

# URBAN GULLS



**How to stop them  
nesting on your roof**

# 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.



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 this leaflet 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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It is estimated that there are over 1000 breeding pairs in Bath and North East Somerset. Between 2011 and 2012, there was a 5.8% increase in the gull population across the district. The main increases were seen in the suburbs, however the central wards of Abbey, Kingsmead and Widcombe still have the highest concentration of gulls. Two species cause problems in our communities; the Herring gull (*Larus argentatus*) and the Lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*.)



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 district from as far away 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 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 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 needs 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.



### 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.

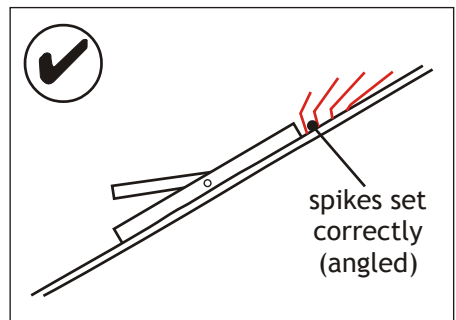
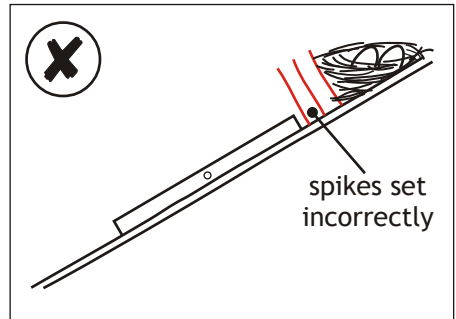
### Pitched roofs

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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 diagram). 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 features will become a problem. Easy roof access can help deal with this.



If the eggs are to be treated in some way, e.g. through the Council's chargeable egg replacement service, easy access is fundamental. If access is not straightforward and safe, the council is unable to take action. The harder it is to get to nests, the more expensive it will be 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 other buildings and in historic areas.

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

guano (bird faeces) and other debris.

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

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There are many companies offering bird proofing services. Consult your local directories for further information.

## **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.

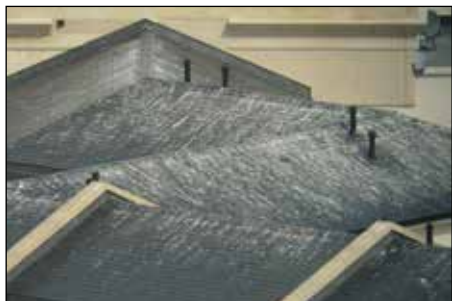
Again, if this is done properly at the outset, it can prevent problems later on.

## Wires

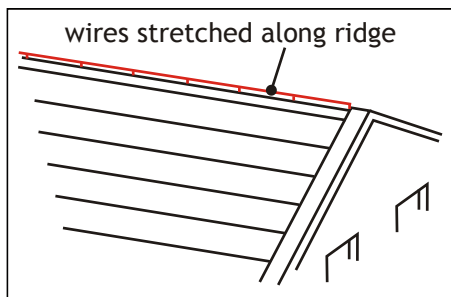
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There are different ways of using wires. One of the simplest methods is to stretch wires along the ridge of pitched-roof buildings. These will not deter nesting birds, but will prevent roosting.

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.



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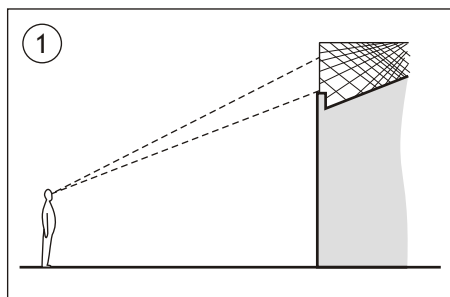
Netting is the most common form of prevention and can be retrofitted to most buildings. However, it can look ugly and careful siting and design will be needed to minimise its appearance.

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.

Another important consideration when using netting as a solution is the visual impact to wider views across the area.

Of particular concern are views of historic monuments. These may be views from the street or from other buildings such as offices or multi-storey car parks.

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.



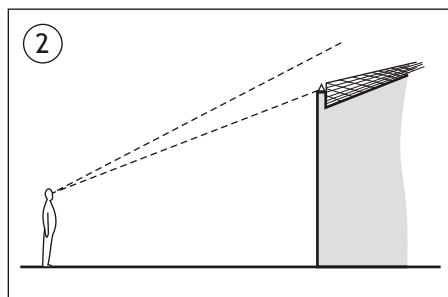
In this example (1) the netting has been located from the top of the parapet to a height that can encompass the whole pitch of the roof. This means that the netting will be clearly visible from the street.

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 Planning Services on 01225 394041 or email [council\\_connect@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:council_connect@bathnes.gov.uk)



## **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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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 Bath & North East Somerset 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 many companies offering bird proofing services. Consult your local directories for further information.

## **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 on behalf of The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) allow measures to be taken against certain species of bird on grounds which

include the preservation of public health or public safety.

The use of an inhumane method which could cause suffering would be illegal to both Herring and Lesser black-backed gulls. This may however change. Go to [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk) for latest information.

The use of poisons or drugs to take or kill any bird is specifically prohibited except under very special circumstances and with a licence issued by Natural England on behalf DEFRA.

## Dummy eggs

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Preliminary treatments carried out by Bath & North East Somerset Council show that, generally, pairs will accept and carry on incubating dummy eggs. Plastic eggs part filled with sand can be painted to look like gull's eggs. These are then substituted for the real thing.

As well as cutting down noise, dummy eggs may slowly disperse the colony. Although more research is needed, it is thought that females who fail to breed 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 their original colony, so in 3 years time there could be fewer birds returning to your area.

## Egg replacement scheme

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The Council has an egg replacement programme (for businesses only) where real eggs are replaced with 'dummy' eggs. The Council provides a chargeable service for businesses, at a rate of £88 per hour. (Prices as of 1st April 2014 until 31st March 2015.) For this, the Pest Control Officers will survey the roof, replace any eggs and carry out 3 visits.

For health and safety reasons we can only work on safe, flat accessible roofs. The Pest Control Officer will make a final assessment prior to undertaking any treatment. If we determine that we are unable to treat then no charge will be made.

To find out further information regarding our scheme, please contact Pest Control on:

**Telephone:**

01225 396007

**Email:**

[council\\_connect@bathnes.gov.uk](mailto:council_connect@bathnes.gov.uk)

*Photographs kindly supplied by Peter Rock*



For further information regarding our egg  
replacement scheme, please contact us at:

[www.bathnes.gov.uk](http://www.bathnes.gov.uk)

Bath and North East Somerset Council  
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