

Large Gulls nesting on buildings

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

Rooftop nesting by large gulls in the British Isles was a relatively rare occurrence prior to 1940, but then increased greatly. The first colonies on inhabited buildings were reported from Cornwall, and these were followed by colonies in SE England in the early 1930s, in NE England, Ireland and Wales by the early 1940s, and later in Scotland.

In 1969 the Seabird Group organised a national census of seabirds, 'Operaton Seafarer', and this included counts of gulls nesting on buildings in Britain and Ireland. The Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* was the main species involved, but numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* were increasing. The first report of Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus* was in 1970, and a pair of Common Gulls *L. canus* nested near Inverness in 1971, but this appears to have been an isolated occurrence.

It had become clear that the number of roof-nesting gulls had grown markedly since 1969, and a second, specific, census was organised in 1976, as a Trust-aided Investigation, to quantify recent changes.

The Herring Gull was found to be the most abundant roof-nesting gull in Britain and was the only species recorded nesting on buildings in Ireland. The number of breeding pairs in sites known in 1969 increased by 143%, and 416 nested in areas colonised since 1969. A minimum of 2968 pairs was recorded, still a small proportion of the total numbers breeding in the country, but the number of localities had continued to increase rapidly. Fifty of the 92 localities in the British Isles in 1976 had been colonised since 1969. However some towns which were colonised had been deserted again. None of these ever had more than ten nests, and some desertions were likely due to active intervention. The highest rate of increase regionally was in eastern Britain between the Rivers Humber and Tay.

A total of 323 pairs of Lesser Black-backed Gulls was reported from 12 towns. The increase recorded was higher than comparable values for the Herring Gull. The majority were around the Bristol Channel but numbers were increasing in eastern Britain.

All seven Great Black-backed Gull records were in Cornwall.

Herring Gulls were most commonly found on residential and commercial properties and primarily in the central areas of towns, on the relatively high and undisturbed rooftops characteristic of these areas. The only large colony on an industrial site outside the Bristol Channel region was in Sunderland. In the Bristol Channel area gulls were reported to be nesting mainly on industrial properties in Bristol, Gloucester and Port Talbot.

The appendices of the report list counts for each colony reported to the survey.

Methods of Data Capture

Requests were made for the number of known nesting pairs of all gulls on buildings, and where available, details of colony history, nest-site types, breeding success and any control measures employed. Early in 1976 all coastal local government authorities were asked for

previous information of gulls nesting on buildings in their areas, and whether complaints had been received concerning these birds. Similar information relating to the 1976 breeding season was supplied by MAFF Pest Officers. Requests for information were published in appropriate journals and magazines and brought a good response from the general public.

Purpose of Data Capture

To estimate the distribution and total numbers of gulls nesting on buildings, primarily in coastal towns.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain and Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding season of 1976.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO as a Trust-aided Investigation with the help and co-operation of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Irish Biological Records Centre, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and all the District Government Authorities and local bird clubs.

Organiser(s)

Pat Monaghan

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Publications

The main report on the survey is:

Monaghan, P. & Coulson, J.C. 1977. Status of large gulls nesting on buildings. *Bird Study* 24: 89-104.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 78, 79 and 81.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

None.

Computer data -- outline contents

N/A.

Computer data -- description of contents

N/A.

Information held in BTO Archives

None.

Notes on Access and Use**Other information****Notes on Survey Design**

Counting breeding gulls in towns is more difficult than is often realised. Rarely are all nests visible from ground level and an accurate count necessitates the use of vantage points, if these exist, which overlook other buildings. Accurate counts of large groups are particularly difficult and there is a tendency to underestimate the size of the population. Accordingly, all figures should be considered as minimum numbers, and the actual rate of increase will thus tend to be underestimated. Counting was further hampered by control measures which involved the removal of nests in certain areas.

In general, individual towns were treated as single units, even where the gulls were nesting in more than one group, and presumably representing two or more colonies. As a result of this enquiry, some data which had not been reported to the 1969 census were obtained, and the 1969 records were amended where necessary before comparison was made with the 1976 results. Negative records were also requested.

Specific Issues for Analysis