



**Environmental Health do not deal with problems associated with wild birds. It is the owner of the building where the birds are nesting or roosting who would be responsible for carrying out any proofing works. If the building in question is owned by South Ayrshire Council then we will forward details of any complaints onto the relevant Council Section.**

In the South Ayrshire area there are two types of gulls can be found nesting on buildings. These are the herring gull, and the lesser black-backed gull. These birds can cause considerable problems including noise, mess from droppings, fouling roofs, walls, windows, gardens, people and domestic washing. The gulls can also cause damage to property by picking at roofing materials and by blocking gutters and down pipes with nesting materials. Blockage of gas flues from similar materials can also cause serious problems. Gulls are also known to dive and swoop on people and pets, causing distress and alarm among the public.

### **Natural History**

Herring gulls are large birds. Mature birds are on average about 55cm (22") from bill to tail with a wingspan of about 85cm (34"). They have silver / grey wings and pink legs.

Lesser black backed gulls are usually slightly smaller. Adult birds have slate grey back and yellow legs instead of pink legs.

Both species begin mating 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.

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.

The chicks grow quickly but generally do not leave the nest for 5-6 weeks and are quite active. They often fall from the nest and in towns this will almost certainly mean 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 down on the ground.

Chicks generally begin to fly in late July, early August and then take normally four years to reach maturity and breed.

Lesser black backed and herring gulls tend to nest in colonies and once roof nesting birds gain footholds other gulls nest on adjacent buildings. If left unchecked, a colony can start to develop.

While generally the law protects wild birds it does recognise that certain species can cause nuisance and allows measures to be taken against them. Herring and lesser black backed gulls are included in the list of birds against which an owner or occupier of affected premises may use humane methods of control. Alternatively they can authorise someone else to act on their behalf. It is important to recognise however that skill and experience are needed to make such work effective. For instance culling of gulls by shooting of roof nesting birds is discouraged, as it is neither humane nor safe.

### **Culling**

There is no universal opinion among the experts that a large-scale cull of gulls would be effective. Indeed some believe that the gull population in the towns is different from that of local landfill sites and there is documented evidence to indicate that this is the case. Culling all the gulls at landfill sites would not result in a reduction in the number of gulls in the town and vice versa. In addition, the practical aspect of carrying out a cull in an urban area is extremely difficult, within the existing legislation.

### **Nest Removal**

Nests could be removed, however, this would have to be repeated a number of times during the season as the gulls will rebuild their nest very quickly if it has been removed or destroyed.

### **Egg Removal**

Eggs could be removed from nests, however, this would have to be repeated a number of times during the breeding season as they will be replaced once they are found not to be viable by the parent birds.

### **NOTE**

Culling, and egg and nest removal are all measures, which come within the scope of the general licences issued by the Scottish Government and such action must therefore be justified.

### **Egg oiling**

The treatment of gull's eggs, with liquid paraffin BP offers a cheap and efficient way of preventing hatching. If done correctly and at the right time of year, this technique is 100% effective in preventing the hatching of eggs.

### **Disturbance of Birds**

There are a variety of methods of disturbing or discouraging birds from particular locations including birds of prey, bird scarers etc. For areas within towns none of these methods are successful in the long term.

### **Proofing**

Methods of proofing buildings include the use of spikes, nets or wires. This is the only sure method of preventing birds from nesting on buildings.

### **Education**

It is vital that the public is made aware that gulls are attracted to areas where food is plentiful. The main sources of food for gulls in the South Ayrshire area are earthworms and insects from pasture and waste produced from the fishing fleet. However, gulls are opportunistic and will scavenge waste bins and look for food from the public.

The public are discouraged from feeding the gulls at home as well as in areas such as the coastal towns and villages of Troon, Prestwick, Ayr, Maidens and Girvan.

Our "Feed a Bin not a Gull" campaign was intended to raise awareness of feeding gulls and the fact that this can lead to aggressiveness. In addition Waste Management introduced a number of gull proof bins to try and prevent the gulls raiding their contents.

The public and businesses are asked to ensure that litter and other food waste is properly stored and / or disposed of using the litter bins provided for litter and placing waste out for collection the day of collection, not the night before, particularly food waste.

Controlling gulls is extremely difficult. The best method is to deny them nesting places on buildings. The Council, however, has no legal powers to force owners or occupiers of buildings to carry out works to their buildings to prevent birds from nesting, nor can they make them take action against birds that have nested, even if they are causing problems.

The Council could not justify, in terms of the general licences available, culling or egg or nest removal as there is no evidence that the presence of gulls is affecting public health or air safety and there is little evidence that public safety was affected.

### **Deterrence**

All owners/ occupiers of buildings, which have, or may attract roof - nesting gulls are strongly urged to provide the building with deterrent measures suitable to the individual building. This section describes some of the measures available.

The principal methods of deterrence are: -

- Fitting of long spikes to nesting locations such as chimney - stacks.
- Fitting of short spikes, contained in a special plastic base, to nesting locations such as dormer roofs.
- Fitting of wires or nets to prevent gulls landing.
- Disturbance of nesting sites including removal of nest and eggs.

### **Short Spikes**

There are several spiking systems commercially available which incorporate a stainless steel spike fitted in a plastic base. The spikes and base come as an assembled unit in convenient lengths, which can be cut to size. These spikes systems may be useful for protecting small dormer roofs and other similar locations. The usual fixing method is to use screws or, where these would damage the structure, proprietary adhesives.

### **Long Spikes**

Long spikes can be used to prevent gulls nesting on top of chimney - stacks between the pots and in the valley behind a chimney - stack where it meets the roof. It is important to fix sufficient numbers of spikes to ensure that the nesting area is well covered.

The basic methods of use are as follows: -

#### **Chimney - back fixing / top fixing**

Gulls sometimes nest behind chimney - stacks where the chimney meets a sloping roof. The valley formed is often warm and sheltered from the wind and makes an ideal nest site.

It is difficult to place spikes at the base of the valley formed because the fixing can interfere with the structure of the roof. The usual fixing method is to screw onto the chimney using a masonry plug and screw with a stout washer to secure the spike against the masonry.

The surface to be treated, usually the cement flashings between the chimney - pots, should be brushed clean with a wire brush. The spikes are then bent into the required shape and placed in position on a dab of mortar. A further dab of mortar is then used to secure the spike assembly. The use of a PVA compound can assist adhesion of the mortar to the chimney stack.

#### **Wiring and Netting**

These methods may have a use in certain locations. If you have a problem with birds nesting on large flat roofs you may wish to contact a specialist company for advice or a quotation. Because of the problems of fixing the Council considers these methods should always be done by, or after having taken advice from, a competent specialist.

While large scale attempts to reduce gull numbers in towns and cities is unlikely to meet with success; small scale targeting of nests on those sites causing particular problems can be successful. In such cases nest material should be removed and bird proofing carried out during the winter months.