



# Advice about the gull problem in Bristol

## *Environmental Health, Pest Control*

In the Bristol area, there are two species of gulls nesting on buildings: the Herring Gull, and the Lesser Black-backed Gull. These birds can cause problems including noise, mess from droppings and fouling roofs, walls, windows, gardens, people and washing. They can also damage 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 sometimes dive and swoop on people and pets and cause distress and alarm.

## What we can do to help residents and businesses affected by gulls

We have no responsibility or statutory obligation to control gulls and cannot offer any practical help. We can only provide advice.

To get in touch with a reputable bird control company, contact the British Pest Control Association.

## Information about 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 nest building from early May. In towns the nest is constructed from straw and grass, twigs, paper and any other convenient material. It can be quite large and very heavy. Gulls usually lay two to three eggs from early May. They take about three weeks to hatch. Chicks generally begin to fly in late July to early August and take around four years to reach maturity and breed. They tend to nest in colonies and once roof-nesting birds gain footholds other gulls will join and nest on nearby buildings. If left unchecked, a colony can start to develop.

Gulls that dive and swoop on people and animals are often parent birds protecting fallen chicks.

## The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

Like all wild birds, gulls are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, making it an offence to intentionally injure or kill them or to damage or destroy an active nest or its contents. However, general licences issued by the Natural England General Licence WML-GL05 allow control measures where there are public health or public safety concerns.

The law doesn't allow control measures for gulls if they're causing noise nuisance or simply damaging property.

## Controlling gulls

This is extremely difficult. The best method is to deny them nesting places on buildings. We have no legal powers to force owners or occupiers of buildings to carry out works to their buildings to prevent birds from nesting, or make them take action against birds that have nested, even if they are causing problems. In terms of the general licences available, we cannot justify culling or egg or nest removal as there's no evidence that the presence of gulls affects public health or air safety and there's little evidence that public safety is affected.

### **Culling**

Experts don't think that a large-scale cull of gulls would be effective. Some believe that the gull population in the towns is different from that of local landfill sites. Culling all the gulls at landfill sites wouldn't reduce the number of gulls in the town and visa versa. Also, culling in an urban area is extremely difficult with the existing legislation.

### **Nest removal**

Nests can be removed, however this would have to be repeated several times during the season as gulls rebuild their nest very quickly if it's been removed or destroyed.

### **Egg removal**

Eggs can be removed from nests under licence. However, this would have to be repeated a number of times during the breeding season as the parent birds will produce new clutches of eggs once they find the previous eggs missing.

### **NOTE**

Culling Lesser Black-backed Gulls, egg and nest removal are all measures which come within the scope of the general licences issued by the government and must therefore be justified.

### **Egg oiling and egg replacement**

The treatment of gull's eggs with liquid paraffin BP is a cheap and efficient 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. However, this method has been replaced by the method of substituting real gull eggs with plastic, dummy ones to stop the birds from laying any more eggs till the end of the breeding season.

### **Disturbance of birds**

There's a variety of methods of disturbing or discouraging birds from particular locations including using birds of prey and bird scaring devices etc. None of these methods is successful and practical in the long term in urban areas.

### **Proofing**

Methods of proofing buildings include the use of spikes, nets or wires. **This is the only practical method of preventing birds from nesting on buildings.**

### **Education**

Gulls are attracted to areas where food is plentiful. Sources of food for gulls in the Bristol area include earthworms and insects, waste produced from human activity and dustbin bags. However, gulls scavenge waste bins and look for food. You should properly store and dispose of litter, particularly food waste. Put it out on the day of collection, not the night before.

## **What you can do about seagulls nesting on your property**

If the gulls on your property are posing public health or public safety concerns you may be eligible for a general license which allows an owner, occupier or authorised person to take, damage or destroy nests, take eggs or kill birds in accordance with the requirements and conditions set out in the licence.

A possible risk to health and safety might be birds nesting on or over a boiler ventilation flue resulting in a build-up of noxious fumes. A license won't be granted for problems involving bird noise, fouling and property damage.

The responsibility and cost for resolving any gull problem lie with the owner or occupier of an affected building.

## **Deterrence**

We strongly urge all owners or occupiers of buildings that have or may attract roof-nesting gulls to add deterrent measures suitable to the individual building. This section describes some of the measures available.

**Spikes:** fitting appropriate repellent stainless steel spikes to nesting and resting locations such as dormer roofs, leading ledges, chimney stacks etc.

Spikes can be used to prevent gulls nesting on top of chimney stacks between the pots and in the valley behind a chimney stack where it meets the roof. It is important to fix sufficient spikes so that the nesting area is well covered. There are several spiking systems commercially available which incorporate a stainless steel spike fitted in a plastic base.

Gulls sometimes nest behind chimney stacks where the chimney meets a sloping roof. The valley formed is often warm and sheltered from the wind and makes an ideal nest site. It is difficult to place spikes at the base of the valley formed because the fixing can interfere with the structure of the roof.

**Wiring and netting:** these methods can be used in certain locations. 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. These methods should always be done by or after having taken advice from a competent specialist because of the problems of fixing.

While large scale attempts to reduce gull numbers in towns and cities is unlikely to be successful, small scale targeting of nests on those sites causing particular problems can be successful. In such cases nest material should be removed and bird proofing carried out during the winter months.

**NB.** It may be necessary to obtain written permission from the planning department before beginning any works when installing permanent repellent devices on certain listed buildings.

## **Further advice**

[Natural England – general licences](#)

[Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#)

[BPCA – British Pest Control Association](#)