

Linda Gamlin - 11th Nov 2020 - proposed statement to the Council on 12th Nov.

Thank you for allowing me to address the meeting.

I've spent the past two months researching all the scientific literature on urban gulls - I'm a science writer, by the way, and have a Masters degree in Applied Biology from Cambridge University. I've produced an article on urban gull problems, and the flawed algorithm that led to the dubious 'endangered' status. This is about to be published in The Times. I've also written a 28-page Briefing Paper for MPs, which is currently being printed and will be sent to all MPs with gull problems in their constituency. (You were all sent an earlier draft of this by Paul Crossley. The final version is substantially different from that, and contains a lot more useful material - if you would like copies I can send them.)

While I endorse much of what Patrick Anketell-Jones has said about gulls, I disagree with him on a crucial point, as I will explain.

The Council has got a good grip on our gull numbers during the past fifteen years. I found some unpublished figures which demonstrate this while doing my research - they show that Bath has done better in keeping the population growth in check, compared to several other urban areas. (There's a graph compiled from these figures this in my Briefing Paper).

The tragedy now is that the Council's grip on the gull numbers is about to be lost, with potentially disastrous consequences.

The Council's previous strategy had four strands, as I understand it: restricting gulls' access to food, netting roofs to stop nesting, coating eggs in paraffin wax to stop them hatching ('egg oiling') and removing nests before the eggs hatch.

I believe that most of the Council's public buildings have already been covered with netting. I would agree with Patrick that adding more netting in places where the gulls are disturbing residents in the early morning, such as Milsom St, is very desirable.

But netting used alone, without any measures to stop hatching, will mean rapidly escalating numbers, and a colony spreading ever outwards.

If hatching isn't controlled, then Bath's nesting colony, in five years time, will have four times as many gulls as now, in a donut-shaped nesting colony around the netted area in the centre. They will still fly into the centre to snatch food from the hands of residents and tourists, forage on cafe tables, look for naked bin bags to rip open, and generally make a nuisance of themselves.

The thing to grasp is this - there are probably over a thousand suitable nesting sites beyond the currently colonised area that are not in use yet.

To give one example - in the small area of Bath immediately around St James's Square, which is where I live, we could accommodate *several hundred* gull pairs. My flat is in a small 1960s block with a flat roof - a great nesting site for lesser black-backed gulls. Nearby are more flat-roofed 1960s houses. Then there are the Georgian rooftops of St James's Square, and its adjoining streets of Georgian terraces, all with that lead-lined central gully to the roof that is attractive to both herring gulls and lesser black-backed gulls. And there are some double rows of chimney pots which are the favourite nesting spot for herring gulls.

Periodically pioneers do arrive and build nests in our area. We have, up to now, kept them at bay with nest removal. As long as there's little history of successful breeding at a site, they are quickly discouraged when the nest is knocked off the roof. Sometimes they persist and build a replacement nest. When that is destroyed, they go away.

Without such measures against nests and eggs in any part of Bath - so that hatching is completely unchecked - the numbers of gulls will shoot up. Gulls return to the place they hatched when it's time to breed, 2-3 years later. Taking into account how many hatch per nest, how many survive to breeding age, and how long mature gulls live, my calculations suggest that five years without any nest removal or egg-oiling will produce a population that is **four times** the current size.

This is the crucial flaw in the idea that diverting the Council's entire budget for nest removal and egg-oiling into netting roofs is a splendid long-term solution. Actually it's a recipe for disaster. Millions of pounds worth of netting would be needed to cope with the hundreds of new gulls on the new nest sites. Costs would build, year on year. It can't be done.

You will of course say "Yes, but we can't remove nests or oil eggs any more.. "

Right now, that is so. But this is a democratic society, not a dictatorship and we have a right to be heard. Councils and residents, in Bath and elsewhere, must *insist* on being able to take those measures against hatching, otherwise the urban areas of this country will be over-run by gulls. Gulls are spreading to towns further and further inland. The numbers nesting on rooftops grow and grow. And it's clear they are becoming more bold and aggressive - there are more and more reports of injuries from divebombing or food-snatching gulls. Rather than resign ourselves to what is being foisted on us by Natural England, we should be

kicking up a serious fuss and demanding that a General Licence specifically for urban gulls is issued.

Natural England are guilty of shameful ignorance and indifference as regards urban gulls. They are under legal pressure to stop gamekeepers slaughtering wild birds on grouse moors, which is why the General Licence rules were changed. The needs of urban areas, Councils and residents, have been pushed aside because they don't understand, and don't care - and because we have nobody putting our case forward strongly.

We should urge Wera Hobhouse to bring together an All-Party Group of MPs that will press vigorously for a restoration of the right for someone with a General Licence to freely remove nests from rooftops, and oil eggs, without lengthy form-filling for every nest.

Please don't be complacent about this.

Thank you for your attention.