



ersatz eggs

HELPING PUT YOU BACK IN CONTROL

Urban Gull Control Methods

There are several methods to control urban gull populations, please see below for more details:-

Poisoning:

This is against the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Shooting

Shooting gulls to reduce the breeding population has proven an effective control method within natural colonies on islands and moorland. Clearly, issues of access and safety will limit the use of this method in urban areas. Specific licences and liaison with the Police is required. Furthermore, the perceptions of the public to the use of shooting in urban areas must be seriously considered when using this form of control.

Using Birds of Prey

Falcons have been used to scare gulls from airport runways although it is only effective if the falcons are flown daily. Hawks were used to reduce the population of gulls in Dumfries but the effect was short term suggesting the gulls became habituated. Within an urban environment where the gull population is dense, falcons and hawks have been aggressively 'mobbed' by high numbers of gulls who direct this behaviour at predators. For birds of prey to be effective, they must be flown daily, over a prolonged period during the breeding season and in a manner (for example hunting, but not to kill) to deter attacks by gulls.

It would appear that using effigies of predators (for example model owls) is ineffective in that gulls can readily become habituated to their presence and this has been proven in recent studies.

Broadcasting Sounds

While the playing of gull distress calls has proved effective on open water, no studies have been published regarding the use of this method within urban environments. The broadcasting of other sounds, such as bangs, is considered less effective as gulls become habituated to them. To surmise, methods that involve the broadcasting of distress calls or the use of pyrotechnics within urban areas could prove to be as disturbing to local residents as the gulls themselves and is therefore not recommended.

Frightening Devices

Audible bird scarers use noise stimuli that makes birds uncomfortable. However, once birds realise these pose no real threat, they can easily become habituated to sounds that seemed initially frightening. If just being placed in situ and left, audible bird scarers can easily become ineffective bird control solutions, however when managed on an on-going basis or used as part of a greater bird deterrent system, sound methods can deliver quality results.

Netting / Spikes & Wires

Roof-netting can prevent gulls nesting on a particular roof, if it is well designed and installed correctly. If the netting is inappropriate or not installed correctly, it can result in deaths. This method is obtrusive, non-selective and the most expensive option available.

A bird control spike, also known as an anti-roosting spike or roost modification, is a device consisting of long, needle-like rods used for bird control. They can be attached to building ledges, street lighting, and commercial signage to prevent wild or feral birds from perching or roosting. Birds can produce large quantities of unsightly and unhygienic faeces, and some birds have very loud calls that can be inconvenient for nearby residents, especially at night. As a result, bird control spikes are used to deter these birds without causing them harm or killing them.

Spikes however can become clogged by leaves, debris and bird feathers. If left unchecked, this can allow birds to perch easily on top. In addition, spikes can make buildings appear less attractive or untidy, especially landmark buildings. In these cases, other methods of control must be used.

To summarise, the use of netting, wires and spikes on buildings for deterring nesting gulls in urban areas has proved successful for many years and is a popular choice for those seeking to prevent nesting on building affected by gulls. However these methods are only successful if the netting, wires and spikes are attached securely to the building, installed correctly and most importantly maintained. Failure to do so results in collisions and entanglement of gulls. Inappropriately installed and maintained proofing causes an unknown figure of casualties and in some cases the successful breeding of gulls.

The high levels of site tenacity shown by gulls to their breeding sites mean that the exclusion of gulls from a building or group of buildings may simply lead them to settle on neighbouring buildings which haven't been proofed by these methods. For such techniques to be effective in an urban situation, netting, wires and spikes may need to be erected and maintained to cover all potential gull nesting sites over a wide area. There are major obstacles to overcome with this approach including adequate coverage, gaining access to properties and most importantly the cost of who pays for the work.

Egg Oiling

Egg oiling with liquid paraffin is approved for use under the Control of Pesticides Regulations (COPR) but can only be used under licence provided by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) under Section 16 (1) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

It is an offence to interfere with a nest or its contents and therefore, before taking any action to remove a nest with or without eggs or chicks, or to oil eggs within a nest, permission must be sought from the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Egg oiling is a method of egg treatment that is typically used for the control of ground nesting birds and is considered to be 100% effective if carried out at the right time of year. The only exception to this rule would be where egg oiling is used for the control of roof-nesting birds such as the gull. Although the gull does not nest at ground level the process has been successfully adapted to be used as part of a gull control programme where birds are nesting in accessible areas at height.

Egg oiling involves the use of liquid paraffin BP to coat the shell of the egg in order to prevent the embryo from developing. Liquid paraffin BP is a white mineral oil, commonly known as paraffin oil. When an egg is removed from the nest and fully immersed in liquid paraffin BP the oil blocks the pores of the egg, coating the underlying egg membrane and depriving the fertilised egg of oxygen. In order for the process to be completely effective the whole of the egg must be coated.

DEFRA recommends the use of a wide-necked container or small bucket for dipping the eggs. Once immersed in the liquid paraffin BP the egg must be turned 360° several times to ensure that the whole egg is coated. DEFRA also recommends that the operator should wear protective gloves and a facemask to comply with Control of Pesticides Regulations (COPR) but confirms that a gloved hand will not remove liquid paraffin BP from a coated egg. Liquid sprays or sponges should not be used to coat the egg as these methods of coating may leave some areas of the shell untreated.



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Once the egg has been dipped in liquid paraffin BP it should be allowed to drain before being replaced in the nest. The nests and eggs that have been treated should be marked to ensure that they are not revisited and re-oiled more often than is necessary, thus reducing both labour and the quantity of liquid paraffin oil used. The major benefit of this method of egg treatment is that the parent will be unaware that the egg has been interfered with and will continue to incubate the eggs for the required period. Other means of egg interference include the following:

- Breaking eggs (in the nest)
- Pricking eggs (using a pin or needle to make a hole in the shell of the egg that will allow bacteria to enter the egg as well as desiccating the contents)
- Removing eggs
- Cracking eggs
- Shaking eggs
- Removal of eggs and the provision of imitation dummy eggs

All of these methods of egg interference are not only illegal, unless a licence has been obtained from DEFRA, but they are also ineffective, with the possible exception of removing eggs and replacing them with imitation dummy eggs.

When eggs are interfered with by any means other than egg oiling with liquid paraffin BP, the parent will normally re-lay another clutch of eggs immediately, rendering the process of interference futile. Imitation dummy eggs are likely to be accepted by the parent but only if the dummy egg is an exact replica of the real egg. When using egg oiling it is important to be aware that if the target species commonly lays more than one clutch of eggs per season it is possible that re-laying will occur once the parent has incubated the treated eggs for the normal period.

Non-lethal disturbance methods

Once nested, adult gulls show a marked attachment to the nest regardless of disturbance. Therefore, it can be assumed that non-lethal disturbance methods are ineffective for deterring breeding birds. However, a proportion of breeding birds will be breeding for the first time and if these birds are subjected to disturbance methods, it may be possible to deter them from breeding within the urban colony and used as a long term strategy, may reduce the size of urban colonies. It has also been shown that site tenacity varies between species of gull. For example, Lesser Black-backed Gulls have a generally lower tenacity to breeding sites than Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls are the more likely of the two species to be deterred from breeding sites by such methods.

To deter gulls from breeding, an intensive application of disturbance is required over a prolonged time. The main problem associated with this methods is that the effectiveness of scaring techniques is likely to lessen with prolonged use as gulls become habituated with them. A recent five year study looked at a range of disturbance techniques to deter gulls from landfill sites. Disturbance methods included falcons/hawks, distress calls, pyrotechnics, bird scaring kits, sound generators and the firing of blanks. The study concluded that while some techniques were highly effective over the short term, they failed to main their effectiveness over longer periods although the combination of techniques led to greater success than when individual techniques were used alone.

Although some of these control methods are initially effective, none of them offer a long term solution for controlling the population of gulls in urban environments.

Please note one should not tamper with a birds nest, please review the following guidelines:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wild-birds-licence-to-take-or-kill-for-health-or-safety-purposes>