

# Gull Summit Breakout Sessions

## Summary



**NatureScot**  
**NàdarAlba**

Scotland's Nature Agency  
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

# Summary

Four breakout sessions explored the challenges and practicalities of managing urban gull populations across Scotland. The following is a summary drawn from raw notes taken by scribes during the sessions.

While views differed on specific tools and approaches, there was strong consensus that no single intervention is sufficient. Lasting success depends on coordinated national and regional approaches, consistent funding, evidence-based best practice, and public engagement.

## Effectiveness of Management Tools

Participants agreed that most tools have limited impact when used in isolation. Lasers, falconry, spikes, and pyrotechnics were generally rated as ineffective or short-term, while habitat management and physical prevention such as cages and netting—when installed and monitored correctly—were viewed as methods with measurable success. However, even effective measures can displace gulls rather than resolve the issue. Participants stressed the need for scientific, peer-reviewed evaluation to establish what works, where, and why.

## Waste Management and Food Sources

Across all groups, waste control was identified as one of the most critical factors in reducing gull problems. Fast food outlets, schools, and town centres provide abundant food sources that sustain urban colonies. Key actions proposed include:

- Enforcing business responsibility for waste and litter.
- Installing gull-proof bins and improving waste collection.
- Introducing powers to prevent public feeding.
- Rolling out public education campaigns (e.g. “Don’t Feed the Gulls”) to change social norms.
- Education, particularly in secondary schools, was seen as a long-term behavioural solution.

## Building Design and Prevention

Participants agreed that prevention should start with better urban planning and building design. Recommendations included:

- Amending Scottish Government Technical Handbooks to discourage flat roofs in problem areas.
  - Incorporating gull-proofing measures at the construction stage.
  - Promoting habitat management by design to make urban areas less attractive to gulls.
  - Examples from new schools highlighted how poor design perpetuates long-term costs and health concerns.
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## Data, Evidence, and Research

All groups highlighted a lack of robust data on gull populations and the effectiveness of preventions. Suggested actions:

- Conduct national and regional annual surveys to establish baselines.
- Create a shared national database of nesting sites, complaints, and management outcomes.
- Commission independent, science-led research and case studies to guide future decisions.

## Collaboration, Licensing, and Governance

Delegates called for a coordinated national framework. Current licensing processes were seen as slow and inconsistent. Priorities include:

- Building mutual trust between NatureScot and local authorities.
- Developing clear, accessible national guidance on licensing and management tools.
- Establishing a national working group or a hub-and-spoke model linking councils, conservationists, and communities.

## Education and Public Engagement

Education was widely recognised as the most powerful and underused tool. Participants proposed:

- National messaging campaigns to shift public behaviour.
- School-based projects linking gull issues to environmental awareness.
- Improved community engagement and transparency to increase public understanding that “the gull problem is a people problem.”

## Funding and Next Steps

A major barrier remains insufficient and seasonal funding. Participants urged:

- Year-round investment to sustain long-term efforts.
- Collaborative funding models involving councils, businesses, and government.
- Exploration of “push-pull” strategies, including creation of safe nesting zones away from problem areas.
- Delegates concluded that education, enforcement, design, and data must work together within national and regional levels in a way that is evidence-led, well-funded, and consistently applied.

In conclusion, participants agreed that no single tool will solve the gull issue. Effective management requires joined-up national and regional strategies, education and enforcement, evidence-led decision-making, and sustained commitment from government, councils, businesses, and communities alike.

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