

Gulls and Pigeons

Advice



Seagulls

We receive many enquiries each year about seagulls, especially during the mating season – this generally begins with the birds identifying nesting sites in February each year, with the actual breeding season running from March to the end of July with a typical clutch of three eggs laid in April/early May.

Urban gulls are protected by The Wildlife and Country Act and it is an offence to remove or harm their eggs or nests unless they are a serious risk to public health. Nuisance alone is not considered to be a reasonable justification for culling.

Tendring District Council's strategy for dealing with issues relating to seagulls and pigeons is to concentrate on their food sources. Our staff have the power to issue fixed penalty fines to businesses that litter the streets with commercial food waste. We also ensure that businesses have adequate waste storage facilities, but should you notice an inadequate storage facility contact Street Scene Office on 01255 686788. Our staff encourage residents to increase recycling by removing food waste from the refuse sacks, participating in the weekly kerbside food waste collection scheme using the gull proof food caddies. Additionally and in conjunction with the Clacton Town Partnership, reusable seagull proof bags have been piloted in the Clacton Town centre area.

Gulls will pick at roofing materials in order to build their large nests. The nests themselves may be in a position to block gutters, vents and chimneys, and are likely to hold moisture against the structure of the building. Not only a nuisance, gulls can present health issues as they often pick-up and transmit E.Coli and other harmful organisms to humans through contact with their droppings.

If seagulls or pigeons are causing a nuisance, then it is the responsibility of the homeowner or occupier to ensure that the property has proofing. The most effective methods are netting and spikes.

Not only can gulls be extremely noisy, there are also an increasing number of reports of these birds attacking people or pets for food, and when protecting their young.

Lesser Black Backed Gull



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.

Advice to Householders

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. 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.



Herring Gull

Seagull Control

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. 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.

Greater Black-Backed Gull



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.

Pigeons

The feral pigeon is descended from domesticated strains of the rock dove and the wild breeding population is supplemented by racing pigeons and escapees from domestic pigeon lofts

Feral pigeons build their nests in or on buildings and other structures, where they are usually found on ledges or in hollows, under eaves or on girders.

Feral Pigeons



Some feral pigeons are capable of breeding throughout the year; however the peak occurs between March and July.

Much of the damage caused by pigeons arises from infestations of buildings and their fouling.

The acidity of their droppings may erode the surface of stonework, gutters and drains become blocked and pavements may be made unsafe because of the potential of slipping on droppings.

Feral pigeons should also be regarded as potential carriers of disease such as salmonella.

Proofing of roosting and potential nest sites is probably the most effective means of control.

Plastic spikes and netting fixed to suitable sites should deter roosting and nesting. Tendring District Council does not offer a service for the control of pigeons but if you require any further information please contact a Pest Control Company specialising in bird proofing and may be found in the local telephone book or on the internet.