

Seagull Control

Advice to Householders

Seagulls are large birds and can be up to 68cm from tail to bill and have a wingspan of up to 85cm. Most people refer to all gulls as being seagulls, and therefore assume that all species are pest species. However there are only three species, which are classed as pests. These are as follows: -

The Herring Gull is on average is 56cm in size. It has a pale grey back and wings with black and white wing tips, and a red spot on its yellow bill. Its legs are usually pink.

The Lesser Black-backed Gull on average is 53cm in size. It has a dark Grey back and wings. Its legs are usually yellow or orange in colour.

The Greater Black-backed Gull on average is 68cm in size. It has a black back and wings and its legs are usually pink.

More and more seagulls are moving into built up areas to nest. The main reason for this is that food sources are readily available both from people deliberately feeding them and the amount of takeaway foods and other refuse strewn around roads and streets. Breeding pairs court in April and commence nest building from early May onwards. In towns the nests tend to be constructed from straw, grass, twigs, paper and any other material the gull can conveniently use. These nests can be large and if they are made of material accumulated over several years, they can become quite heavy. This means that if a breeding site is established, then the gulls will return year after year. Many people find gulls to be a nuisance for a number of reasons but the main ones are listed below:-

- *Noise caused by calling gulls and their heavy footsteps*
- *Mess caused by their droppings fouling washing, cars, gardens, people and walkways.*
- *Damage to properties caused by gulls picking at roofing materials and by nests which block gutters or hold moisture against the building structure.*
- *Birds dive bombing and swooping on animals and people.*
- *Gas flues can become blocked by nesting materials which can have serious consequences (sometimes these can be fatal) if gas fumes are prevented from escaping correctly.*
- *Mites and other insects can get a hold in houses from the old, abandoned nests once the chicks have fledged.*
- *The risk to Public Health due to the diseases that they carry.*

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Eggs are laid from early May onwards with 2 or 3 being the usual number. The eggs take about three weeks to hatch, which means that the first chicks are seen around the beginning of June. The chicks grow quickly and are quite active, which means that they often fall from their nests. In towns this often means that they are unable to return to their nests. Small chicks will die if they are not returned, but the larger chicks will be protected by their parents and fed on the ground. The chicks generally fledge in August and then take about three years to reach maturity when they in turn will start to breed. The life expectancy for gulls can be up to 20 years. Gulls are social creatures and once roof nesting gets a hold, other gulls will start to move in to an area

and nest on adjacent buildings, until their numbers build up sufficiently that a colony is established.

The main legislation that deals with the control of birds is the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**. Generally speaking it is illegal to capture, injure or destroy any wild bird or to interfere with its nest or eggs. The penalties for disregarding the law can be severe. General licenses issued by the **DETR (Department of the Environment, Transport & Regions)** and **MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food)** allow certain measures to be taken against certain pest species of birds on grounds which include the preservation of public health or public safety. Any action taken must be humane and use of an inhumane method, which could cause suffering, could be illegal. Only the owner of a building or its occupier can take action against the gulls on it, and only if those gulls are of the three species referred to above. They may however give permission to someone to act on their behalf. Shooting is not to be encouraged unless full regard is had to the Fire Arms Act 1968 and gun licences etc. are checked first.

The best method to prevent gulls from nesting on your property is to sufficiently proof your property against the birds so that the nests are not built there in the future. The more people who proof their properties, and maintain them, the more likely it is that gulls will be forced out of residential areas to nest in other areas where they will be less likely to be a nuisance to the public. Proofing materials that can be used are: -

- Spikes on chimney pots, gutters, dormers etc.

For more information on proofing your premises you can contact the Councils' contracted Pest Control company on: 01255 433 999, alternatively there are companies listed within the yellow pages or on the internet.