

This advisory leaflet is issued by the
Council's Environmental Protection service.

Contact details overleaf.

If you, or somebody you know,
would like the information
contained in this document in
large print, Braille, tape/CD
or in another language please
contact Wealden District Council
on 01323 443322 or
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Living with Gulls

Information

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Everyone thinks of sunny summer days by the sea when they hear a gull's wailing cry. They are as much part of the seaside as sandcastles and ice cream.

But gulls are wild creatures and their natural behaviour does not always please everyone in towns.

The down side

Some people have problems with gulls in towns because they may:

- make a lot of noise
- nest on roofs and block gas flues
- make swooping 'attacks'
- snatch food from people
- tear open rubbish sacks

All these behaviours have a natural explanation and can be managed with a little care and understanding.

Living in harmony with gulls

We all share responsibility for making sure gulls don't become a nuisance.

In some seaside towns – where people have been feeding gulls – the birds have learned to snatch food. Try to keep food to yourself, but don't blame the gulls if they can't tell the difference between scraps willingly offered and your bag of chips.

Dispose of edible litter carefully – put it in gull-proof lidded bins. Plastic bin bags left in the street are an open invitation for gulls to investigate.

Gulls that swoop suddenly on people or pets are usually trying to protect chicks that have got out of the nest. If you see a gull chick, leave it alone – its parents can look after it better than you.

Gulls make most noise between May and July, when they are breeding. If gulls on your roof disturb you,

or you are worried they may block a gas flue, you can prevent them nesting there in the first place. A specialised pest control company will probably be able to tell you about the devices available. Check also with your local fire brigade that the system you choose will not carry a risk of lightning strikes.

Discouraging gulls

Gulls naturally take advantage of a wide range of food, including rubbish dropped by people. It is best, therefore, to avoid widespread feeding of gulls in situations where problems could result. As herring gulls are declining, it is preferable to leave nesting birds undisturbed. They can be aggressive to intruders near their nests, and should the situation arise you can protect yourself by holding a stick or other suitable objects above your head – they go for the highest point.

If there is a genuine reason for not having roof-top nesting gulls, it is better to deter them, rather than to destroy them or their nests once they have started breeding. Studies show that, once established, breeding birds continue to return to specific sites year after year. A simple wire system can be made on a frame that fits into the area the birds are using, for example, between the chimney pots. Wires on the frame should be 30cm (1ft) high to prevent gulls from landing and folding their wings. On flat roofs, wires can be stretched and held in place with brackets, again 30cm high.

Gulls and the law

Gulls are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 – though licences are issued allowing landowners or occupiers to kill certain species or destroy their nests and eggs in order to:

- prevent serious damage to agriculture
- preserve public health/air safety
- conserve other wild birds

But even in these circumstances, it is illegal to do anything that will cause suffering to gulls. There are restrictions on the method of killing – poisons are prohibited except under special licence.

Gulls in distress

Remember, if you see a gull chick – usually mottled brown and grey in colour – leave it alone. It probably does not need rescuing, unless it is obviously injured.

If you see an injured gull, contact the RSPCA 24-hour cruelty and advice line: 0870 55 55 999.

For further advice

Before undertaking any action (except proofing out of the nesting season) we recommend that you seek expert advice on current legislation from DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) 0207 904 6000 or on their web pages at: www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/vertebrates/gen-licence.htm