

Gulls are increasingly moving into towns and built-up areas to feed and rear their young. This is because fish stocks are becoming scarcer and the easy pickings from litter and household waste make such areas more attractive to gulls.

It is illegal to harm any wild bird, including gulls, unless a special licence is granted, but there are some steps you can take to stop gulls from causing a nuisance. There are many species of gull, many of which are not considered to be pests.

There are three species that most often cause problems in urban and coastal areas:

- Herring gull (common grey gull)
- Lesser black-backed gull
- Greater black-backed gull

### **Gull control**

The principal legislation relating to gulls and all other birds is the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#). Under the legislation it is illegal to capture, injure or destroy any wild bird or interfere with its nest or eggs. The penalties that can result from prosecutions under the act can be severe.

[General licences](#) issued by Natural England and DEFRA (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) allow specific measures to be taken against species of birds on grounds which include the preservation of public health or public safety.

Contact Natural England on [0845 601 4523](#) if you think that gulls are posing a public health or public safety concern.

Any action that is taken must be humane and the use of an inhumane method which could cause suffering to the birds would be illegal. Only the owner of a building or its occupier can take action against the gulls on it and only if those gulls are of the three species mentioned above. They may however give permission to someone to act on their behalf. Shooting is not encouraged, particularly in urban areas because of the risks to others and private property. If shooting does occur it must be carried out with reference to the Fire Arms Act 1968.

The local authority has no statutory obligation to control gulls and is unable to offer any practical help to resolve issues involving gulls.

### **What action can I take if gulls are nesting on my property?**

There are a variety of ways to control gulls; some are more effective than others and the costs vary. It is illegal to destroy any bird (including their chicks) as a method of control. Experience indicates that the best way to deter these gulls from nesting on your property is to take the following steps.

1. **De-nest your building** - At the end of every nesting season (usually September) remove all nests and nesting material from your building.
2. **Proof your building** - Just removing nests will not solve the problem on its own. The birds will build another nest the following spring. Herring gulls must be discouraged from coming back. We recommend the proofing of affected buildings. This can be done by fitting fine netting with a maximum mesh size of 25mm, which should be kept taut on four sides to prevent the wings of birds becoming caught in the mesh. It is important to make sure that all possible nesting and roosting sites on the roof - especially behind chimney stacks - and building/window ledges are protected. It is also important to maintain the netting to prevent it from tearing or sagging, otherwise gulls may become injured or die, caused by entanglement and/or starvation as they are trapped and unable to feed. Furthermore, use of humane and safe chemical deterrents, such as fire gel, applied on likely nesting surfaces, is also recommended. However, these need to be regularly renewed to be effective.
3. **Who should do the work?** You can do it yourself or engage someone else to do it for you. There are a number of pest control companies available to carry out proofing. You can find them on the internet, in the local papers, Yellow Pages or Thomson Local. A licensed contractor to remove a nest can also be found this way.
4. **When should it be done?** The best time to de-nest and proof buildings is at the end of the nesting season, usually around September time. If you engage a company to do the job they will advise you further on your particular situation. Proofing of buildings should be implemented outside the nesting season of gulls, between September and mid-February.
5. **Who pays for the work?** The responsibility for resolving any problem is yours if you are the owner or occupier of an affected building. Therefore, the cost of any works to resolve the problem will have to be met by the owner or occupier.