



- Environmental Health -

INFORMATION ON HERRING 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

Herring 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, herring 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, herring gulls roost in large flocks, feeding principally on marine organisms, carrion and garbage.

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

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, herring gulls may be killed or taken by an authorised person under the terms of a General Licence. There are three General Licences which cover:

1. The killing/taking of birds to prevent serious damage to agriculture.
2. The killing/taking of birds to preserve public health/air safety.
3. The killing/taking of birds to conserve wild birds.

There is also a fourth General Licence which permits the sale, and advertisement for sale, of certain gulls' eggs, including the herring gull, for human consumption.

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 Environment Services, 9 Pittodrie Place, Aberdeen (Tel. 01224
323188).**

"Pinnacle" Anti-bird Matting:

Hughes & Hues Ltd., Unit 1F, Lowmoor Industrial Estate, Tonedale, Wellington, Somerset, TA21 0AZ (Tel. 01823 660222).

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**".

Local tradesmen, such as slaters or roofing contractors, may also be able to remove seagull's nests.

