

*Effective, cost-efficient ways in which local  
authorities can deter wild species*



# Alternatives to Culling

*Includes a series of advice sheets to help council tenants and residents deter wildlife*

*'The size of a pigeon flock is dictated absolutely by the extent of food available to it ~ if birds are physically removed from the flock, by culling for example, this not only increases the food supply for the remainder of the flock but creates a void, which is filled by surviving members of the flock.'*<sup>2</sup>

Pigeon Control Advisory Service



# Councils and culling

Local authorities are often called upon to 'control' wild species in town or city centres, as well as in suburban areas. Concerned residents may demand action while not always understanding the true nature of 'pest' problems, thus subjecting councils to political and financial pressures. A rushed response to these demands for action can lead to inhumane and ineffective control, breaches of current legislation and wasted funds. A clear and well-informed policy, together with accurate assessments of the impact of these species, will enable relevant departments to respond effectively.

Culling wildlife is rarely an effective long-term solution – which is why councils that embark on this route often find they are calling the pest control companies over and over again. I believe we would all prefer to use humane, non-lethal techniques to solve any problems. Animal Aid's view is that killing animals just because they cause a nuisance, such as digging up flower beds or creating noise at certain times, for example, is a disproportionate response and that we should seek to find more compassionate ways to live in harmony with the animals with whom we share the world. Of course, these humane methods must also be effective and a sensible use of public funds in these cost-sensitive times. This booklet offers help and advice on the various species that come into conflict with people, along with cost-efficient, humane ways to deal with any that are perceived to be a pest.

I hope you will find it useful.

*Helen Ascott*  
*Wildlife Campaigner*  
*Animal Aid*  
01732 364546



# Species in the spotlight

This report focuses on foxes, grey squirrels, pigeons, rats, mice, gulls and geese. It provides information about behaviour, current and popular control methods and, crucially, the best ways to deter or control them humanely.

Some of these animals and birds are extremely popular with the general public and many people spend their leisure time in local parks, as well as their own gardens, feeding the geese, foxes, squirrels and gulls. For some, this is the only contact they will have with wildlife, and these encounters can enrich their lives and encourage compassion and respect for nature. It should be borne in mind that people rarely write to their council

to extol the virtues of a particular species, so gauging public opinion from those who do contact the council is unlikely to be truly representative.

The species in this booklet have adapted well to the man-made world and take advantage of the shelter and food inadvertently or deliberately provided. They are doing what they need to do in order to survive and rear their young.



- **Gulls have been attracted away from coastal areas since the 1920s by the huge amount of food on offer at landfill sites.**
- **Foxes have become extremely comfortable in our urban and suburban environments with their plentiful food supplies and perfect cub-raising territories, such as beneath garden sheds.**
- **Grey squirrels are hardier and more adaptable than their red cousins, who favour secluded evergreen forests, rather than the more common deciduous forests that are prevalent across the South. The red squirrel was in decline due to loss of habitat, persecution and disease long before grey squirrels were introduced.**
- **Rats are bright, clean and very intelligent animals, who have suffered for centuries because of the mistaken belief that they caused the medieval plague.<sup>1</sup>**
- **Mice are common visitors to homes and gardens but will only remain where there is a plentiful food supply.**
- **Geese eat grass and are therefore attracted to lawns and parks where their favourite foodstuff grows in abundance.**
- **Pigeons, even in town centres, retain their wild instincts, choosing to nest on building ledges because they resemble cliffs.**
- **Culling is, at best, a short-term solution, and has to be done repeatedly to have an impact on numbers. It is cruel and ineffective – and, therefore, wasteful of taxpayers' money – as well as unpalatable for the general public.**

Employing lethal pest control companies perpetuates the problem, as newly vacated niches are quickly filled again, and back come the pest controllers to kill the new inhabitants. Rather than embarking on such a pointless and costly policy

of culling, councils are increasingly looking for permanent solutions. Using humane, non-lethal methods benefits animals, the environment and taxpayers, eases the public's concerns, and enhances the reputation of the council.



# Foxes

## History

Foxes are opportunistic feeders, surviving in a variety of habitats, from isolated woodlands to city centres. As a result, they frequently come into conflict with humans. They are playful, social creatures with complex territories and impeccable timekeeping, showing up early for any regular feeding session. As a member of the canine family, this successful omnivore can be seen as a nuisance by residents for fouling, digging and 'screaming' during the breeding season.

## Behaviour

Foxes are territorial and will breed if there is a good food supply, producing four to five cubs in March. Certain territories can be highly sought-after and, when a fox is killed, another will take her place, which renders culling ineffective and a waste of resources. Vixens with cubs may have several earths as a safety precaution and will move their cubs if danger or nuisance threatens. Foxes thrive in the urban environment where they survive on food deliberately provided by residents, and not merely on food scavenged from bins, as is commonly believed.<sup>3</sup>

Regarded as a pest by a sometimes vocal minority, foxes may be accused of damage to gardens, including digging up flower beds, stashing food in flower pots, stealing shoes, digging under patios and sheds, fouling on lawns and paths, and scent-marking their territory with urine. Foxes love to play, and a few residents may object to their presence and, in particular, to the barking and screaming that can accompany nocturnal mating rituals.

*'In a survey about wildlife in their garden completed by nearly 4000 households across Britain, 65.7% liked urban foxes... In a recent survey by The Mammal Society foxes were voted one of the most popular British mammals.'*<sup>4</sup>

**The Mammal Group,  
University of Bristol**

## Methods of killing

Pest control companies will typically trap and shoot foxes in urban areas, while resorting to shooting free-running foxes in the countryside. Cruel and inaccurate, shooting will often leave a fox wounded, unable to hunt, and dying a protracted and painful death. Some pest control companies will offer 'humane control', by trapping and releasing a fox many miles from his territory. This might seem to offer a positive solution but a fox out of his own territory experiences stress and must compete with the new territory's current occupier. Such a relocation is known as a 'hard release', and could be considered an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Moreover, it won't solve the original fox problem, as the newly vacant urban territory will quickly be occupied by another fox.



# Foxes

## Humane deterrents

Foxes will occupy a territory if there is food available. A typical fox territory in London may cover around 350 average-sized gardens. Foxes like routine and prefer to keep away from people. Knowing this, sensible, simple, effective deterrents include:

- Reducing available food
- Replacing fish or bone fertilisers with plant-based ones
- Using noise – such as a radio left on in a shed – to disturb their routines and deter a vixen and her cubs
- Using proprietary animal repellents such as ‘Get off my garden’, which are harmless and work well\*
- Raising the height of fencing
- Blocking fence holes and obstructing pathways
- Removing or defending attractions such as bins, compost heaps, bird feeders, ponds and favoured ‘lying-up’ spots

And remember, secure fencing is vital to protect any small farmed animals or pets.

*\* It is an offence to use any chemical or product as an animal repellent unless labelled as such.*

## Fox facts

- Foxes have been living in our cities since at least the 1940s.
- Urban fox numbers have remained steady – between 225,000 to 258,000 – over the last 20 years.
- Foxes rarely scavenge from dustbins.
- Eighty-six per cent of the UK’s fox population lives in the countryside
- Only one quarter of foxes live to be two years old.
- Foxes will avoid cats and dogs. A dog is far more likely to attack a fox than the other way round, and cats are very well equipped to defend themselves and so foxes will avoid confrontations with them wherever possible.

*With thanks to the University of Bristol Mammal Group  
([www.thefoxwebsite.org](http://www.thefoxwebsite.org))*



## Useful contacts

The Fox Project. [www.foxproject.org.uk](http://www.foxproject.org.uk)  
Helpline on 01892 826222

Fox-A-Gon. [www.fox-a-gon.co.uk](http://www.fox-a-gon.co.uk). 07768 903 043  
or 07973 414 935

Foxolutions. [www.foxolutions.co.uk](http://www.foxolutions.co.uk). 0844 804 0630

The enclosed advice sheet can be copied and given to residents who are concerned about foxes (see back of booklet).



### *Humane case studies*

*Many councils across the UK, including Richmond and Lambeth in London, now support non-lethal fox control measures.*

*'In common with many other authorities, Richmond does not support or practise lethal control. It supports coexistence and humane deterrence. Foxes are not vermin, they are part of our urban wildlife. Residents are given advice and encouraged to adopt humane solutions to their fox problems.'*<sup>5</sup>

Richmond Council

*'Culling by shooting or trapping foxes may appear to provide a simple answer to the problem. However, research suggests that culling foxes is expensive, difficult to carry out and rarely successful. It provides only a short-term solution. When a fox or a population of foxes are removed from an area they are soon replaced by one or more from a neighbouring territory. This is because an area has been left vacant with food available.'*<sup>6</sup>

Lambeth Council





# Grey squirrels

## History

Native to North America, grey squirrels were introduced to the UK as an ornamental species in the nineteenth century. They thrive in a variety of habitats unsuited to red squirrels and expanded their range in the 1940s to encompass much of England. They can now be found in urban areas across the country where they often delight and charm the public with their acrobatics and ingenuity, and offer rare contact with nature for many people.



## Behaviour

These highly intelligent and adaptable animals can be seen in woodlands, parks and gardens throughout the UK. Human persecution has decimated the populations of grey squirrels' natural predators, pine martens and goshawks, but thousands are still killed by cats and dogs. Others die of starvation or they are killed on our roads.

If there is a good food supply, greys produce two litters of 2-4 young between February and July. They eat fruit, seeds and nuts in the autumn, tree bark in the spring and flowers and buds through the summer. Culling is ineffective in the long-term as, unless food availability is reduced, the numbers are likely to remain static.

Squirrels are sometimes accused of damage to property in attics and roof spaces, where they seek a dry and warm refuge to raise their young. Some gardeners will complain of damage to plants as well as 'stealing' birds' food. In some areas, they are blamed for the decline in red squirrels, but the red squirrel population was hit by disease, deforestation, harsh winters and squirrel-killing bounty clubs long before the greys arrived.<sup>7</sup>

Grey squirrels are also accused of damaging trees, but fewer than five per cent of those damaged trees die, which is, according to the Forestry Commission 'far fewer than from poor and delayed thinning practice'.<sup>8</sup> Grey squirrels may actually help to control sycamore growth in some forests.<sup>9</sup>

Killing squirrels is often very unpopular and a waste of public money.

## Methods of killing


Squirrels are 'controlled' in a number of ways, none of which can be said to be humane. Anti-coagulant, or blood-thinning poisons, which are described by the Pesticides and Safety Directorate as 'markedly inhumane',<sup>11</sup> are used commonly. These cause the squirrels to bleed to death internally, often taking up to 10 days for the animals to die, whilst remaining fully conscious and in pain.<sup>12</sup> The use of such chemical pesticides is cruel and indiscriminate, as well as an environmental worry for residents. Shooting, trapping, drowning (which is a criminal offence) and bludgeoning them to death inside a sack (the 'sack method') are also methods of squirrel control.<sup>13</sup>

*'Grey squirrels aren't aggressive to native UK reds, they're just bigger and bolder.'*<sup>17</sup>

Bill Oddie





A close-up photograph of a grey squirrel with reddish-brown highlights, sitting on a wooden fence. The squirrel is facing left, holding a nut in its paws and eating it. Its long, bushy tail hangs down behind it. The background is a soft-focus green and yellow, suggesting a forest or park setting.

*'Culling of grey squirrels could actually lead to more problems than solutions, such as increased localised density, increased forest damage and an increase in the spread of disease.'*<sup>10</sup>

Professor Stephen Harris,  
School of Biological Science,  
University of Bristol

### ***Humane case study***

*A grey squirrel gained access to an enclosed roof-space of a front door porch by chewing a hole through the boards – a fairly typical act for a squirrel looking for a secure nesting site. The customer was concerned that the squirrel might get into the house or cause serious damage but did not wish to harm her. He called his local council, who put him in touch with John Bryant of Humane Wildlife Deterrence. Mr Bryant opened up the space and the scared animal ran away, leaving a nest with three babies inside. He then removed the nest safely, and placed it in an owl nesting box, which he fixed over the hole in the porch made by the squirrel. From a distance, the customer watched as the squirrel later returned and removed the babies one at a time, taking them away to some nearby trees.'*<sup>18</sup>

# Grey squirrels

## Humane deterrents

Squirrels are agile and intelligent, and will find any available food and shelter. Knowing this, effective deterrents include:

- Reducing available food by using airtight storage containers
- Encouraging residents not to feed squirrels
- Stopping feeding wild birds until squirrels leave and encouraging the use of squirrel-proof bird feeders
- Coating bird feed in chilli or capsicum – it deters squirrels but is not detected by, and does not harm, birds. The RSPB recommends that seed mixes be thoroughly coated, but not hidden, in the chilli powder
- Blocking access to roof spaces and buildings (and covering water tanks to prevent squirrels drowning)
- Using squirrel repellent spray around bird feeders
- Purchasing sonic repellents for use in attic or roof spaces (although by law these cannot be used where bats dwell)

For a potential longer term solution, a highly specific immuno-contraception agent, which is deliverable via bait, is currently being developed.



## Squirrel facts

- Grey squirrels do not kill red squirrels or chase them from their habitat.
- Red squirrels suffered badly from deforestation, severe winters and diseases before greys arrived.
- When numerous, red squirrels were also persecuted as pests, with the Highland Squirrel Club alone killing more than one hundred thousand red squirrels between 1903 and 1946.<sup>14</sup>
- Despite culling, grey squirrel populations have spread over much of the UK. Culling does not work.
- Culling may lead to increased, localised population densities.<sup>15</sup>
- There is no evidence that grey squirrels are responsible for the decline of woodland birds.<sup>16</sup>

The enclosed advice sheet can be copied and given to residents who are concerned about squirrels (see back of booklet).



# Pigeons

## History

Pigeons are actually rock doves, who originally nested high on cliff edges. They have adapted well to an urban environment and now thrive on a diet largely consisting of fast food scraps and bread. They have become a common feature of many city centres, attracting appreciative crowds to famous squares the world over.

## Behaviour

These amiable and most intelligent of wild birds will breed depending on the food supply: quite simply, the more they are fed, the more they breed. Having easily adapted from their native cliffs to high buildings, which offer predator-free roosting, they have the best vantage point from which to locate the vast amount of food we waste. Pigeons breed all year round. Fitting inadequate netting, which can trap them and their squabs (chicks) with no means of escape, will cause injury and death. This situation can also put local authorities and landowners in breach of current wildlife legislation. It is, therefore, recommended that all councils insist that any company installing netting also fits one-way devices to allow the trapped birds to leave. Squabs will need to be relocated with their parents, or taken to a wildlife sanctuary.

The multi-million pound pest control industry promotes the idea that pigeons are disease-ridden and pose a health risk to the public. Yet, since all species of bird and mammal – including people – carry pathogens, this is not a credible argument for killing pigeons. In most cases, pigeons are not causing a real or significant problem and tolerance should be



encouraged. Pigeon fouling alone cannot legally be used as a reason for culling. Furthermore, research shows that culling can actually increase flock sizes. When adult birds are removed, more food is available for the flock to prosper and so breeding rates increase.<sup>19</sup>

## Methods of killing

Shooting, trapping and the deployment of raptors are common methods used by the pest control industry. Often indiscriminate and always inhumane, they are a waste of taxpayers' money. Shooting birds in a public place obviously poses a danger to the general public and can never be entirely accurate, with wounded birds left to die in agony. Using birds of prey, which are often not the natural predator species for pigeons, can also be extremely cruel. It is also alarming and potentially dangerous for the public, as terrified pigeons are pursued and torn apart.<sup>20</sup> Poisoning with narcotic baits results in a slow and painful death.





# Pigeons

## Humane deterrents

Reducing the food available is the best way to reduce flock sizes, but physical deterrents may also be employed successfully to move birds away from specific areas. Ways to deal with pigeons effectively and humanely include:

- Reducing the food available by, for example, ensuring streets are kept clean and street bins are emptied
- Educating and encouraging residents, especially 'persistent feeders', not to feed the pigeons
- Employing physical deterrents such as spikes, balloon-kites and properly fitted humane netting, which must be regularly checked and properly maintained
- Blocking access to roof spaces and buildings where necessary
- Introducing custom pigeon coops where eggs can be replaced with decoy eggs
- Installing 'Bird-Free' ultraviolet or optical gel to deter birds from roosting and nesting\*

\*'Bird-Free' is a UV gel designed to deter birds humanely. It is made from food grade oils and other non-hazardous ingredients. Birds find the look and smell of the gel disturbing enough to want to move elsewhere. Although relatively new to the market, the gel has been used by a number of councils, including Horsham and Crawley in Sussex, as well as The Kensington Roof Gardens in London and the Mo Sheringham Museum in Norfolk. They all report success in reducing numbers significantly, with the added benefit of negating the need for ongoing and costly cleaning of buildings.

## Pigeon facts

- Pigeons are closely related to collared doves and wood pigeons.
- Mike Everett, spokesman for the RSPB, said 'There is no evidence to show that they (pigeons) spread disease'<sup>22</sup> and yet the myth – often perpetuated by pest control companies – persists.
- Pigeons breed all year round, so there is never a safe time to exclude them from roof spaces and gantrys without the risk of harming or trapping their squabs. Doing so poses potential breaches of wildlife legislation.
- At least 20 pigeons were awarded the Dickin medal for gallantry in the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> Thousands were used and killed in the war as they carried messages behind enemy lines.
- Pigeons pair off monogamously, making culling particularly cruel.



## Useful contacts

Pigeon Control Advisory Service (PiCAS). [www.picasuk.com](http://www.picasuk.com)  
Phone 0844 736 6272



### ***Humane case study***

*Surrey Heath Borough Council met with The Pigeon Control Advisory Service (PiCAS) in 2001 to discuss a humane and effective pigeon control programme for Camberley Town Centre. It was the first local authority to trial a system using a bespoke pigeon loft in order to control numbers. This had been proven to reduce flock size by as much as 95 per cent in five years without resorting to culling.*

*The council's website states: 'Evidence has shown that other methods of pest control in town centres are unsuccessful and can actually increase the bird population. Mrs Regan Clark JP, who runs the Camberley and District Animal Welfare Group, checks the loft every day. She then replaces their eggs, free of charge, with china eggs without fear or harm to the pigeons.'*<sup>21</sup>

# Rats and Mice

## History

Originating from Asia, rats and mice are extremely adaptable creatures, now living in a great variety of habitats worldwide. Mice have followed human settlements throughout history, from around 8000BC, and thrived alongside man. Black rats were brought to the UK by the Romans on ships 2000 years ago, and are today one of the UK's rarest mammals.<sup>24</sup> Brown rats arrived much later, at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

## Behaviour

House mice can be frequent visitors to our homes. They also dwell outside but will squeeze into incredibly small spaces seeking shelter, warmth and food. Sometimes confused with wood mice, these resourceful creatures will breed if there is a good food supply.

Despite their poor image, rats are extremely bright, clean and sociable – as anyone who cares for 'pet' rats will know. Wild brown rats live in small family groups, and occupy small territories, provided there is an adequate food supply. This explains their close proximity to human habitats and the vast amounts of food they find there. Although black rats are rare,

they are routinely persecuted along with their brown cousins.

Rat and mice populations are often overstated by the pest control industry in order to maintain the public's fear of and revulsion for those species, thereby perpetuating business. Independent figures published by the government estimate that there are around seven million rats and five million mice in Britain.<sup>25</sup> Blamed for spreading disease, damaging buildings and gnawing through cables, these creatures are often simply responding to the warmth and ready food supply offered by our homes and gardens. Where there is an adequate food supply, rats and mice will continue to occupy a territory. Whilst it may be true that rats and mice carry disease, as all mammals do, the risks to people are extremely low. Weil's disease, also known as leptospirosis, for example, is carried by cows as well as rats and, consequently, it is farmers who are most at risk.<sup>26</sup> Of the 33 cases of leptospirosis in England and Wales in 2009, 14 were contracted abroad.<sup>27</sup>

Culling is highly ineffective, as new rodents will move into territories where the previous occupiers have been killed.



## Methods of killing

Poisoning is the most common technique used to kill rats and mice. Rodenticides are extremely cruel, typically causing internal haemorrhaging, which leads to protracted suffering and a terrible death. Leaving poisons around can also damage the environment and kill non-target species through either primary or secondary poisoning (where other animals consume a poisoned body). Shooting such a fast moving and small target is unlikely to be accurate, and creates the potential for injury and a painful death. This can be worse when over-enthusiastic amateurs use catapults. Hunting rats with dogs is rarely effective, as rats will quickly return to their burrows when danger threatens.





*'The most common cause of garden rat infestations is the feeding of birds - reportedly by 60 per cent of households!'*

John Bryant,  
Humane Urban  
Wildlife Deterrence

# Rats and Mice

## Humane deterrents

Availability of food and their neo-phobia (fear of new things) is key to deterring rats and mice. Simple and commonsense techniques can work quickly and effectively. Most 'infestations' are actually due to bird feeders.

- Establish good hygiene practices
- Reduce the food available by clearing away pet food and keeping food in airtight containers
- Use bins with tight-fitting lids
- Stop feeding wild birds until the rats or mice have moved on, and then only feed small amounts when the weather is particularly harsh
- Don't compost meat, fish bones or bread
- Disrupt rat or mouse 'runs' by placing different obstacles on the trails
- Keep areas close to buildings tidy and free from weeds
- Employ indoor and outdoor sonic repellents, although by law these must not be used outdoors if bats are present
- Ensure buildings are well maintained and inspected, and holes blocked
- Ensure drain covers are tightly sealed
- Fit cone guards to waste and drain pipes
- Ensure water tanks in attics are adequately covered to prevent animals drowning

## Rat and Mouse facts

- Links to the Black Death in the 14th century are unfounded. Recent research by English Heritage – involving archaeological digs of mass plague graves – exonerated them. 'We ought to be finding great heaps of dead rats in all the waterfront sites but they just aren't there', said Barney Sloane, author of *The Black Death in London*.<sup>28</sup>
- Mice eat just three grams of food per day.
- Rats' nocturnal behaviour means we rarely see them.
- Water voles have frequently been mistaken for rats by the pest control industry. This, coupled with the destruction of the former's habitat, means their numbers are in serious decline.



The enclosed advice sheet can be copied and given to residents who are concerned about rats and mice (see back of booklet).



# Gulls

**Herring gull, Great black-backed gull,  
Lesser black-backed gull and the Black-headed gull**

## History

Once confined to coastal areas, breeding on cliffs and feeding almost exclusively in the sea and estuary areas, gulls have taken advantage of man's behaviour and moved inland to benefit from the immense and ever-ready supply of food waste produced. Herring gulls are large, and probably the most recognisable of gulls, with their young sporting distinctive brown spotty plumage. Their antics often delight local residents in seaside towns. They are highly intelligent birds with an increasing preference for inland rubbish tips, just like their cousins, the Great black-backed gull and the smaller Lesser black-backed gull, who prefers coastal areas in the summer. Black-headed gulls are actually brown-headed for half the year and white-headed for the other six months. They are commonly found almost anywhere inland but prefer the South East, where they establish their sociable and noisy colonies.

## Behaviour

Gulls are supreme opportunists and have adapted well to our modern way of living, nesting on high rooftops and eating discarded scraps. Despite their apparent success, numbers for all gull species are actually in decline. The Herring gull is on the International Union for Conservation and Nature (IUCN) red list, which makes culling even more nonsensical. Their cries are potent reminders of seaside holidays for most of us, and those who are lucky enough to live by the sea can be encouraged to be more tolerant of these iconic coastal birds.

Gulls quickly adapt to and thwart our best efforts to control them. Like all good parents, they are protective of their young and may swoop to ward off people who they perceive to be a danger. They can also swoop dangerously as they attempt to take food that people are holding.



Outside the breeding season, however, the main complaint – often made by pest control companies – is that they can spread disease to people. However, there is little evidence to support this. According to the Pigeon Control Advisory Service, which also specialises in humane gull control, the likelihood of a bird passing a disease to a person is so small as not to be credible.<sup>29</sup>

It has been claimed that gulls prey on other birds' eggs but their impact is considered to be very low.<sup>30</sup> In fact, gulls can have beneficial effects on other wildlife. For example, several other bird species nest within gull colonies and benefit from protection from predators.<sup>31</sup>

## Methods of killing

Most gulls are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and cannot be killed without a specific licence obtained from Natural England, but those listed on the General Licence can be controlled if certain conditions exist. In most cases where lethal controls are used, gulls are shot or poisoned. Shooting can leave birds wounded to die a protracted death, and can put other birds and the public at risk. Shooting often just disperses a colony, which will simply return once the shooting has stopped. Furthermore, when gulls become agitated, their droppings become more acidic, so the stress caused by a colony being shot at could actually increase the damage caused by their droppings.<sup>34</sup> Poisoning can also put the public and other wildlife at risk. As gulls are long-lived and mobile, any reduction in numbers will quickly be replenished from local colonies.<sup>35</sup>





# Gulls

## Humane deterrents

Food is the key factor in deterring gulls from an area but other humane deterrents may also be employed effectively.

- Reduce the amount of food available, as this will have the greatest impact
- Dissuade residents from feeding
- Ensure waste food is properly disposed of and streets are kept clean
- Block access to regular breeding sites
- Install 'GullWire' (consisting of parallel wires) or 'Daddi Long Legs' (a detachable, reusable wire device) to deter landing
- Employ physical deterrents such as balloon-kites
- Provide alternative roosting sites away from sensitive areas
- Oil the eggs of laying pairs \*

\* Sustained oiling of eggs has been shown to be effective, resulting in a 95 per cent reduction in hatching.<sup>36</sup>

## Gull facts

- Urban gulls are quite different in behaviour from their coastal cousins, feeding on discarded food at waste sites rather than seafood from fishing industries.
- The UK Herring gull population has declined by 72 per cent since 1969, with the Lesser black-backed and the Great black-backed gull numbers also in decline.<sup>39</sup>
- Herring gulls can live for more than 35 years and mate for life, although 'divorce' does occur if breeding fails.
- Climate change can encourage two broods per year instead of one.<sup>40</sup>
- Gulls are highly intelligent birds, quickly adapting to bird dummies, sound deterrents, birds of prey and nets.<sup>41</sup>

## Useful contacts

Pigeon Control Advisory Service (PiCAS). [www.picasuk.com](http://www.picasuk.com)  
Phone 0844 736 6272



*'Brighton and Hove City Council's strategy for dealing with the seagull problem is to concentrate on seagull food sources.'*<sup>32</sup>

The enclosed advice sheet can be copied and given to residents who are concerned about gulls (see back of booklet).

*'During a persistent cull on the Isle of May, it was noticed that young birds were taking up territories previously occupied by adults. In other words, if you make a hole in a niche, somebody else will fill it.'*<sup>33</sup>

**Peter Rock, gull researcher,  
Bristol University**



*'Throughout the summer of 2007, the town centre breeding gull population of Taunton, Somerset, was subjected to an egg replacement programme whereby real eggs were replaced with imitations. The gulls whose eggs had been replaced were monitored every three weeks from May to August and the gulls incubated the imitation eggs for at least twice as long as they normally would and sometimes even longer. Furthermore, once the nest was abandoned, the gulls did not return during the season.*

*'In practice, this meant that the gulls spent the summer months sat on top of buildings and nuisance behaviour normally associated with the breeding season was reduced. Noise levels had decreased and the aggressive attacks that can be experienced when young chicks are present did not materialise within the treated areas.*

*'This control method is humane in the eyes of the public - in that the Council was being proactive and controlling the gulls in treated areas but not in a harmful way, is relatively inexpensive (especially in the current economic climate) compared with falconry, oiling etc. and the eggs can be re-used the following year. Finally, this method actually works as I have proven in my dissertation.'*<sup>38</sup>

**Simon Moon, Taunton Deane Borough Council**

# Canada and Egyptian geese

## History

Canada geese have become widespread residents since being introduced to the UK by Charles II in 1678 as 'ornamentals' and for shooting. This royal connection enhanced their popularity, leading to an increase in their numbers during the 18th century. However, populations only began to increase significantly in the 1950s when major road building created gravel pits in the Home Counties, which provided the perfect breeding environment for these endearing birds.



Egyptian geese are native to sub-Saharan Africa. They are believed to have been sacred to the ancient Egyptians, and often appeared in murals and carvings. Despite their ability to disperse over comparatively large breeding areas, 90 per cent of the 900-strong UK Egyptian goose population resides in Norfolk.<sup>42</sup>

## Behaviour

Both of these striking birds have successfully made their home in Britain as a result of man's intervention. Like many species, they are devoted to their young, sometimes forming crèches, which they will defend if necessary. Survival rates are high for both species and only environmental management will yield results when population control is desired. Geese often mate for life, and prefer to nest near to water. They use it as a refuge for their brood whenever danger threatens, so water's edge

planting will deter them<sup>44</sup> and can enhance habitat for other wildlife.

## Methods of killing

As with all lethal control, it must be demonstrated that non-lethal methods have first been explored. Trapping and shooting are the most common methods of lethal control, which can be particularly cruel as these birds generally mate for life. Shooting can pose a risk to other birds and the public, particularly in urban areas. During the moult (where they shed feathers rendering them temporarily flightless), geese will be rounded up and then shot. This is extremely stressful and distressing for those geese who witness the deaths of their fellow birds, including their mate. Canada geese are invariably very popular with the public, which also finds shooting distasteful and distressing.

*'The Canada goose population in southern Britain numbers over 80,000 birds and is still increasing. However, in recent years the overall rate of growth has slowed and in some areas numbers have stabilised or declined.'*<sup>45</sup>

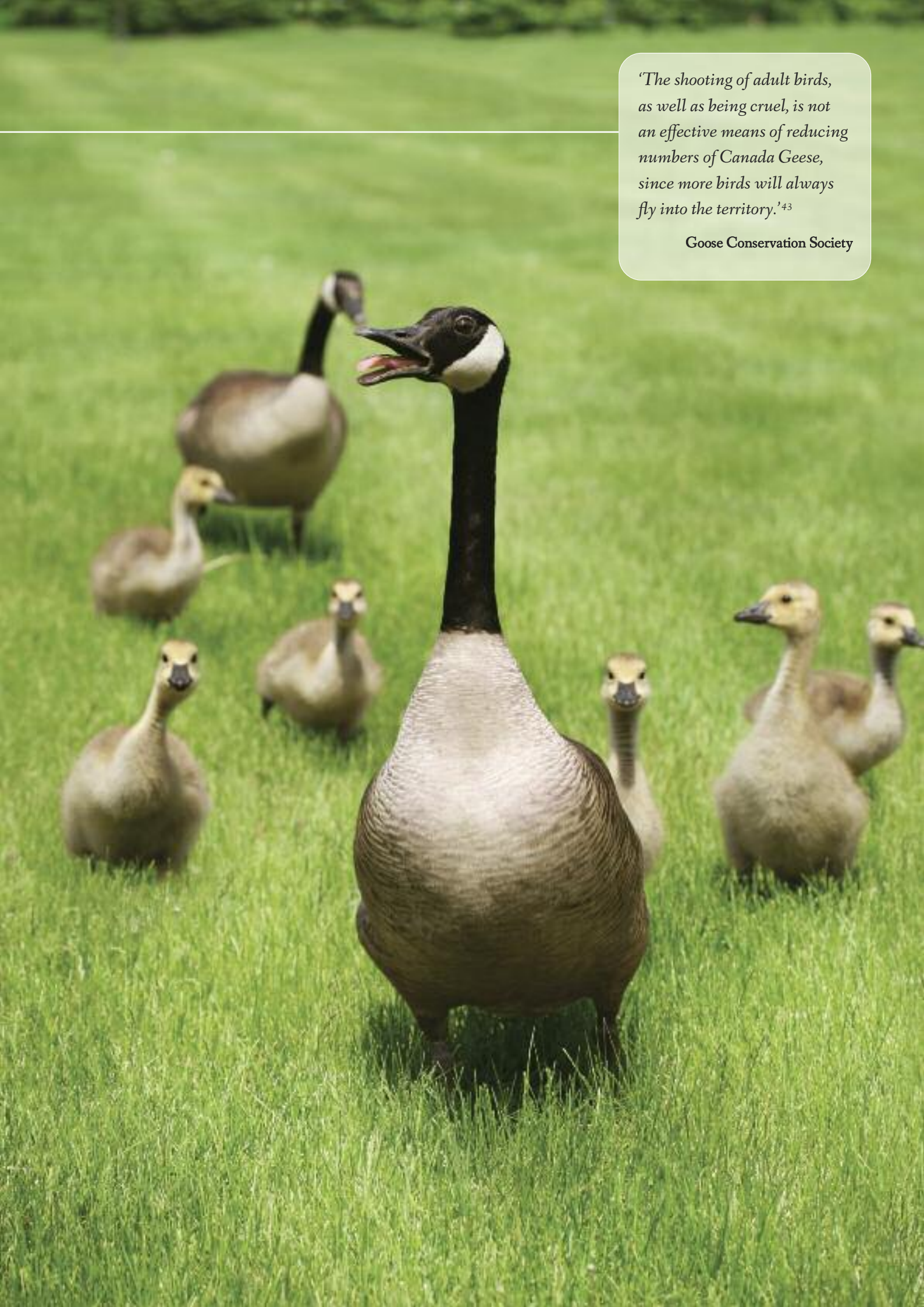
**Natural England**





*'The shooting of adult birds, as well as being cruel, is not an effective means of reducing numbers of Canada Geese, since more birds will always fly into the territory.'*<sup>43</sup>

**Goose Conservation Society**



# Canada and Egyptian geese

## Humane deterrents

Geese choose very specific environments in which to make their homes. Making the area less appealing is often key to deterring them, and a multi-faceted approach that employs many or all of the following techniques together is likely to yield the best result:

- Obstruct access to water with fencing or planting
- Dissuade the public from feeding in areas where the geese are not welcome
- Provide specific feeding sites in public parks and gardens
- Site walking or jogging paths next to water to deter geese
- Oil the eggs of laying pairs
- Use physical deterrents such as balloon-kites, which must be moved regularly to avoid habituation
- Erect ground-level scarers, such as flapping tapes and flags, which also must be moved regularly to avoid habituation
- Employ acoustic scarers, which are most effective outside of the breeding season, moving them regularly to avoid habituation. By law these must not be used where bats are present



## Goose facts

- Egyptian geese are often mistaken for shelducks.
- Geese generally mate for life and can pine to death after the loss of their mate.
- Canada geese eat grass and are therefore attracted to lawns and parks.
- Canada geese have been known to 'give lifts' to other migratory birds.<sup>46</sup>
- Canada geese can live for up to 20 years.
- Goose excrement is harmless; it's largely just recycled grass.<sup>47</sup>

## Useful contacts

Pigeon Control Advisory Service (PiCAS). [www.picasuk.com](http://www.picasuk.com)  
Phone 0844 736 6272

The enclosed advice sheet can be copied and given to residents who are concerned about geese (see back of booklet).

# Summary

Lethal control methods for so-called 'pest' species may appear to be the simple and convenient option, especially when under pressure from some particularly vocal residents demanding immediate action. However, these are, at best, a short-term solution and, at worst, a waste of public funds and a waste of time and effort, as well as being cruel.

We understand the pressure on councils to act when confronted by aggrieved residents but we would always encourage them to look at the facts and the experiences of other local authorities, as well as the likely efficacy of culling. The more cost-effective, sensitive, long-term and popular approach will always be humane control and deterrents. Adopting such a strategy will, in turn, improve the environment for us all.

In addition to the information in this booklet, we have created a range of advice sheets aimed at your local tenants and residents. They are designed to assist the public to deter wildlife from their own homes and gardens in a more effective and humane way. Please feel free to photocopy them for distribution, or use them as a basis for your own advice sheets.



Animal Aid exposes and campaigns peacefully against all animal abuse and promotes a cruelty-free lifestyle.



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