



- Environmental Health -

## INFORMATION ON GULLS



Herring gulls are common residents of the British Isles with a population of around 200,000 pairs. Their cries and calls have come to be associated with seaside towns.

### IDENTIFICATION

Herring gulls are a large gull, with grey upper parts and black ends to their wings, which have white tips or "mirrors". The bill is heavy looking and yellow, with a red spot towards the tip of the lower mandible. The legs and feet are a pink flesh colour.

### HABITAT

Gulls are found mainly on the coast, but can also be seen on inland waters and refuse tips, especially outside the breeding season. They are gregarious in all seasons, breeding in large colonies on coastal cliffs, grass slopes, islands, and sand dunes. Since the 1940s, gulls have bred increasingly on roofs in coastal towns and cities in the south-east, south-west, and north-east regions of Britain.

### EGG-LAYING AND HATCHING

Eggs are generally laid in May - a clutch consisting of 2-4 (usually 3) - and are incubated by both sexes for between 28-30 days.

The young are fed by both parents, and fly when about 5-6 weeks old.

Only a single brood is raised. Outside the breeding season, gulls roost in large flocks, feeding principally on marine organisms, carrion, garbage and on agricultural land.

### PROBLEMS

Versatile breeding habits, changes in winter distribution, and feeding on inland refuse tips have led to a population increase which, in turn, has caused a strain on normal breeding grounds. This seems to be the main reason for increased nesting in buildings.

Nests in towns and cities are normally built on the roofs of houses, shops, offices and factories, often between chimneys or other suitable construction.

The resulting mess from droppings, and birds' raucous cries and loud wailing during the breeding season, have lead many people to consider them a pest species.

### **THE LAW ON GULLS AND OTHER WILD BIRDS.**

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the following birds may be killed or taken by an authorised person under the terms of a *General Licence*.

|                          |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Great Black-backed Gull  | Larus marinus         |
| Herring Gull             | Larus argentatus      |
| Lesser Black-backed Gull | Larus fuscus          |
| Collared Dove            | Streptopelia decaocto |
| Feral Pigeon             | Columba livia         |
| Woodpigeon               | Columba palumbus      |
| Carrion Crow             | Corvus corone         |
| Hooded crow              | Corvus cornix         |
| Jackdaw                  | Corvus monedula       |
| Magpie                   | Pica pica             |
| Rook                     | Corvus frugiligus     |

**The owner or occupier of the land on which the action authorised is taken or their agent is an "authorised person" for the purposes of the *General Licence*.**

The *General Licence* can only be relied on:

When killing or taking of birds or destroying nests and/or eggs to protect public health, public safety and to prevent the spread of disease.

Before any such action is taken, the authorised person needs to be satisfied that non-lethal methods of control, such as scaring or proofing, are either ineffective or impracticable. Where any action is taken against the lesser black-backed gull or herring gull, the person taking the action must advise Scottish Natural Heritage, as soon as the action is completed or by the end of January of the following year at the latest of the number of birds or their eggs taken, killed or destroyed in each month along with the reason why. The methods of control used against these birds in each month, and the locations of any such actions shall also be detailed.



The address of SNH to be used is;

Scottish Natural Heritage  
Licensing Team  
Great Glen House  
Leachkin Road  
Inverness  
IV3 8NW

Companies which are licensed to undertake this work.

Ecolab Ltd  
Tel: 02920 852000

Presley Pest Control Ltd  
Tel: 01651 851234

Lyons Environmental Services  
Tel: 07938957865

Specialist Vermin Control  
Tel: 07825 447231  
Email: svc@hotmail.co.uk

(The Moray Council can not recommend or endorse any of the above mentioned companies.)

### **HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM NESTING GULLS**

Herring gulls are noisy and aggressive, particularly while breeding, and parent birds will fly, and even strike, at anyone they perceive to be an intruder or a threat to their young. If you are near a nest site, sensible precautions should be taken to protect yourself.

### **DISCOURAGE NESTING**

Studies of breeding herring gulls show that, once established, they will continue to return to a specific site year after year. As they live for up to 30 years, this could be for a considerable time. Any offspring produced are just as site-tenacious.

The best defence against gulls nesting on roofs is to erect deterrent devices which prevent the birds building their nests. Various devices are on the market and can be obtained from the following companies:

Netting and Wire Systems Ecopic Pigeon and Gull Deterrent:  
**Network Pest Control Systems Ltd., 1030 Centre Park, Slutchers Lane,  
Warrington, Cheshire, WA1 1QR (Tel. 01925 411823).**

Sprung Wire System "No Perch" Bird Control:  
**Peter Cox Property Services, Unit 10, Whitemyres Avenue Industrial,  
Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire (Tel. 01224 624063).**

Alternatively, you can make a simple wire system at a much reduced cost. Make a frame that fits into the area that the birds are using, e.g. between chimney stacks. Fix wires onto the frame at a height of 30cm. This will prevent the gulls from landing in that area as they cannot fold their wings properly.

On flat roofs, wire can be stretched across and held in place by brackets, again at a height of 30cm, with a 10cm space in between the wires. Again, this will deter the birds from landing.

**IMPORTANT:** Please check these D.I.Y. deterrents with your local Fire Brigade to make sure they do not constitute a fire risk, as a result of lightening strike.

Information on seagull deterrent equipment, and egg and nest removal, may be obtained by contacting pest control companies listed in the 'Yellow Pages' under "**Pest & Vermin Control**".

