

Bird Guidance

What do they look like?

The two main birds that can be described as pests are the gulls and the pigeon. There are many types of gulls but generally they are a medium to large bird with long wings. They are mostly white with grey or black back and wings. Immature birds are a mottled brown. Gulls have a slow wing beat and glide or soar frequently on motionless wings while in flight. The pigeon is about 33cm in length and weighs on average 350g. Its plumage can vary considerably, usually blue-grey.

Where do they live?

Gulls are common in the UK with a population of around 180,000 breeding pairs. Gulls are mainly found in coastal areas but have recently taken to migrating inland, particularly during winter months. Gulls can often be seen scavenging around waste disposal sites. Pigeons are found worldwide, the feral or town pigeon is closely associated with humans and is a common sight in urban areas. It may however, be found in more rural areas where it is often associated with farms.

What do they eat?

Gulls will eat a wide range of foods but problems mainly occur due to their habit of scavenging food from bins and being fed by the public.

Pigeons normally feed in flocks and for most of the year rely on spillage and scraps at food premises and being fed bread, cake and grain by members of the public.

Pest Status

Gulls have been implicated in the transmission of salmonella bacteria which can cause food poisoning. They feed at refuse tips then roost on an pollute reservoirs and other large bodies of water. They can damage property by pecking at roofing materials resulting in problems with dampness and they can block gutters and downpipes with nesting material. Fouling of vehicles and buildings can be a problem due to the corrosive action of their droppings. When the gulls have young they become aggressive towards people and in some cases the noise they make can lead to complaints from members of the public.

Much of the damage caused by feral pigeons arises from their infestation of buildings. Fouling of buildings, monuments and pathways frequently occurs where the birds roost. This is unsightly, may have a destructive effect due to the acid nature of the droppings and can make pavements slippery causing a hazard for pedestrians. Feral pigeons can also be regarded as potential transmitters of disease.

Control

Experience indicates that the best way to deter gulls from your premises is to take the following action:

- **De-nesting** - At the end of every season (usually September) remove all nests and nesting material from your building
- **Deterrent** - This can be achieved by fitting plastic spikes in the nesting or roosting areas. Wires or netting can also be effective but may be unsightly on prominent parts of the roof. You can either do this yourself or employ a professional pest control company to carry out the work. Local companies can be found in the yellow pages, you should employ a company who are members of the British Pest Control Association.
- Rubbish should be stored in lidded bins
- Rubbish should be put out on the day of collection

Pigeon problems are created when they have access to regular food, if the source of food is removed then they will usually leave the area in search of a new source of food.

The main way to protect a building from pigeons would be to undertake proofing measures. This can be achieved using a variety of methods and can either be carried out by yourself (further advice available from the Pigeon Control Advisory Service www.picas.org) or a private pest control company could be employed to undertake the work.