose, species and activities specified. Failure to use it in this way or to abide by any one of the conditions may mean that you are not covered by the licence and this could lead to prosecution.

You can find out more on [how to use a general licence](#) by visiting our web site.

The general licence that is most commonly used for dealing with problem gulls is the one for the purpose of *preservation of public health, public safety and preventing the spread of disease* and could be used where gulls are dive-bombing people, for example. This general licence lists the actions that you can take to control problem gulls and the specific methods you must use.

You can find a copy of [GL 03/2019: To kill or take certain birds for the preservation of public health, public safety and preventing the spread of disease](#) for use during 2019 on our web site.

If you wish to make use of this general licence, you must be able to confirm the species of gull that is causing you problems (see page 2 for tips on gull identification). The types of gull that can be controlled using this licence are limited to ***herring gulls, lesser black-backed gulls and greater black-backed gulls*** only. It cannot be used for the control of other types of gull such as common gulls or black headed gulls.

Individual licences

If the gulls that are causing you problems are not listed on general licences (for example common gull), or the problems you are having are not covered by the purposes of the general licences, you must apply for an individual licence to take action to control the birds. Visit our web site to find out more on [how to apply for an individual licence](#).

Identifying gulls

The type of gull that causes most problems for people living in towns and cities is the ***herring gull***.

The herring gull is a large bird with pink legs, pale eyes and yellow bill with a red spot.

They can be very noisy and parent birds are very protective of their nests, eggs and young.

Young herring gulls are only slightly smaller than their parents and are a mottled brown colour.



In contrast, the ***common gull*** is smaller, has greenish legs, dark eyes and no red spot on the bill.

Despite its name, the common gull is not that common – numbers have declined in recent years – and this is why common gulls are not listed on general licences.

Common gulls don't breed in towns as often as herring gulls though they are found in places such as Aberdeen, Elgin and Forres.



You can find more information on the following web sites to help you identify the gulls that are causing you problems:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/animal-deterrents/gulls/>

<http://www.bto.org/about-birds/birdfacts/bird-families/gulls>

If you are not confident that you can identify the type of gull or that you can undertake the appropriate actions to control the gulls that are causing problems, we recommend that you contact a suitably qualified individual such as a pest control operative.

Please be aware that gulls frequently use roofs etc. for nesting and tend to return year after year. We recommend that people look for ways of preventing gulls from nesting in certain places in future years to avoid an on-going problem. You should also avoid feeding gulls and make sure that all food scraps and litter are disposed carefully so that gulls can't get to them.

If you are concerned for the welfare of a gull or think that a gull nestling has been abandoned by its parents you should contact the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA). Their Animal Helpline number is 03000 999 999.