

Gull Management Guidance

Planning and implementing a strategy to help tackle gull problems

Background

The presence of large numbers of gulls, particularly in urban areas, can sometimes cause problems for people in residential, commercial or industrial settings. These problems include aggressive behaviour of breeding birds, scavenging and spreading litter from bins, and noise issues. For further information on what would be considered public health and safety issues and satisfactory alternatives please see [SNH Guidance on Public Health and Safety: Issues with nesting birds](#), which should be read in conjunction with this note.

Gulls, licensing and the law

The law protects all wild birds, including gulls and their nests and eggs ([Birds and the law](#)). Whilst many actions can be undertaken to help prevent or minimise problems caused by gulls without contravening the law, sometimes it may be necessary e.g. by removing nests or eggs where problems are evident or expected. In these instances SNH are able to licence such activities as a last resort in order to preserve public health or safety. Information on how to apply for a licence is available on the [SNH website](#).

What is Gull Management?

If the presence of gulls is causing or expected to cause a public health or safety issue it is critical to address this at the earliest possible opportunity to minimise the risks posed. Failing to do this not only increases the risk but also means that it is unlikely to provide a longer-term solution to problems.

A hierarchical approach to gull management measures must be taken. In the first instance the site owner and/or manager should aim to prevent problems occurring (avoidance) through the use of scaring devices and physical preventative measures such as nets, wires, spikes and annual pre nesting season debris removal. Where this fails to deter birds, nest and egg removal should be undertaken to prevent breeding. Only as a very last resort, when all other measures have failed should chicks and adult birds be killed.

It should be noted that the problems caused by gulls are not necessarily restricted to breeding birds, and that during the winter our towns and cities may be visited by birds that have migrated from the continent – this means that measures to resolve problems will be dependent on exactly what those problems are. A good, reputable, professional pest controller can be invaluable in helping to develop an effective prevention plan depending on the specifics of the problem(s) being experienced.

Who should undertake Gull Management?

It is important to note that many gull management activities do not necessarily have to be carried out by specialists. One of the keys to success is concerted and frequent effort, particularly early in the gull breeding season. Therefore it may be possible for the people normally present at the location to carry out tasks (for instance ensuring nesting materials are removed, keeping areas tidy and free of food or other attractants). Where problems are being

experienced across a wide-area and number of properties or premises we strongly advise that a collaborative and strategic plan is developed between all parties and with professional input.

Key Principles

- Know which species of gull you are dealing with
- There are a variety of means by which problems can be minimised or avoided. If you have a problem you should try as many deterrents as possible in the hierarchical order described above.
- Prevention is better than cure
- Early intervention is extremely important (pre-nesting and early in the breeding season debris clearing and scaring)
- Efforts need to be concerted and regular
- Consider both short and long-term solutions
- Licensed activities should be a last resort.

Options for managing gull problems: The following list gives options, as well as recommended dates and frequency, for carrying out activities to reduce or avoid problems caused by gulls.

Action	Details	Who can do it?	Suggested timing	Suggested frequency
Physically prevent nesting	Physically excluding birds from potential problem nesting sites is often the best way of preventing or minimising problems caused by gulls. Whilst this can be expensive in the short-term, in the long-term this may be far more cost-effective and successful than year-on-year management. There are a wide variety of products available to prevent birds from nesting, including netting or wiring to prevent use of potential nest sites, anti-nesting spikes to 'proofing' key areas such as chimney pots or guttering/roof valleys. All exclusion measures do need to be appropriately maintained to ensure that they remain effective and do not cause welfare problems (e.g. entanglement). This is a list of equipment that can be used to exclude and scare birds .	Advice from a reputable and experienced pest control company is likely to be helpful, especially for larger projects.	Any time outside of breeding season (September to March).	Once, but maintenance may be required.
Remove old nests and potential nesting materials	Clearing of nesting material from areas where gulls have previously nested and caused problems in the past is very important in terms of good roof maintenance and management to prevent problems such as blocked drain pipes and gutters and could possibly reduce the attractiveness of a site for birds to nest in future.	Anyone, unless specific access or health and safety considerations.	Prior to birds arrival/commencement of breeding season. March.	Once.
Regular removal of attractants such as litter and food waste	The presence of food, unprotected bins and food waste can exacerbate problems caused by gulls, particularly where they are causing mess or other problems at ground level. By ensuring that bins are secure and emptied regularly and that litter and food waste is minimised any problems should also be minimised. Whilst undertaking these measures at an individual site level is recommended, it may be far more effective as part of a co-ordinated plan over a much larger area.	Anyone.	At all times, particularly prior to and during breeding season.	Preferably daily and at least weekly.
Human disturbance	The presence of people on site is a great deterrent to nesting. However it is critical that these are employed from the very start of the nesting season. By putting in effort at the start of the season, and particularly when problems first arise, gulls may choose to attempt to nest elsewhere.	Anyone, unless specific access or health and safety considerations.	Throughout breeding season. With particular emphasis immediately prior to the start of the nesting season.	Preferably multiple times daily.
Static/ automated scaring devices	There are a wide range of commercially available 'scaring' devices to help discourage birds from using or nesting at a site. These can range from static audio devices emitting noises from sirens or distress calls of the same species of bird to visual deterrents to the use of pyrotechnics, lasers, starter-pistols firing blank cartridges. These can be effective but as with many measures they need to be part of a more integrated effort involving multiple approaches and should be varied regularly for maximum effect.	Anyone, although advice from an experienced and reputable pest control company is likely to be helpful.		Constant but change device very regularly (every two weeks).
Hawking by birds of prey	The flying of captive-bred birds of prey by a falconer may sometimes be useful to help dissuade birds from nesting. This should be used most intensively at the start of the breeding season.	An experienced falconer.		As often as possible.

Disturbance by dogs	Use of dogs to patrol potential nesting areas at ground level can be an effective means of ensuring that birds do not settle at the start of the breeding season.	Anyone, unless specific access or health and safety considerations.		As often as possible
Nest removal (licence required)	As soon as birds start to settle and scrape out a depression in the ground or to bring in, move or arrange nesting materials you can consider that they are nesting and therefore that destruction or removal of that structure could only be carried out under licence. By doing so, and continuing to do so as frequently and intensively as possible, particularly at the start of the breeding season, it may be possible to minimise problems caused by gulls. By keeping on top of this it may be possible to avoid the need for the removal of eggs in future and it may possibly help persuade the birds to move elsewhere.	Anyone, unless specific access or health and safety considerations.	Throughout breeding season. With particular emphasis immediately prior to and at start of nesting season	Preferably daily or multiple times daily at the start of the nesting season. <u>At the very minimum this must be carried out fortnightly on sites where there is full accessibility for the activity to be undertaken or weekly if full access is not possible</u>
Egg removal (licence required)	Regular removal of nests as they are built should reduce the need to remove and destroy eggs. However this may still be necessary in some cases. Once eggs are removed (along with the nests) birds will likely attempt to re-lay and can do this multiple times. Therefore, as with removal of nests, effort should be targeted as early as possible and very frequently and this can ultimately reduce the size of the breeding population at that site. If egg removal is carried out very regularly at the start of the season, it can be successful in resulting in the colony being abandoned.	Anyone, unless specific access or health and safety considerations.		
Egg pricking/oiling (licence required)	Egg pricking or oiling (with paraffin oil), or replacement of the eggs with dummy eggs (that can be purchased commercially) can make them unviable and minimise the need to repeatedly remove eggs because the birds will generally continue to incubate them rather than relay.	Anyone, although advice from an experienced and reputable pest controller is advised.		
Killing of adults or chicks (licence required)	This should be an absolute last resort. Removal of nests or eggs, or the pricking or oiling of eggs should mean that this circumstance does not arise. We would expect to only licence this in exceptional circumstances where it has not been possible to be able to remove nests and eggs and where there is a clear and imminent risk to public health or safety.	Recommend that this should be carried out by an experienced and reputable pest controller.	If and when the need arises	As necessary