



Advice for Residents on Sea Gulls

Moray Council has received complaints of sea gull feeding in the area. On some occasions this can lead them into conflict with humans and cause friction between neighbours; feeding gulls encourages them into residential areas where the noise, mess and swooping behaviour can cause distress and nuisance to neighbours. Whilst it is not against the law to feed any bird including sea gulls, we encourage people not to do so within housing areas. Any feeding action is likely to attract gulls.

Potential problems:

- Gulls begin breeding in April and start to nest in early May. Loud mating calls and squabbling can begin at dawn and continue all day, causing noise disturbance to local residents.
- Gulls can disturb roof tiles and block gutters, flues, chimneys, drains and ventilation. Bird faeces are unsightly and can lead to increased erosion of buildings.
- Gulls may carry diseases such as salmonella and tuberculosis which can be serious for humans.
- Leaving food for gulls encourages them to stay in close proximity and when fed regularly they expect everyone to do the same, leading them to attack people and steal food.
- Breeding gulls continue to return to the same site year after year and can live for up to 30 years. Offspring are just as site tenacious resulting in ongoing annual problems.
- Gulls with young can be very aggressive and will swoop at people to protect their young; this can be extremely distressing. The young gulls remain on the ground for a lengthy period before flying and tend to settle in a garden or area.
- Urban gulls can come into conflict with humans and be put at risk of injury or death either accidentally or through wanton persecution.

The Law:

A general licence is available under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which allows authorised persons to take action against the great black backed gull, the herring gull and the lesser black backed gull where there is a threat to public health and safety and all other possible solutions have been tried. An authorised person is usually the owner or occupier of a building. Action which can be taken includes destruction of gulls, action on eggs and removal of nests.

Where any action is taken against the lesser black-backed gull or herring gull, the person taking the action must advise Scottish Natural Heritage, as soon as the action is completed or by the end of January of the following year at the latest, of the number of birds or their eggs taken, killed or destroyed in each month along with the reason why, the methods of control used in each month, and the locations of any such actions. More information can be found on Scottish Natural Heritage's website: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/licensing/species-licensing-z-guide/birds/birds-licences-public-health-and-safety-and-air-safety>

The Moray Council has no statutory duty to take action against gulls and cannot force the owners or occupiers of buildings to take appropriate action to reduce gull numbers. However, where the Council is the occupier of a property where gulls are causing nuisance the Council does have a responsibility to resolve the issue.

Preventative measures:

- Do not drop litter or food scraps in public spaces, this is an offence and can lead to a fixed penalty notice for littering as well as encouraging gulls into the area.
- Be a considerate neighbour and do not attract gulls by feeding them. Utilise bird feeders when feeding other bird species as gulls cannot feed from them.
- Ensure household waste is disposed of properly and is secured within bins to prevent gulls accessing waste and feeding off scraps.
- The best deterrent against nesting gulls are devices such as spikes, nets or wires installed on roofs to prevent them from landing and constructing nests.
- If gulls do nest on your property you can arrange for eggs to be oiled or replaced with china eggs; this is more effective than removing nests as gulls will just remake and relay.

Safety:

It is strongly recommended you take advice from specialists before taking any action, to ensure you remain within the law and that any deterrent works do not pose a fire risk or safety hazard.