

# Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 17 May 2018

## Urban Gull Control Options

Item number	100
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	None

### Executive Summary

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At Transport and Environment Committee on [7 December 2017](#) a motion from Councillor Cook requested a report which accurately reviews the actions of other local authorities in Scotland as well as that of relevant English authorities and any other agencies which have been proactive in this area so that future possibilities for action in Edinburgh are identified. This report seeks to address that request.

## Urban Gull Control Options

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that committee
  - 1.1.1 Note the contents of this report;
  - 1.1.2 Recommend to Planning Committee that consideration be given to roof structure on new builds and refurbishments to minimise their attraction to nesting gulls.

### 2. Background

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- 2.1 There are six species of gull in Scotland these are: Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Kittiwake and Lesser Black-backed Gull. All have been found within built environments and tend to breed colonially and to forage and roost communally.
- 2.2 There are a number of theories around why there is a greater prevalence of urban gulls. These theories include gulls moving from food sources around sea fishing communities on to landfill sites which have become more closed and controlled and ultimately onto urban sites.
- 2.3 Gulls are a protected group by law (Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981) falling into either red or amber protection status depending on the species. Herring gulls are on the red list because although numbers are increasing in urban areas the decline in numbers in coastal areas has been greater leading to an overall decrease in numbers.
- 2.4 A number of reports have been submitted to various Council committees over the last decade, describing ways of gull control. Gull control has been offered by the Council Pest Control on a fee-paying basis since 2009 and by a number of other private sector operators.
- 2.5 In 2012 committee agreed to trial a free at the point of use gull control programme focussed on North Merchiston. It is not clear if this trial was a success measured by the number of eggs and nests removed or whether the gulls were displaced to neighbouring areas.
- 2.6 Councillor Cook requested in a motion at the Transport and Environment committee on [7 December 2017](#) a report which accurately reviews the actions of other local authorities in Scotland as well as that of relevant English authorities and any other

agencies which have been proactive in this area so that future possibilities for action in Edinburgh are identified. This report seeks to address that request.

### 3. Main report

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- 3.1 This report seeks to review points in the gull lifecycle where intervention may be possible, look at various control measures and review what other local authorities have been doing.

#### **Gull Lifecycle Intervention Points**

- 3.2 To reduce gull numbers and the potential for disturbance there are three potential intervention points. These are

- 3.2.1 disrupt roosting and nesting sites;
- 3.2.2 disrupt gull reproductive cycle; and
- 3.2.3 control food sources.

- 3.3 Appendix 1 gives details in guidance from the Scottish Government to local authorities of a range of control measures, their consequences, and likely chances of success.

#### **Gull Control Measures**

##### **Natural predators.**

- 3.4 By nesting on urban rooftops this keeps the gulls and their eggs away from foxes and rodents. Airborne predators such as buzzards, kites and hawks are in such low numbers locally they are not significant on gull population control.

##### **Roofing and nesting disturbance.**

- 3.5 Measures include placing of short or long spikes on roosting or nesting areas and proofing roof areas with netting. These measures can have some success, but may just move the problem to an adjacent roof that does not have control measures.
- 3.6 Gloucester Council have produced a detailed and descriptive document outlining the various measures and how best to deploy them. This is reproduced at Appendix 2.
- 3.7 One measure that committee could consider adopting is recommending that Planning Committee “design in” rooftops for new builds and refurbishments that deter gulls from nesting. This option is seen by some as a better option than trying to retrofit roofing solutions.

##### **Authorised Interventions.**

- 3.8 Scottish National Heritage (SNH) recognise that gulls, although on endangered lists, can cause harm to humans. As a result, SNH issue an annual licence laying out the authorised control methods. The current licence “GL 03/2018: To kill or take certain birds for the preservation of public health, public safety and preventing the spread of disease” will be used by pest control companies to control gulls.

- 3.9 The SNH general licence goes on to say “General Licences allow authorised people to carry out activities that would otherwise be illegal under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). They cover situations where we accept that there may be no other satisfactory solution. However, they should only be used as a last resort. Operators must be able to explain what other alternatives they have tried if challenged.”
- 3.10 Reviewing numerous local authority websites related to gull control, it is clear there is a difference in interpretation of the SNH general licence terms. Some local authorities state they have no powers and only provide control advice and signposting to private pest control companies. Other local authorities say they have powers but limit themselves to education programmes around bird feeding. Some local authorities such as Dundee Council feel able to justify use of lethal controls for “preservation of public health, public safety and preventing the spread of disease” being used in the absence of another “satisfactory solution” and as a “last resort”.
- 3.11 Public Health can be taken to include both physical as well as mental health. In such an interpretation the effects of sleep deprivation from squawking gulls would be a legitimate concern and justify control measures.
- 3.12 The SNH Licence allows only the following gull control measures:
- 3.12.1. Pricking of eggs
  - 3.12.2. Oiling of eggs using paraffin oil
  - 3.12.3. Destruction of eggs and nests
  - 3.12.4. Cage traps
  - 3.12.5. Shooting with any firearm
  - 3.12.6. Targeted falconry
  - 3.12.7. By hand

**Food Source Controls.**

- 3.13 Measures that would reduce the prospects of an easy meal for gulls which are happy to scavenge for food include:
- 3.13.1. Improved litter control including around takeaway food outlets
  - 3.13.2. Use of stronger “peck proof” plastic bags by households and businesses when disposing of waste.
  - 3.13.3. Improved refuse collection frequency to minimise the time that waste is left kerbside awaiting collection
  - 3.13.4. Dissuading the public from feeding gulls through communication and perhaps environmental warden interventions
- 3.14 Whilst human food source control would be beneficial gulls would still have free and easy access to one of their staple diet of earthworms due to the huge amount of greenspace in Edinburgh and homes with gardens. Gulls can fly significant

distances for food which gives them access to the surrounding farm land in the Lothians.

### Gull Control Measures in Edinburgh

- 3.15 The Council Pest Control team have for a decade provided gull control measures on a fee-paying basis compliant with SNH licence controls. Other Pest Control companies have provided a similar service to their customers including Edinburgh Airport using a specific licence which control birds that may damage planes.
- 3.16 The following table which sources data from both SNH and the Council Pest Control team lists the number and type of interventions that have taken place in Edinburgh in the last six years. This table shows that although there was no free Council provided service in North Merchiston significant fee-paying activity was taking place across the city by the Council Pest Control team and other pest control companies.

Year	Nests		Eggs		Chicks		Adults	
	Council	Others	Council	Others	Council	Others	Council	Others
2017*	3	7	511	11	2	0	0	0
2016	144	44	572	72	40	0	0	147
2015	45	28	576	32	21	0	0	162
2014	152	61	770	96	38	2	0	0
2013	171	65	802	85	12	0	0	279
2012	187	11	555	27	10	0	0	402
Sub Total	702	216	3786	323	123	2	0	990
Grand Total	918		4109		125		990	

\* Private company data not submitted at the time of request

- 3.17 The following table shows the gull control activity in Edinburgh during 2012 when the free at the point of use North Merchiston "pilot" was undertaken. Streets included were Bruntsfield Place, Bryson Road, Dundee Terrace, Temple Park Crescent, Yeaman Place, Fowler Terrace and Watson Crescent.

A significant amount of activity was undertaken in other areas of the city by the Council and by other pest control companies. Activity included nest removal and destruction of eggs, chicks or adults. It is not known why other pest control companies were destroying adult birds.

Year - 2012	Nests	Eggs	Chicks	Adults
Council - Excluding North Merchiston	80	390	10	0
Council - North Merchiston "Pilot"	107	165	0	0
Other Pest Control Companies	11	27	2	402
Grand Total	198	582	12	402
North Merchiston as % of Edinburgh Activity	54%	28%	0%	0%

## Gull Control Measures in Other Local Authorities

- 3.18 The [BBC](#) in a survey found that expenditure varied across the constituent parts of the UK. As part of a Freedom of Information request the BBC aggregated spend over three financial years 2013-14 to 2015-16.

Country	Total Spend 2013-16
Scotland	£950,000
England	between £1.7M and £2.1M
Wales	£43,000
Northern Ireland	£9,518

- 3.19 Breaking down the expenditure in Scotland equally across all 32 authorities would give an average spend of around £10,000 per authority per annum. Many authorities spend nothing and a few spend significantly more than £10,000 per annum. These are discussed later.
- 3.20 The BBC survey also showed gull control expenditure grouped by the top 15 spending authorities in England as follows.

Local Authority	Total Spend 2013-16
Southwark	£393,562
Hackney	£162,653
Greater London	£137,321
Stoke on Trent	£75,420
West Sussex	£65,748
Portsmouth	£62,568
Greenwich	£60,000
City of London	£58,268
Leeds	£57,574
Camden	£54,272
Redbridge	£53,963
Halton	£51,304
Newham	£50,948
Poole	£45,060
Watford	£43,006

- 3.21 The BBC data shows the 15th highest spending authority in England spent around £15,000 per annum on gull control. The other 200 spend less. Two thirds of English local authorities responded to the BBC FOI request. Breaking down the expenditure in England equally across the approximately 250 local authorities would give an average spend of around £3,000 per authority per annum.
- 3.22 [Bath & North Somerset 2016 – 2018](#). The Council spent £85,000 in 2016/17 and will spend a further £57,000 in 2017/18 in their campaign against nuisance urban gulls. This approach will involve falconry and nest management.
- 3.23 [Worcester City Council 2017](#). Worcester is one of the lower spending active authorities spending £5,000 on the issue in recent years.

- 3.24 [Scarborough 2017](#). Scarborough Borough Council spent £36,500 appointing a specialist contractor NBC Environmental to deal with the 'nuisance' local herring gull population. A one year 'disruption and dispersal programme' was launched targeting the problem in selected areas on the North Yorkshire coast. It focused on seafront and town centre locations in Scarborough and Whitby and involved the removal of herring gull eggs and nests from buildings in the selected areas and the use of birds of prey such as Harris hawks and falcons to deter and scare away gulls.
- 3.25 [The Highland Council 2012](#). In 2012 Highland Council spent in the region of £30,000 to tackle nuisance from 700 pairs gulls across the city. This was subsidised by a £10,000 grant from The Inverness Business Improvement District.
- 3.26 [Aberdeen City Council 2009 – 2012](#). Aberdeen Council is one of the more proactive councils within Scotland with expenditure historically higher than most. It is reported that a significant amount of expenditure is spent on deterrent measures such as netting, spikes and sound systems which are all very effective in the locality but do little to reduce overall numbers of gulls. Areas of focus are primarily civic buildings and schools. Expenditure 2009-10 was £168,584 and in 2011-12 was £107,849
- 3.27 [Aberdeenshire Council 2013-17](#). Aberdeenshire have undertaken egg and nest control measures backed up falconry for a number of years. Using mainly outside contractors their effort was focussed on civic buildings, schools and some of their town centres namely: Stonehaven, Peterhead and Fraserburgh. These projects involved weekly visits with predatory birds along with targeted de-nesting on council owned buildings. Aberdeenshire Council removed nests from private properties if it could be demonstrated to be essential on health and safety grounds. The annual cost is estimated to be around £8,000 per town centre. Aberdeenshire Council considered charging householders £50 as a contribution towards the £300 per property cost for three gull control visits.
- 3.28 [Dundee City 2017](#). Dundee City Council authorised the culling of 200 adult birds and 30 chicks last season. This will have an impact this year (2018) but without bird proofing measures new gulls are likely to fill the void created by the culls. The cost of the project is not given.
- 3.29 [Dumfries & Galloway 2000–17](#). For the best part of 20 years Dumfries & Galloway have been carrying out gull population control with varying success. In 2009 & 2010 the council opted to carryout falconry throughout the town centre from dawn till dusk. The estimated cost was around £20,000 - £25,000. Although it was a very visual deterrent which was warmly received by the local population the statistics in the table for 2010 show a rise in nest site numbers suggesting the effects of the falconry programme were limited.
- 3.30 The only clear result is that intensive de-nesting in the inner city has forced birds to nest on industrial units in outlying areas of town. This would also explain the total gull population growth despite intensive de-nesting. The project has seen a 13% decline in town centre gulls but a 240% rise in edge of town gull pairs. After all the intervention over nearly a decade at great cost the total number of gull pairs in Dumfries has increased by 113%.

3.31 Table of number of gull pairs in town centre or town edge of Dumfries over time.

Year	Town Centre	Town Edge	Total Gull Pairs
2007	149	147	296
2008	138	160	298
2009	166	204	370
2010	218	450	668
2011	175	417	592
2012	185	486	671
2013	165	522	687
2014	153	410	563
2015	130	500	630
Change	-13%	240%	113%

3.32 The example of Dumfries is often put forward as an example of gull de-nesting and control for Edinburgh to follow. But the human population of Edinburgh is 15 times that of Dumfries and housing style is often four to six storey tenemental rather than single or double storey. The evidence from Dumfries would suggest that if considerable resource was expended over a significant time period the number of gulls in North Merchiston could be reduced a little but the gulls would relocate to other parts of Edinburgh instead.

#### 4. Measures of success

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4.1 Adoption by Planning Committee, guidance that builds in measures to deter gull and pigeon roosting and nesting.

#### 5. Financial impact

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5.1 There are no significant, new financial implications arising from this report.

#### 6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

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6.1 The actions and outputs described in this report adhere to the risk compliance policy and governance arrangements. In addition, the recommendations in the report do not impact on any existing policies of the Council.

#### 7. Equalities impact

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7.1 There are no significant equalities implications arising from this report.



## **8. Sustainability impact**

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- 8.1 There are no significant sustainability implications arising from this report.

## **9. Consultation and engagement**

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- 9.1 Planning Service.

## **10. Background reading/external references**

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- 10.1 Gloucester City Council: Gulls - How to stop them nesting on your roof (Appendix 2)
- 10.2 Report to Environmental Services Committee, dated 11 October 1999, Feral Pigeon and Gull Nuisance Within The City (Appendix 3)
- 10.3 Report to Executive of the Council, dated 16 January 2001, Gull Problems Within The City (Appendix 4)
- 10.4 Report to Executive of the Council, dated 29 January 2002, Gull Management Within The City (Appendix 5)
- 10.5 [Report to TIE Committee, dated 27 July 2010, Gull nests in Tenemental Areas.](#)
- 10.6 [Report to TIE Committee, dated 29 November 2011 Gulls Nests in Tenemental Areas](#)
- 10.7 [Report to TIE Committee, dated 21 February 2012, Control of Gulls and Feral Pigeons in the City](#)
- 10.8 [Report to T&E Committee, dated 19 March 2013, The 2012 Merchiston Gulls De-nesting Pilot Project](#)
- 10.9 [Motion to T&E Committee, dated 15 March 2016, Urban Gulls - Motion by Councillor MacInnes](#)
- 10.10 [Report to South West Neighbourhood Partnership dated 7 June 2016, Urban Gulls \(Merchiston\)](#)
- 10.11 Note to Petitions Committee, dated 27 January 2017, Gull De-nesting in North Merchiston
- 10.12 [Motion to T&E Committee, dated 7 December 2017, Gulls Denesting \(Business Buletin\) - Motion by Councillor Cook](#)

**Paul Lawrence**

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Robbie Beattie, Scientific Bereavement & Registration Senior Manager

E-mail: Robbie.beattie@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 555 7980

**11. Appendices**

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Appendix 1	Guidance from Scottish Government to Local Authorities
Appendix 2	Gulls – how to stop them nesting on your roof (Gloucester City Council)
Appendix 3	Feral Pigeon and Gull Nuisance Within the City (11 <sup>th</sup> October 1999)
Appendix 4	Gull Problems Within the City (16 <sup>th</sup> January 2001)
Appendix 5	Gull Management Within the City (29 <sup>th</sup> January 2002)

Type of mitigation technique	Mitigation technique	Contexts for possible effectiveness in urban Scotland	Major biological limitations	Practical application issues
Non-lethal disturbance	Sounds (e.g. distress calls, bangs, sirens,)/pyrotechnics	<p>Clearing gulls from relatively small areas for short periods of time;</p> <p>Moving gulls to alternative sites, particularly non-breeding birds (e.g. disturbance at roosts to deter recruits).</p>	<p>Habituation to the scaring method is likely to occur;</p> <p>Less likely to be effective at moving territorial breeding gulls.</p>	<p>Frequent changes in the position, time and type of disturbance may improve effectiveness;</p> <p>In urban settings, disturbance methods may disturb humans and other non-target species.</p>
	Use of birds of prey	<p>Little rigorous documentation of success available on which to base guidance;</p> <p>Falcons might be used effectively in relatively open areas (e.g. industrial areas with large flat roofs, landfill sites);</p> <p>Hawks might be useful only to flush pest birds from buildings, which can then be secured;</p> <p>Success less likely with territorial nesting gulls of landfills and roosts (e.g. at airports and to deter non-breeding birds from recruiting into the breeding population).</p>	<p>Choice of bird of prey species is likely to be important depending on context of use;</p> <p>Generally, requires intensive work initially and re-enforcement over subsequent years.</p>	<p>Training and careful choice of bird of prey species to reduce risk of actual kills of gulls and/or other non-target species;</p> <p>Relatively large areas might be "treated" by birds of prey flying, particularly falcons;</p> <p>Need to start before gulls begin nesting at potential breeding sites;</p> <p>Can be used with sounds / pyrotechnics but regular re-enforcement using bird of prey likely to be necessary;</p> <p>Concerns specific to the urban environment (risks to the public and birds).</p>
	Human disturbance	<p>Unpublished information suggests that this may be effective in clearing breeding colonies from urban areas if appropriate access to nesting areas can be achieved.</p>	<p>Likely to require intensive work during the breeding season (starting early in the season);</p> <p>Suggested as being less prone to habituation than other scaring techniques.</p>	<p>Issues of access to all suitable nest sites;</p> <p>Currently no studies to assess the extent to which any effect in a given year will persist in subsequent breeding season(s);</p> <p>Some persistent individuals/pairs of gulls may require additional methods of removal.</p>
Manipulation of nesting areas	Preventing access, landing or nesting	<p>Can eliminate nesting and loafing birds from specific proofed buildings;</p> <p>Need to proof all suitable gull nest sites to reduce</p>	<p>Birds are likely to move to alternative suitable nesting sites nearby.</p>	<p>Issues of access to all suitable nest sites;</p> <p>Correct design and placement of devices required for different buildings and gull</p>

		effectively numbers nesting in any particular area; Correct design and placement of any devices used is essential.		species (training issues); Periodic maintenance of devices required. Need to minimise risks of entanglement to gulls and non-target species.
	Manipulation of nesting substrates	Anecdotal reports of nesting prevented by use of roofs of materials or colours but no consistent reports and no rigorous testing documented.		
	Creation of alternative nesting habitat or relocation of colonies to non-conflict sites	Likely to require: (i) creation of suitable nesting habitat (suitable substrate in a setting that renders nesting areas free from ground predators; in a location away from human interests; (ii) pro-active attraction of the gulls to the area; and (iii) use of suitable methods to disturb gulls from current breeding locations that are perceived to be problematic;  No specific studies to test whether the idea is feasible in the context of urban gull colonies.	Requires knowledge of likely distances over which gulls of breeding age would be likely to move if disturbed;  Requires knowledge of other likely areas for colonisation (some of which might also result in perceived conflicts with humans).	Availability of suitable locations within a suitable distance of existing colonies is critical;  Recurrent problems with containing the colonies in non-conflict areas?
Manipulation of food sources	Reducing food availability <i>e.g.</i> street litter, waste, people feeding gulls	Likely to requires widespread co-ordinated effort to eliminate or reduce all food sources within an area (winter problems) and within possible foraging ranges (breeding birds).	Need to know the availability of alternative food sources within the range of the gulls and predict how the individual gulls will respond with respect to the removal of the sources over which the LA has control.	Lack of knowledge of gull movement patterns and behaviour in urban environments currently limits use of this potential method
Restriction of breeding success	Treatment (e.g. oiling, pricking, substitution) or removal of eggs or nests	Likely to be effective for removal of 'problem pairs' or for localised problem areas;  Treatment of eggs may reduce gull aggression levels due to incubation behaviour.	To reduce numbers of gulls at any one colony, a high proportion of eggs must be treated or removed;  Continued effort likely to be required, although reduced recruitment may reduce the level of effort needed in future years.	Time consuming (multiple visits required per breeding season); Little expertise required for nest or egg removal, more care required for egg treatment;  Removal of eggs or nest destruction may be faster per site visit than egg treatment but is likely to require more follow-up visits to remove replacement clutches;  Issues of access to all nest sites.

	Introduction of predators	Not likely to be useful in urban environments in Scotland.	Risks to non-target species.	Inaccessibility of many nests to predators.
	Contraception	Technology not sufficiently developed currently.	Specificity of chemical or hormone contraception (potential effects on non-target species);  Requirement to treat a substantial proportion of the gull colony over an extended time.	Technology undeveloped;  Time consuming, continuous effort;  Attraction of pest species to any "treated" food.
Removal of adult birds	Capture and translocation or killing	May be of utility in removing 'a problem' nesting pairs as a temporary measure.	For translocation, distance is likely to need to be large to discourage return;  Replacement by other pairs likely to occur.	
	Narcotic bait	Isolated nesting areas with restricted public access (e.g. industrial sites).	Density dependent responses (e.g. earlier and more successful breeding) from surviving individuals may reduce effectiveness; Need to target a substantial proportion of the colony if the aim is to reduce overall numbers;  May reduce recruitment from new birds.	Nests must be accessible for placing baits and collecting carcasses;  Requirements and conditions for obtaining necessary specific licence are considerable;  Training and health & safety considerations.
	Shooting	Generally likely to be inappropriate for urban environments;  Isolated areas with restricted public access.	Density dependent responses (e.g. earlier breeding) from surviving individuals;  May reduce influx	



November 2016

# Gulls

## How to stop them nesting on your roof

### Introduction

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This booklet has been produced in partnership with the Gloucestershire Gull Action Group. Although the examples quoted are Gloucester-based, the suggestions put forward are applicable throughout Gloucestershire and beyond.



*Herring Gull*

Its purpose is to advise developers how to design their buildings in a 'gull unfriendly' way, and give advice to owners/occupiers of existing buildings on how to deal with nesting gulls without causing them or other wildlife undue distress.

Although it is not a formal Supplementary Planning Document, development control staff will be using the guide when assessing applications for new buildings, or applications for netting and other forms of control where planning permission or listed building consent is required.

### Background

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The first record of urban nesting gulls in the county was in 1967 when three pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gulls bred in Gloucester Docks. Numbers have increased significantly over the past 30 years to the extent that in 2004 it was estimated that two thousand pairs of Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls nested in Gloucester City. Although there are no authoritative figures across the county, it is thought that in urban areas numbers are increasing at about 20% per year. Two species cause problems in our towns and cities; the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) and the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*).



*Lesser Black-backed Gull*

There are a number of reasons why gulls come to urban areas, but in the case of Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, they are here to breed.

Rooftops provide excellent nesting sites that are protected from the elements and free from predators like foxes and rodents. The availability of food in the surrounding countryside and from landfill sites means that the survival rate of young chicks is very high. Although they will take food from discarded rubbish in streets and parks, this is not considered to be a significant factor for their success within urban areas.

Although other gulls can be seen in and around our towns and cities, it is only the Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls that breed in these areas. This guide will deal with discouraging these birds from nesting.

## Lifecycle

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Adult birds (3 years and over) having once bred in a town or city will generally return to the same colony year after year, often to the same nesting site. New recruits (those breeding for the first time) will find a new site and come to the county from as a far afield as South Wales and Devon.

Mating activity will start in February when birds begin to identify nesting sites, courting is in full swing by March, and by April the nest will have

been made. Typically, eggs will be laid in late April or May. Apart from courtship rituals the impact on we humans at this time is not too great. This all changes in June. The eggs start to hatch, the adults become very active and the young chicks call for food. Matters get much worse in July and August when the young birds fledge (begin to fly). At this time the adults are very aggressive and young chicks are falling out of nests and roaming the streets. By the end of the summer the colony begins to disperse and things quieten down until the next breeding season.



It is important to understand that Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls are colonial birds, that is they prefer each others company in a large group to successfully breed. Birds on the periphery of the colony or in new satellite colonies are highly vulnerable and will tend to be those that are nesting for the first time. Making life difficult for these birds can pay real dividends. If they are



left and become established on your roof it will become almost impossible to move them on. A little forethought therefore in 'designing-out' obvious nesting sites or installing preventative measures can pay significant dividends in later years.

### Nesting habits

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Lesser Black-backed Gulls in wild colonies tend to nest on the ground, often on dunes or moorland. In urban areas they prefer flat roofs with a little substrate (gravel etc). They build a very simple nest of moss and other vegetation and if need be this can be done in a matter of hours.

Typically three eggs are laid in each nest. On a modern building, nests will tend to be built behind a parapet wall or where there is protection from the elements.

In wild colonies Herring Gulls prefer cliffs, though will nest on dunes and moorland. In urban areas they will tend to occupy difficult to access sites between chimney pots and tucked away on ledges. They will nest on flat roofs and can be seen nesting together with Lesser Black-backed Gulls.



There are a number of simple techniques that can be employed to make your building less attractive to gulls. Broadly these can be split into two distinct categories. The first is to 'design-out' nesting sites in the first place.



The second concerns attaching other structures to deter the birds. The latter can be retro-fitted, but the former is probably more effective.

### 'Designing-out' nesting sites on new build

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As discussed, flat roofs are the favourite nesting sites for these birds. Modern office and commercial buildings provide ideal sites. Without suggesting that the whole design process should focus on gulls, a few points should be kept in mind.

### Pitched roofs

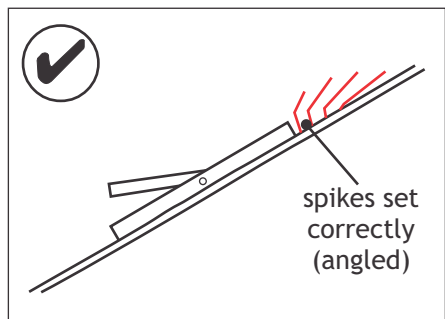
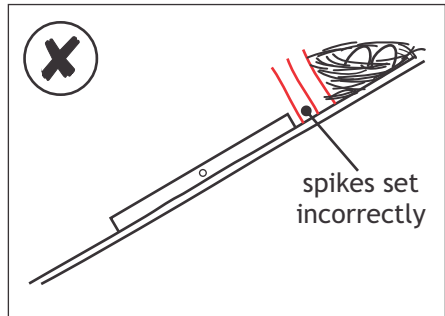
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Nests require something to grip onto. If the roof is on a slope then a smooth surface will be less attractive. Generally, on a smooth roof such as a typical commercial 'crinkly tin' building, a roof plane of more than 25 degrees will tend to be too steep. Any less than this and gulls will be attracted to it.



Small interruptions in the roof plane on any building can provide enough purchase for a gull nest.

This may have to be included in your design to accommodate a stairwell or some plant housing. If it can't be designed-out, make sure a nest cannot be easily built by using spikes or wires (see below). Erecting these at a later date will be significantly more expensive.



### Flat roofs

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Modern flat-roofed office and residential buildings provide ideal nesting areas. Designing-out nesting sites in such buildings may well be

impractical. Netting or other protective measures may not be wanted for aesthetic reasons or because of the cost of installation and maintenance. If this is the case then ease of access can make a significant difference to any owner/occupiers ability to deal with the birds in a cost effective way. Access to all the roof area without the need for climbing boards or ladders can make the maintenance of the roof far more straightforward. If gulls do take up residence, blocked gullies, vents and similar will become a problem. Easy roof access can help deal with this.

If the eggs are to be treated in some way, for example, through the City Council’s egg removal programme, easy access is fundamental. If access is not straightforward and safe the City Council will not take it on. The harder it is to get to nests, the more a private company will charge to treat them.

For residential buildings, roof gardens are seen as preferable. They allow easy access and, if used frequently, they will be a deterrent in themselves to a colony establishing on a roof. Roof gardens have other benefits, such as attenuating rainwater run off and insulating buildings, though care must be taken



with over-looking and in historic areas.

For flat and pitched roofs, if rain water is harvested, precautions should be taken to prevent contamination with guano and other debris.



## **‘Designing-out’ nesting sites on existing buildings**

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There are several companies offering a wide range of services. There are also a number of different systems. The main ones are summarised below with tips given on their usefulness and how to mitigate their visual impact.

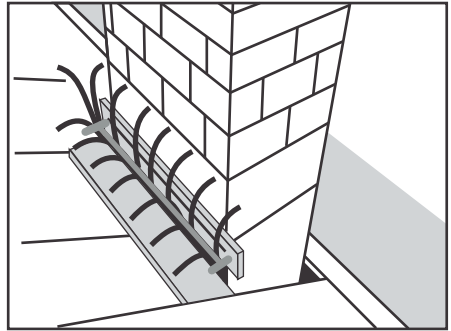
### **Spikes**

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These are typically a series of upturned spikes that deter gulls from roosting or, in certain circumstances, from nesting. Spikes can be effective on ledges where, if enough of them are used, they will deter the birds. They are generally ineffectual if placed around parapet walls or installed at low densities.



In certain circumstances, spikes can be visually intrusive and should be used with great care in conservation areas and on listed buildings. They are most useful when restricting access to certain localised sites typically inhabited by Herring Gulls. For example they can be effective on sites around chimney stacks, with the ‘Nesthog’ or similar devices being particularly useful (see below).



Again, if this is done properly at the outset, it can save problems later on.

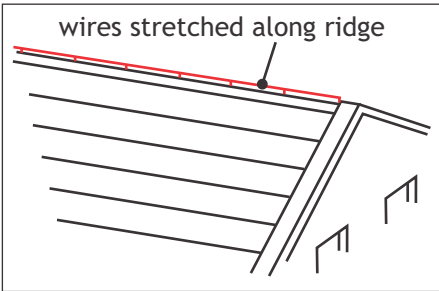
### **Wires**

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There are different ways of using wires. One of the simplest methods is to stretch wires along the ridge of pitched-roof buildings. These will not deter nesting birds, but will prevent roosting.

Although generally quiet when roosting, the birds will deposit a large

amount of droppings. These look unsightly, will be expensive to clean and will hasten the deterioration of the roof fabric.



Wires can be stretched across a flat roof. These are aligned in parallel rows at a distance that will prevent a gull from landing. They have the advantage that other birds do not get snagged in them, and they can be less visually intrusive than nets.

Even so they can be fairly incongruous and siting needs to be done sensitively. Skylines that are

visible from prominent public places should be avoided (see Netting). Bright colours may improve performance but should not be used. This sort of system needs to be properly installed and maintained if it is to be successful. If done incorrectly, gulls can still enter the excluded area.



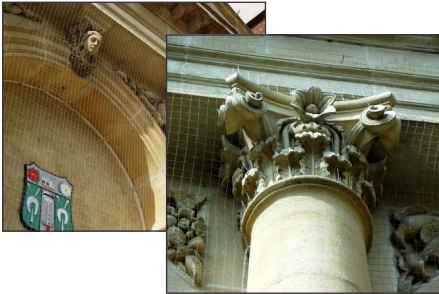
## Netting

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Netting is the most common form of prevention and can be retrofitted to most buildings. However, it can look ugly and careful siting and design will be needed to minimise its appearance.

Netting comes in a range of colours so it is important that an appropriate shade is chosen. Where the netting will be close-fitting to the roof it may be more acceptable to choose a netting colour to match the roof materials. Where the netting is to be

located above the roof plane, so that sky is visible between the roof and the netting (when viewed from the street), a transparent or neutral colour would be more appropriate. Vivid or fluorescent colours should be avoided as they stand out unnecessarily.



The Eastgate Portico in Gloucester has been sensitively covered with stone coloured netting, which blends well into the structure so that from a distance it is not noticeable. Although done to deter pigeons it gives a flavour of what can be achieved for gulls.



On this building (below left) little thought has been given to the colour of the netting making it far more obtrusive in the street scene.

Another important consideration when using netting as a solution is the visual impact to wider views across the City. Of particular concern are views of Robinswood Hill, the Cathedral and other historic churches and monuments. These may be views from the street or from other buildings such as offices or multi-storey car parks.

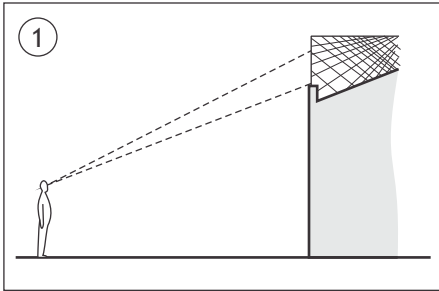
Wider views are important as they impact on the image of the city and the overall visual attractiveness of Gloucester.



This is the view from a multi-storey car park used by visitors to the city. The dark netting detracts from an attractive view of the cathedral.

Siting of the netting on the building is an important consideration. Netting should be located so that it cannot be seen from the street below.

Locating the netting further back on the roof and using a combination of methods such as wires or spikes, will help to minimise the visual impact from the street.

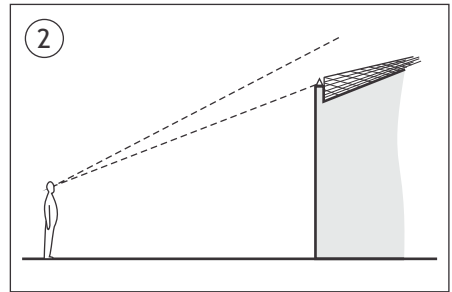


In this example (1) the netting has been located from the top of the parapet to a height that can encompass the whole pitch of the roof. This means that the netting will be clearly visible from the street. This is considered unacceptable as the netting can appear untidy and detract from the visual aesthetics of the building and the wider street scene.

In the next example (2) the netting starts from behind the parapet. Spikes or wires have been used on top of the parapet to prevent perching.

This method is much more visually acceptable.

These procedures are not necessarily foolproof and birds can make nests on top of them. Remember, gulls and other birds may become snagged in the netting. Not only does this cause unnecessary distress and suffering for the birds, but can create unfavourable publicity for the building owner. As a guide, a mesh size of 75mm is generally considered most appropriate for gulls.



## Historic buildings

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The fitting of netting, spikes or any other structure to listed buildings or those buildings within conservation areas should be undertaken with special care and sensitivity. In most cases Listed Building Consent or planning permission will be required. Before undertaking any works please contact the City Council's Principal Conservation and Design Officer on 01452 396855.

## Other measures

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All manner of scaring techniques have been tried. Many appear to be a waste of money, though more innovative systems are currently being developed. The following have proved to be less than helpful.

## Plastic eagle owls and similar scaring devices

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As shown below left, these are quickly habituated and are of little value.

## Distress calls or other noise-based products

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These are also quickly habituated and essentially have little effect unless changed on a frequent basis. Most are not appropriate in an urban area as they can be a noisy nuisance in their own right.

## Wind driven moving structures

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Again, these are quickly habituated and have questionable long-term effect.

## Summing up

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Designing-out or ensuring access to potential nesting sites is considered to be the most effective method of preventing gulls from occupying a building. Anyone involved in the design process of large commercial and residential buildings will be encouraged to take on board this principle when submitting planning applications to Gloucester City Council.

For existing structures some techniques are available, but these can be costly and may have a



detrimental impact upon the urban townscape. Careful choice of system and thoughtful design can, however, minimise these impacts.

### **Pest control operatives and suppliers of gull management equipment**

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There are a number of companies that sell bird proofing products and/or install these products.

The Contractor currently employed by Gloucester City Council is Mitie Pest Control. They carry out the egg and nest removal programme from the roofs designated by the Council.

#### **Mitie Pest Control**

1 King Alfred Way, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL52 6QP, United Kingdom.

Telephone: +44 (0)844 335 0330,  
Mobile: +44 (0)7823 362782.

Web: [www.mitie.com/pest-control](http://www.mitie.com/pest-control)

### **Herring Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and the law**

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The following is drawn from the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1991 (as amended), as guidance and should not be taken as legal advice. Generally it is illegal to capture, injure or destroy any wild bird or interfere with its nest or eggs. However, General Licences issued by Natural England (see link [www.gov.uk/government/publications/wild-birds-licence-to-take-or-kill-for-health-or-safety-purposes](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wild-birds-licence-to-take-or-kill-for-health-or-safety-purposes)) allow measures to be taken against certain species of bird on grounds which include the preservation of public health or public safety.

Any action taken must be humane. The use of an inhumane method which could cause suffering would be illegal. Subject to terms and conditions, the General Licence (November 2016) permits an authorised person to kill or take lesser blackback gulls or damage/destroy their nests, or to take/destroy their eggs. For Herring Gulls the licence permits authorised persons to take, damage or destroy their nests or to take/destroy their eggs.

The use of poisons or drugs to take or kill any bird is specifically prohibited except under very special circumstances and under licence.

## **Egg oiling**

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Oiling eggs - dipping them in light paraffin oil - seals the shell and effectively sterilises them. The birds, however, are duped into thinking that the eggs are still viable and will continue to sit. At this time they are actually quite quiet and disturbance is significantly reduced. As no chicks hatch, the particularly noisy aspect of the breeding cycle is removed.

Eggs must be oiled as near the laying time as possible (preferably once a full clutch of 3 eggs has been laid). This will vary with the season but will normally be around the first week of May (Gloucestershire).

After about 4-6 weeks the eggs will start to deteriorate and they will be ejected from the nest. Mature birds will lay a second or even third clutch, and if the technique is to be successful these will need oiling as well.

## **Dummy eggs**

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Preliminary experiments carried out by Gloucester City Council show that, generally, pairs will accept and carry on incubating dummy eggs. Plastic eggs part filled with sand (used by chicken breeders) can be painted to look like gull's eggs. These are then

substituted for the real thing. As they do not go off there is the added benefit that only one visit to the nest is needed. More testing will be necessary, but so far the results look promising.

As well as cutting down noise, oiling/dummy eggs may slowly disperse the colony. Although more research is needed it is thought that unsuccessful females will find a new mate and therefore nest elsewhere (this could of course be an adjacent roof). Also, it is thought that male birds may return to the natal colony, so in 3 years time there could be fewer birds returning to your area.

This document has been produced in partnership with Gloucestershire Gull Action Group. Particular thanks to Peter Rock Gull Consultant (pete.rock@blueyonder.co.uk) for pictures and technical information.

**Gloucester City Council**  
Herbert Warehouse,  
The Docks, Gloucester, GL1 2EQ

**T:** 01452 396396

**E:** [heretohelp@Gloucester.gov.uk](mailto:heretohelp@Gloucester.gov.uk)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/GloucesterCityCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/GloucesterCityCouncil)

**Twitter:** @GloucesterCity

**THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Monday 11 October 1999

**FERAL PIGEON AND GULL NUISANCE WITHIN THE CITY**

Report by the Director of Environmental and Consumer Services

Contact Officer: Eric Robinson  
Head of Regulatory Services  
0131 469 5242

Wards Affected: City Wide

1. PURPOSE

1.1 To address Councillor Tritton's motion raised at the Environmental Services Committee of 16 August 1999 calling for a report on pest control within the city to include the growing problems caused by feral birds, particularly seagulls and pigeons, in the city. The report should:

- (i) address ways in which the Council can act to minimise the inconvenience caused to residents in areas affected by these nuisances;
- (ii) consider what action can be taken to reduce the nesting and roosting of birds in residential areas;
- (iii) draw up a programme of action to be taken to prevent the nesting and roosting on public buildings.

1.2 The report will not give a full report on pest control in Edinburgh but does address the issue of feral birds.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Committee approve the measures detailed within this report namely an intensification of street litter control notices. That Committee continues with the programme of maximising the containerisation of waste.

2.2 The production of an advisory leaflet aimed at property owners in respect of measures that can be taken to prevent gulls roosting on their property.

2.3 That the Committee note that the Department is aware of problems associated with pigeons roosting on structures and is actively pursuing with City Development and Housing Departments the implementation of a proofing programme.

2.4 That this report be referred to the Housing Committee, Property Services Committee and Planning Committee for information.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The need for the control of certain species of birds can be seen across the domestic, commercial, industrial and agricultural sphere. This requirement has been recognised and a significant part of the commercial pest control industry is dedicated to the fight against pest bird species.

### 3.2 Gulls

Gulls were first recorded breeding on buildings in Britain early this century and are now found nesting on roofs in many coastal towns and large cities.

3.3 Many people who have gulls on their property find they cause a nuisance and annoyance due to the following reasons:

- Noise, caused by calling gulls and by their heavy footsteps on rooftops.
- Mess caused by their droppings, fouling on washing, gardens, cars and people.
- Damage to property, caused by gulls picking at roofing materials and by nests which block gutters and hold moisture against the building structure.
- Birds can dive and swoop on people and pets.
- Blockage of gas flues by nesting materials can have serious consequences if gas fumes are prevented from venting properly.

3.4 The majority of people who have gulls nesting on their property refer to them as “seagulls” because most of us do not differentiate between one type of gull and another. However, most species of gull do not nest on buildings, and within most areas of Edinburgh herring gulls and lesser black backed gulls are predominant.

3.5 Both species court in April and commence nest building from early May onwards. In towns, the nest is constructed from straw and grass, twigs, paper and any other material the gull can conveniently use. The nest can be quite large and, if made of material accumulated over several years, very heavy.

3.6 Eggs are laid from early May onwards with two or three being the usual number. The eggs take about three weeks to hatch so the first chicks are generally seen about the beginning of June.

3.7 The chicks grow quickly and are quite active often falling from the nest. In towns this almost certainly means they cannot return to the nest. Small chicks will die unless returned but larger chicks will be protected and fed by their parents on the ground. Parent birds protecting fallen chicks are often the ones which dive and swoop on people and animals who often do not realise a chick is on the ground.

3.8 Chicks generally fledge in August and then take three to four years to reach maturity and breed. Herring gulls and Lesser black backed gulls tend to nest in colonies and once roof nesting birds gain foothold other gulls nest on adjacent buildings.

3.9 The principal legislation dealing with the control of birds is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Generally, it is illegal to capture, injure or destroy any wild bird or interfere with its nest or eggs. The penalties for disregarding the law can be severe.

The law does recognise that particular species of common birds can cause nuisance in certain circumstances and allows measures to be taken against such birds. However, any action taken must be humane and the use of an inhumane method which could cause suffering would be illegal. The use of poisons or drugs to take or kill any bird is specifically prohibited except under special circumstances and with a Government Licence. It is doubtful whether the Council would be eligible for a licence in a built up area for the use of stupefying baits.

3.10 The list of birds against which humane methods may be used includes herring gulls and lesser black backed gulls.

3.11 Only an owner or occupier can take action against gulls nesting on their building, or alternatively, they can give someone else permission to act on their behalf.

3.12 In practice there are very few humane methods to kill birds which are likely only to effect that particular species, and skill and experience is needed to deploy them.

### 3.13 **Control Methods**

3.13.1 **Culling** – The most commonly used control measure against gulls is culling, ie the deliberate killing of a proportion of the breeding population, by shooting or more often by placing poison baits at breeding sites, under licence. Since 1972 many culls have been carried out elsewhere in the United Kingdom, in the interests of a variety of causes including nature conservation, reducing the risk of bird strikes near airports, protecting water supplies and reducing the nuisance caused by gulls nesting in towns. Culling can, at least in some circumstances, be an effective means of reducing the size of a breeding colony.

It is common myth that populations exist as discrete units and that change in a population at one site will have little effect elsewhere. In fact, only about 30% of herring gulls in a colony are likely to have been reared at that colony, the remaining 70% come from other colonies as far as several hundred kilometres away. This, therefore, would result in the initial reduction in population density allowing a higher proportion of young birds establishing themselves within the colony from elsewhere to replace the birds killed.

In Edinburgh the birds are dispersed and are positioned in situations that do not provide easy and safe access for placing of baits and are adjacent to streets heavily used by pedestrians. The effects of poisoned baits are unpleasant to witness and do not occur instantly; a reasonable proportion of those gulls that could be poisoned would be likely to die in public view after moving away from their nests. Shooting of gulls on rooftops would be neither safe or humane and should not be encouraged.

3.13.2 **Disturbance** – A wide variety of techniques is available to disturb gulls at breeding colonies and elsewhere. These include use of gas guns, playing of distress calls or calls of birds of prey, positioning of flags or scarecrows within the colony, etc. Most of these techniques are successful on initial deployment. However, their effectiveness declines, often rapidly, as the gulls

become used to these methods through repeated exposure. These techniques have not proven to be effective in the long term.

- 3.13.3 **Suppression of breeding** – Removal of eggs from nest is not effective because adults can quickly replace them (in some cases up to 15 times or more without any apparent reduction in egg quality). Pricking of eggs often causes the embryo to die through dehydration, and so can be effective in reducing production of chicks at a colony. However, survivors of those chicks that do hatch are likely to be increased to act against the reduction in population size initially aimed at. Moreover, because gulls do not normally breed until their sixth year of life on average, any declines in productivity will have little or no effect on recruitment for about five years. Furthermore, recruitment by gulls reared at other colonies (70% of the total) will be unaffected. This method of control is therefore unlikely to impact upon adult population size at the colony.
- 3.13.4 **Birds of prey** – In some locations such as landfill sites, agricultural areas etc, the use of birds of prey is extremely effective in reducing population sizes. Unfortunately, their effective use within the city is not possible due to limited “free airspace” and the dangers of injury to the birds. Birds of prey may also attack other birds and animals outwith the target species, therefore creating an unsatisfactory option for the city.
- 3.13.5 **Proofing of buildings** – Placing of monofilament netting or other obstacles at breeding sites can be an effective means to prevent gulls nesting there, and so is a useful tool for moving gulls away from particular sites. However, gulls are very reluctant to leave a colony once they have started breeding and are likely to respond by moving only a short distance to equally problematic sites.
- 3.13.6 **Reduction of food supply** – Gulls can make extensive use of domestic refuse as a source of food, and there are unfortunately many opportunities for gulls to feed in the centre of Edinburgh. Reduction of these sources may reduce the density of gulls overwintering in Edinburgh and this is within the control of the Council. This may not have an immediate effect due to the availability of natural food sources at sites such as Bruntsfield Links and the Meadows.

Action taken by the council to reduce food supplies would by necessity have to be supported by owner/occupiers taking action to clear nesting material from their property from mid April onwards on a fortnightly basis until the end of June.

Options available to the council to minimise food sources would include a continuation of the containerisation scheme within the affected areas to reduce domestic refuse being placed at the kerbside. An intensified programme of street litter control including the targeting of commercial premises and their duty of care with respect to waste disposal. An increase in the use of street litter control notices on fast food outlets. The last two options are proposed to be introduced under new controls on late hours catering and liquor licences.

An advisory leaflet would also be produced by the Department detailing safe and humane options available to property owners to discourage gulls from nesting on their property.

The responsibility for the removal of gull nuisance lies both with property owners and the Council in preventing the availability of food supplies.

### 3.14 Pigeons

3.14.1 The feral pigeon is found throughout Britain. Many people associate this bird with urban environments and as such it is sometimes called the "town pigeon". The peak breeding season is between March and July but feral pigeons are capable of breeding all year round. The brood usually consists of two eggs. Incubation lasts for about 18 days and the hatched chicks are fledged after about 30 days. Another clutch can be laid when the first young are only 20 days old. This means that up to nine broods can be produced per pair, per year.

3.14.2 Feral pigeons tend to scavenge food often at food premises, docks or mills and flocks of several hundred can be common where spillage is abundant. Unfortunately also in urban environments, they are encouraged by members of the public feeding them birdseed, bread, etc.

3.14.3 The feral pigeon is listed in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as a pest species and therefore humane methods of control are permitted.

3.14.4 The Council is licensed to undertake this work and recognises the potential risk to public health by the transmission of E.Coli, Salmonella and Campylobacter from pigeon droppings. Although a general licence is issued by the Department of the Environment in respect of killing feral pigeons, which covers all "authorised persons" it is not all encompassing, but covers bird control for the purpose of preserving public health, public safety and the prevention of serious damage to livestock, crops, vegetables and fruit and growing timber. Damage to property is no longer a viable reason to control these birds.

### 3.15 Control Methods

3.15.1 The most successful method of pigeon control at specific locations is proofing which prevents birds from roosting on buildings, bridges and other structures. Consideration must be given to types of proofing methods which include netting, post and wire systems, spike systems and gel type applications.

3.15.2 A survey has already been carried out by this Department of all the bridges within the city and an assessment made of density of pigeon loading in comparison to perceived amount of pedestrian traffic.

3.15.3 As a result of this survey two bridges have been initially identified as particularly bad at Abbeyhill and Smokey Brae which should be the first to be addressed by this Department in conjunction with the City Development Department.

3.15.4 The problem with proofing is that the bird population may be moved on to other unsuitable locations. The Department has experienced a rise in complaints from residents in multi storey developments. The fundamental issues of food control have already been discussed however culling may need to be addressed at a later date as the ultimate control method.



3.15.5 The Council is licensed to kill pigeons by a number of approved humane methods. These are cage trapping followed by humane disposal or shooting.

3.15.6 An ongoing assessment of other public buildings will be made and advice on proofing will be made available from the Department.

4. **IMPLICATIONS:**

4.1 **Finance**

Cost of Proofing.

4.2 **Personnel**

None

4.3 **Equality**

None

4.4 **Strategic Policy Objectives**

None

5. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

J MICHAEL DREWRY  
Director of Environmental & Consumer

Services

## Gull Problems within the City

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### Executive of the Council

16 January 2001

#### 1 Purpose of report

Motion: To address Councillor Tritton's motion which calls for a report on humane measures which could be taken to reduce nuisance caused by gulls throughout the City.

The report should include details on:

- (i) nest removal
- (ii) egg pricking or oiling
- (iii) the use of a hawk

The problem is most apparent in the nesting and breeding months (April to August) and, if possible, measures should be in place for the 2001 season.

#### 2 Summary

- 2.1 The Local Authority has no statutory obligation to control the gull population within the City.
- 2.2 The present service in Edinburgh is advisory only, including the issue of an information leaflet.
- 2.3 The Executive is asked to note the content of the report entitled "Feral Pigeon and Gull Nuisance within the City", presented and approved at the Environmental and Consumer Services Committee on 11 October 1999.

#### 3 Main report

- 3.1 Nest removal: This practice may be of value if carried out repeatedly throughout the year, as gulls will endeavour to rebuild a number of times before being displaced to other nesting sites. Nests are often built in inaccessible locations on chimneys and in roof valleys, making the removal of nests extremely difficult and dangerous, therefore only nests which are deemed safely accessible following a health and safety risk assessment could be removed.

- 3.2 Egg Pricking: Egg pricking and taping by its very nature requires the operative to gain access to the nest, which may be dangerous, not just for the reasons mentioned within the preceding paragraph but also because the parent gulls will attack persons approaching the nests.
- 3.3 Eggs are pricked and stirred before being placed back in the nest where the gull will sit on them expecting them to hatch.
- 3.4 It is good practice to tape eggs following this procedure, the effect of which slows down the rate of bacterial decay, resulting in the gull sitting on the egg for a longer period. This period may be up to six weeks over the normal hatching period.
- 3.5 The effects of the aforementioned practices as methods of breeding suppression would not be immediately noted, but would take a minimum of five years within an established colony, with the population being monitored on an ongoing basis.
- 3.6 Two x two person teams with vehicles, safety equipment, personal protective clothing and appropriate disposal arrangements would be necessary to carry out an effective programme of nest removal and egg pricking. This proposal, if accepted, should be reviewed at the end of the first year.
- 3.7 Culling: The most commonly used control measure against gulls is culling, ie. the deliberate killing of a proportion of the breeding population, by shooting or more often by placing poison baits at breeding sites, under licence. Since 1972 many culls have been carried out elsewhere in the United Kingdom in the interests of a variety of causes including nature conservation, reducing the risk of bird strikes near airports, protecting water supplies and reducing the nuisance caused by gulls nesting in towns. Culling can, at least in some circumstances, be an effective means of reducing the size of a breeding colony.

It is a common myth that populations exist as discrete units and that change in a population at one site will have little effect elsewhere. In fact, only about 30% of herring gulls in a colony are likely to have been reared at that colony; the remaining 70% come from other colonies as far as several hundred kilometres away. This, therefore, would result in the initial reduction in population density, allowing a higher proportion of young birds establishing themselves within the colony from elsewhere to replace the birds killed. In Edinburgh the birds are dispersed and are positioned in situations that do not provide easy and safe access for placing of baits and are adjacent to streets heavily used by pedestrians. The effects of poisoned baits are unpleasant to witness and do not occur instantly; a reasonable proportion of those gulls that could be poisoned would be likely to die in public view after moving away from their nests. Shooting of gulls on rooftops would be neither safe nor humane and should not be encouraged.

- 3.8 Birds of Prey: In some locations such as landfill sites, agricultural areas, etc, the use of birds of prey is extremely effective in reducing population sizes. Unfortunately, their effective use within the City is not possible, due to limited "free airspace" and the dangers of injury to the birds. Birds of prey may also attack other birds and animals outwith the target species, thereby creating an unsatisfactory option for the City.

#### **4 Consultations**

- 4.1 The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) are not opposed to the culling of gulls within the City, but they stressed that they are a 'protection' and not 'destruction' body and therefore are not prepared to get involved in any proposed cull. The RSPB were actively involved in the culling of gulls on the islands in the Forth during in the 1970s and 1980s, however, this was carried out to maintain and increase the population of terns. The RSPB are now opposed to the culling of gulls on the islands in the Forth on both health and safety grounds and because they do not consider that an alleged lack of nesting sites is the reason why gulls have come inland to breed. The RSPB consider that it is the readily available food sources within the City environment that attracts gulls inland to feed and breed.
- 4.2 The Forth Seabird Group has indicated that as part of a national census on gull populations they intend to carry out an aerial survey of Edinburgh in May 2001. Accurate information on location of colonies, breeding pairs, nest sites and current numbers is required to target resources effectively and this proposed survey should be supported.
- 4.3 East Lothian Council currently remove nests and prick eggs in the towns of Musselburgh and Dunbar. In the first year of this programme, they physically removed 170 nests in Musselburgh and over a period of three years they claim to have achieved a 50% reduction in the number of nests which they record annually on computer printed maps.
- 4.4 The Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department has major reservations over the use of stupefying baits and a licence could not be granted in built-up areas, due to dangers arising with drugged birds causing accidents. As with the use of stupefying baits, shooting birds is considered inhumane and is definitely not recommended in city centre and urban locations, as it is considered ineffective and potentially causes serious health and safety issues.

It is the opinion of the Rural Affairs Department that there are few known incidents of successfully using birds of prey in city centre locations, as these only serves to displace the problem.

#### **5 Options**

##### Option 1 - Status Quo

- 5.1 To continue to provide public information leaflets, to offer proofing of property in a commercial capacity and roll out the programme of containerisation of refuse throughout the City.

## Option 2 - Humane Control Methods

- 5.2 To carry out a nest removal and egg pricking service for domestic property between the months of March - September for a five year period commencing 2001.
- 5.3 To trial the use of static imitation birds of prey secured on public buildings in the Bruntsfield and Morningside areas as part of a controlled experiment monitored by Officers from this Department. In order to obtain meaningful results, this trial should commence in February/March before the nesting season.

## **6 Financial Implications**

- 6.1 Option 1: None.
- 6.2 Option 2: Year 1 £40,000 (Two x two person teams, vehicles and service costs for six months of the year)
- |   |         |                     |
|---|---------|---------------------|
| 2 | £41,200 | (3% inflation rise) |
| 3 | £42,436 | (3% inflation rise) |
| 4 | £43,708 | (3% inflation rise) |
| 5 | £45,018 | (3% inflation rise) |

The Department has no budget for this option.

## **7 Recommendation**

- 7.1 That the Executive determine the preferred service provision to deal with the gull problem within the City.

**J M Drewry**  
Director of Environmental and Consumer Services

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### **Appendices**

<b>Contact/tel</b>	Eric Robinson, Head of Regulatory Services (0131 469 5242)
<b>Wards affected</b>	City-wide
<b>Background Papers</b>	Report on Environmental Services Committee 11 October 1999 entitled "Feral Pigeon and Gull Nuisance within the City"

F:\typist\data/comrep/2000/gullproblems.gd.kr  
4 December 2000

## Gull Management within the city

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Executive of the Council

29 January 2002

### 1 Purpose of report

To address the proposals by the Executive as a result of a motion by Councillor Tritton.

The report to cover:

- a the full costs of a culling programme
- b details of the effects of the Council's containerisation of waste programme on the seagull population
- c investigate the legal position in regard to access to communal roof of tenements to deal with nesting sites
- d the implications of immediately implementing a pilot programme which offers residents a service of nest removal, egg pricking or oiling, as appropriate
- e do all of the above for feral birds.

### 2 Summary

- 2.1 The report addresses the Department's belief that a localised cull would be inappropriate and that the gull problem should be addressed at a national level.
- 2.2 Reports on the effects of containerisation, the legal position and the implication of an immediate pilot programme offering residents a service of egg pricking, oiling and nest removal.
- 2.3 The worth of reporting on all feral birds.
- 2.4 The Executive is asked to note the content of the two previous reports entitled "Feral Pigeon and Gull Nuisance within the City", presented and approved at the Environmental and Consumer Services Committee on 11 October 1999 and "Gull Problems within the City" presented to the Executive of the Council on 16 January 2001.

### **3 Report on the Full Cost of a Culling Programme**

- 3.1 The Local Authority has no statutory obligation to control the gull population within the City.
- 3.2 Culling involves the removal of a percentage of the breeding adult population. This would necessitate the use of lethal control methods on a large scale. The methods available have been detailed in previous reports.
- 3.3 It is impossible at this time to cost a full culling programme for the City of Edinburgh as the area has never been surveyed to ascertain the numbers and location of nesting birds. In addition, many nest sites are difficult to access and would require specialist access equipment to be hired, entailing additional variable costs.
- 3.4 Culling would not be a legal option at present as the City of Edinburgh Council have not exhausted humane alternatives.
- 3.5 Opposition to a cull can be expected from groups and individuals concerned with animal welfare as letters have already been received expressing concern over a possible cull in Edinburgh.
- 3.6 A representative of MAFF has advised that the City of Edinburgh Council would not be granted a licence to use stupefying bait. Licences are issued based on a specific application detailing the problem and methods of control which have been implemented, and failed, leaving a significant problem unaddressed. To date the City of Edinburgh Council has issued advisory leaflets and has not tested any other control methods with respect to gulls.
- 3.7 Without stupefying baits, the use of equipment designed to humanely dispatch adult birds would not be possible as there are no commercially available methods of trapping gulls.
- 3.8 Shooting gulls in an urban setting is not an option as a firearm certificate rated rifle would be required to effectively dispatch the birds. Lothian and Borders Police have verbally advised that the use of a firearm would not be permitted in built-up, heavily populated areas of the city where gull nesting typically occurs.
- 3.9 This Department is licensed to authorise any person to kill, damage or destroy the nests or take or destroy the eggs of both the Lesser Black Backed Gull and the Herring Gull for three specific reasons listed below:
- preserving public health
  - preserving public safety
  - preventing the spread of disease.
- 3.10 The Department must address each gull-related request from the public on an individual basis to ensure that the most effective, lawful route is followed. For example, a nest with chicks which is blocking a gas flue would necessitate the disposal of birds.
- 3.11 The Department believes that a national cull would be necessary to deal with the gull problem and proposes to consult with the Central Science Laboratory of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

#### **4 The effect of containerisation on the gull population**

- 4.1 Complaints for this financial year up to August have been analysed and from the results it can be concluded that containerisation of waste dramatically reduces the likelihood of public complaints about gulls.
- 4.2 42 wards have been containerised and we have received 18 complaints relating to 9 of these wards. However, in the 16 non-containerised wards, 12 produced 44 complaints in the same period.
- 4.3 The containerisation of waste may not in itself remove gull colonies, as birds can travel up to 30 miles per day to feed, but it does stop a large source of foodstuffs being put out as an encouragement.
- 4.6 Scottish Natural Heritage have indicated that they would be willing to study the pellets produced by gulls to give an idea of their diet. This information would show whether the birds' main food sources exist within the City and whether total containerisation would reduce the availability of the birds' food supply.

#### **5 Investigate the legal position in regard to access to communal roofs or tenements to deal with nesting sites**

- 5.1 We are currently awaiting a response from Legal Services to address the above question. We are also attempting to ascertain whether notice can be served to require nests to be removed where the property owner or owners are not willing to take action and whether cost recovery if work is carried out in default would be possible.
- 5.2 Both Scarborough and East Lothian Council seek prior consent to remove nests and/or eggs and/or birds from the owners of buildings where gulls have nested. Each request for action is assessed individually before any works are carried out. For these reasons they have not faced legal challenge to their control methods.

#### **6 Implication of an immediate pilot programme offering residents a service of egg pricking or oiling and nest removal as appropriate**

- 6.1 Egg pricking and oiling or nest and egg removal from the start of and throughout the breeding season will serve to reduce the serious nuisance and noise disturbance caused to residents by nesting gulls.
- 6.2 The above methods will not effectively control the roof nesting gull population but may stem the rate of growth in existing colonies. Gulls take around six years to reach breeding maturity and can live as long as 33 years, so there will be no immediate reduction in the number of breeding adults.
- 6.3 Nest and egg removal would have to be repeated throughout the season, as gulls are known to rebuild their nests several times on or near to the same site.
- 6.4 Egg sterilisation by either pricking or oiling has a limited decoy effect. Gulls become aware that their eggs are defective and re-lay, sometimes as soon as a few days later.
- 6.5 In practice, Scarborough BC found oiling to be the more effective decoy method. However, egg oiling has inherent operator Health and Safety problems if carried out on a large scale. Operators working at height with oily hands and equipment represents a high level of risk.



- 6.6 Displacement of the gulls into areas of the city currently unaffected may occur if nests are persistently removed.
- 6.7 Proofing of the building to prevent further nesting is recommended after nests are removed from rooftops. Displacement of gulls to areas in the immediate vicinity which are not proofed will occur.

## **7 Do all of the above for feral birds**

- 7.1 No definition of feral birds has been given.
- 7.2 An Order which came into effect in 1992 removed from the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 the list of birds which may be taken at all times by an authorised person, which may previously have been used to define feral birds.
- 7.3 The licence granted to CEC for 2001 listed the following species under the above authorisation:  
  
Crow, Collared Dove, Great Black Backed Gull, Lesser Black Backed Gull, Herring Gull, Jackdaw, Jay, Magpie, Feral Pigeon, Rook, House Sparrow, Starling, Wood Pigeon.
- 7.4 The enormity and relevance of reporting upon all the previous topics for each of the above listed birds is of dubious worth.

## **8. Consultations**

- 8.1 East Lothian Council provides a free service of nest/egg and gull removal for two days each year and have faced no legal opposition to access roofs for the purpose of gull control.
- 8.2 Scarborough BC have been actively involved in gull control for 30 years and as well as providing advice and information they now employ a team of roofers, supervised by an Environmental Health Officer to provide a nest removal service. Proofing is conditional to the free service and, as each request is dealt with on an individual basis, they have had no legal challenge to access common roofs. They propose to charge for the service this season.
- 8.3 Scottish Natural Heritage are interested in assisting any studies into bird numbers movement and feeding patterns.
- 8.4 Dr Cuthbert of Kingston University is of the opinion that a cull in Edinburgh would not be legal and favours a programme of waste containerisation and proofing of individual buildings.
- 8.5 PICAS Pigeon Control Advisory Service promote proofing.
- 8.6 Animal Concern advocate proofing and the flying of hawks as well as litter reduction.
- 8.7 The Department is of the opinion that an open debate on all the issues would best serve the concerns of the public and it is intended to hold a seminar in February with all interested parties.

## **9 Recommendations**

- 9.1 That this Department, in tandem with local action groups and Scottish Natural Heritage, create a database pinpointing nesting sites to monitor the gull population within the City year by year.

- 9.2 That this Department continue with the programme of maximising the containerisation of waste.
- 9.3 To consider whether to provide a pilot scheme free for nest/egg removal, conditional to the uptake of proofing the property to the public for a 5-year period commencing May 2002, to be reviewed at the end of one year. This cannot be contained within the Departmental budget and therefore additional resources will be required if this pilot scheme is to be undertaken.
- 9.4 To provide a chargeable service for nest/egg removal to the public and commercial sector on request, strongly recommending proofing for a 5- year period commencing May 2002, to be reviewed after one year.
- 9.5 That the owners of all non-residential buildings highlighted by local residents as gull nesting spots this year are contacted to recommend proofing of their rooftops before next season.
- 9.6 To continue to offer advice and information on request and to collate data relating to the number, nature and location of gull complaints.
- 9.7 We believe that research and guidance on a national level is required with respect to nesting urban gulls. As such, we propose to consult with the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) of Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs regarding their proposed research project to evaluate problems associated with urban nesting gulls and to develop and test an integrated control and management strategy.
- 9.8 That the Department, subject to confirmation from Legal Services, instigate legal action to recover costs if work is carried out in default.
- 9.9 That the Department organise a seminar on the gull problems in February 2002.

## 10 Financial Implications

10.1	Recommendation	9.1	Nil
10.2	Recommendation	9.2	Nil
10.3	Recommendation	9.3	Staffing costs (1 operative) (£17,000)
10.4	Recommendation	9.4	Self-financing
10.5	Recommendation	9.5	Staff costs contained in Departmental Budget
10.6	Recommendation	9.6	Nil
10.7	Recommendation	9.7	Nil
10.8	Recommendation	9.8	Nil

  
**J M Drewry**  
 Director of Environmental and Consumer Services

22/1/02

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**Appendices**

**Contact/tel** Eric Robinson, Head of Regulatory Services  
TEL: 0131 469 5242

**Wards affected** City wide

**Background Papers** 2 previous reports "Feral Pigeon and Gull Nuisance within the City"  
"Gull Problems within the City"

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10 January 2002