



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-0044, 3 February 2017

Seagulls in coastal towns and cities

This debate pack has been produced ahead of the debate on seagulls in coastal towns and cities.

The debate will be in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 7 February 2017, 2.30-4pm.

The Member in charge is Oliver Colvile MP.

Debate packs are intended to provide useful information for Members, including press and parliamentary material, on issues relating to the debate.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

David Hirst
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1. Summary

A spate of seagull attacks across the country, led the then Prime Minister David Cameron to call for a “big conversation” on the issue.¹

All gull species currently enjoy protected status in the UK, but some people have called for a cull to remove gulls in problem areas.²

Wildlife protections

Animal welfare is a devolved issue. Gulls currently enjoy protected status in the UK; all species of are protected under the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#) and the [Wildlife \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1985](#). This makes it illegal to intentionally or, in Scotland and Northern Ireland, recklessly injure or kill any gull or damage or destroy an active nest or its contents.

All “seven breeding gull species in the UK are birds of conservation concern” according to the RSPB. The herring gull is red listed due to severe declines in its national breeding population, and the other species are amber listed for differing reasons. Only, the Mediterranean gull population is not in decline.³

Dealing with problem gulls

[Natural England advises](#) that:

In many cases the problems [with gulls] can be avoided or kept to tolerable levels by local authorities and landowners taking preventative measures such as installing netting or wire over vulnerable roosting areas, keeping food storage and waste facility areas secure and discouraging deliberate feeding of birds by the public.⁴

Councils are allowed to issue licences for birds to be disposed of or nests to be destroyed where there is no other satisfactory solution, and there is a risk to public health or safety. There are slight differences in the licensing arrangements in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, though all adhere to the EU Birds Directive.

A gull cull?

Currently, DEFRA’s approach to managing gull populations is through licensing and effective long-term management.⁵ However, some people have called for a cull to remove gulls in urban areas.⁶ There is some public support for a cull. In the summer of 2015, [YouGov surveyed 1,746 people on their support for a cull on seagulls](#). This revealed that: “by a small margin British people tend to support the idea of a gull cull (44% support, 36% oppose), while in rural areas support reaches 50%.

¹ Christopher Hope, [“David Cameron wants a ‘big conversation’ about ‘murderous’ seagulls killing pets and attacking people”](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 17 July 2015

² BBC, [“Seagulls: Denis O’Donovan calls for cull of ‘vicious’ birds”](#), 20 July 2015

³ RSPB, [“Populations and conservation status”](#), [accessed: 23 January 2017]

⁴ Natural England, [“Advice on how to deal with problem gulls”](#), 30 July 2015

⁵ [PQ 9338 \[Birds: Conservation\] 14 September 2015](#)

⁶ BBC, [“Seagulls: Denis O’Donovan calls for cull of ‘vicious’ birds”](#), 20 July 2015

Most people aged 60 or over (53%) also support a cull, but 18-24s oppose one by a majority (53%).”⁷

The RSPCA is opposed in principle, to killing or taking wildlife and would instead advocate the use of non-harmful methods of deterrence where possible.⁸

Wales

In 2015, [the then Minister for Natural Resources explained](#) that he felt that the powers in place for local authorities to take action were sufficient, but that the Department would look at what else could be done:

We have been very careful, on balance, to make sure that we manage protected species, but I think there are already powers in place for local authorities to take action. It is something I’ve asked my team to give me some further advice on, because I do recognise, actually, some of the activities in urban settings, particularly in Cardiff, where there are some wild birds that take their actions on innocent bystanders as you walk past their nests.⁹

Scotland

In 2010, Dumfries and Galloway Council, the Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage published a report which examined gull deterrence using Peregrine Falcons.¹⁰ This study found that falcons could act as a deterrence, and made a number of recommendations. IN answer to a PQ in September 2015, Environment Minister Aileen McLeod explained that she “hoped that local authorities across Scotland will be able to implement the recommendations in this report, and learn from measures.”¹¹

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Government states that “Choosing the right course of action is essential as it is illegal to intentionally harm or kill any wild bird species.”¹² It goes on to say that not all of the measures you can take are lasting solutions, and recognises that in some circumstances local authorities may need to reduce gull numbers for public health reasons.

⁷ Will Dahlgreen, [“Gull Cull: public favours reducing seagull numbers amid attacks”](#), *YouGov.co.uk*, 5 August 2015

⁸ RSPCA Cymru, [“Seagulls - trends, legal protection and living with Wales’ gull population”](#), August 2015

⁹ [OAG\(4\)0348\(NR\) \(7 October 2015\)](#)

¹⁰ Scottish Government, [“Use of Falcons to Displace Nesting Gulls from an Urban Area: Final Report”](#), 14 April 2010

¹¹ [Question S4W-27335 17 September 2015](#)

¹² Northern Ireland Government, [“Dealing with nuisance birds”](#), [accessed: 2 February 2017]

2. News items

Plymouth will belong to seagulls this summer - but this is how you can avoid them

Plymouth Herald

7 June 2016

<http://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/plymouth-belong-seagulls-summer-avoid/story-29370658-detail/story.html>

Dive bombing seagulls becoming increasingly aggressive, say St Ives' businesses

Western Morning News

July 16, 2015

<http://www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/dive-bombing-seagulls-increasingly-aggressive-say/story-26915380-detail/story.html>

'Nuisance' seagulls swoop on Llanfairpwll residents

BBC News

25 July 2016

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-west-wales-36881186>

Gull Cull: public favours reducing seagull numbers amid attacks

YouGovUK

5 August 2015

<https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/08/05/gull-cull/>

Number of urban seagulls in Britain nearly quadrupled in last 15 years, says research

Independent

1 August 2015

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/nature/number-of-urban-seagulls-in-britain-nearly-quadrupled-in-last-15-years-says-research-10431771.html>

David Cameron wants a 'big conversation' about 'murderous' seagulls killing pets and attacking people

Daily Telegraph

7 July 2015

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/11746530/David-Cameron-wants-a-big-conversation-about-murderous-seagulls-killing-pets-and-attacking-people.html>

Seagulls are not terrorists. This war is a bad idea

Guardian

20 July 2015

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/20/killing-seagulls-bird-gull-attacks-david-cameron>

3. Parliamentary material

3.1 Parliamentary Questions

[Seagulls](#)

Asked by: Chalk, Alex | Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether her Department has made an assessment of the potential effect of removing the protected status of seagulls in urban areas on local authorities' ability to manage seagull populations more effectively.

Answering member: Dr Thérèse Coffey | Conservative Party |
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra has not undertaken such an assessment. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 already allows for the control of gulls, under licence from Natural England, in the interest of public health and safety or to prevent disease. Local authorities, businesses and individuals are also able to take action to manage urban gull populations e.g. using bins with secured lids, ensuring domestic animals are not fed outside and that streets are clear of litter.

07 Sep 2016 | Written questions | House of Commons | 44108

[Seagulls](#)

Asked by: Martin Horwood | **Party:** Liberal Democrats

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate his Department has made of the size of the seagull population in the UK; and what estimate has been made of the cost to local authorities of its population growth.

[122557]

Answering Member: Richard Benyon | Conservative Party |
Department: Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The species of gull we have in the UK are: Mediterranean gull, black-headed gull, common gull, lesser black-backed gull, herring gull, greater black-backed gull and yellow legged gull.

The last full gull census was "Seabird 2000" in 1998-2002, which covered coastal and inland colonies of both rural and urban environments. The population estimates (coastal and inland population combined) were as follows:

	Number
Mediterranean gull	108
Black-headed gull	82,728
Common gull (a.k.a Mew gull)	44

	Number
Lesser black-backed gull	64,208
Herring gull	45,365
Great black-backed gull	1476

Yellow-legged gulls are very rare in the UK and were not included in the Seabird 2000 census. The Rare Breeding Birds Panel 2010 report estimates UK breeding population as 1-2 pairs.

Seabird 2000 was the third national census to be carried out, each at around 15 year intervals (Operation Seafarer in 1969-70 and Seabird Colony Register in 1985-88) with the next seabird census planned for 2014-15.

We have made no estimate of the cost to local authorities of gulls.

19 Oct 2012 | Written questions | House of Commons | 122557 | 551 cc466-7W

3.2 Debates

[*Seagulls \(Coastal Towns\)*](#)

Westminster Hall adjournment debate on seagulls in coastal towns.

26 Oct 2011 | House of Commons | Westminster Hall | 534 c142-8WH

Lead member: Aldous, Peter | **Answering Member:** Paice, James

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

4. Further reading and useful links

Living with Gulls

Royal Society for Protection of Animals (RSPCA)

<https://www.rspca.org.uk/search?searchKey=gulls&x=0&y=0>

Urban Gulls

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/community-and-advice/garden-advice/unwantedvisitors/gulls/urbangulls.aspx>

Populations and Conservation Status of Gulls

RSPB

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/community-and-advice/garden-advice/unwantedvisitors/gulls/populations.aspx>

Gulls and the Law

RSPB

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/community-and-advice/garden-advice/unwantedvisitors/gulls/thelaw.aspx>

Discouraging Gulls

RSPB

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/community-and-advice/garden-advice/unwantedvisitors/gulls/discouragingulls.aspx>

Birds Swooping at People

RSPB

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/read-and-learn/watching-birds/behaviour/swooping.aspx>

British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)

General Licences in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

<https://basc.org.uk/shooting/general-licences/>

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