



## PRESS RELEASE

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### Controlling Yellow-legged Gull Populations

The Department of the Environment and Climate Change wishes to share details of the rationale behind its longstanding gull culling programme.

There was a population explosion of the Yellow-legged Gull in the late 20th Century, not only in Gibraltar but also throughout the coasts of Andalusia. The reason is tied to the species' reliance on refuse generated by humans.

Having such a large population of gulls in Gibraltar is problematic for several reasons:

**Air safety:** Gibraltar has an international airport and the large gull population poses a problem for air traffic.

**Public nuisance:** Yellow-legged Gulls cause a nuisance to the public due to their droppings, or by nesting on buildings and within people's properties. They can be very aggressive to people who approach nests during the breeding season.

**Conservation:** (1) The gulls in Gibraltar regularly mob, down and often kill and eat migratory birds, (2) they are predators that will frequently take the chicks of other birds, including Barbary Partridges, and (3) it is well documented that gull colonies cause nitrification of soils, altering the flora of the surrounding habitat. There is evidence of this in Gibraltar, where these changes could prejudice some of our special plants.

The removal of gulls, although unfortunate, is therefore well justified.

The gull control programme has always been managed by organisations with expertise in animal biology and conservation. This ensures that the methods used are sound, the animals' welfare is given priority and importantly, only Yellow-legged Gulls are targeted.



The operation is extremely effective: over 4200 fully-fledged gulls were removed in 2015 alone. Although replenishment of new birds from outside of Gibraltar appears to be very high, numbers of breeding birds have been decreasing steadily since the early 2000s.

Shooting has been proven as the most effective method of control of such bird populations in Gibraltar and elsewhere. All shooting activity is licensed and areas where the Avian Control Unit operates are under strict control of the Royal Gibraltar Police. Shooting in Gibraltar is carried out with .22 calibre rifles. Although shotguns can be very effective in culling programmes, these are not used in Gibraltar because they are not as accurate and cause a higher incidence of non-lethal injury, as well as disturbance and risk to other wildlife. Indeed, use of shotguns some years ago by a UK contractor resulted in many more injured birds and complaints from the public.

The methods used are designed to minimise non-lethal injury to the gulls, but it is unfortunately impossible to eradicate the risk of injury entirely. Any person with concerns about injured or nesting gulls should contact the Avian Control Unit on 20066588. If the bird is injured, it is important that it be reported promptly. A message should be left on the answering machine and the matter will be tackled within a maximum of one working day.

Unfortunately, some members of the public appear to have taken matters into their own hands over the years. There has been a spate of poisonings recently and there has been some evidence in the past of private individuals shooting at gulls. Members of the public should refrain from these practices, which are illegal and pose a serious threat to other wildlife and in the case of poisoning, to pets and children. Needless to say, the possession and use of firearms without a licence is illegal in Gibraltar. Furthermore, all wild bird species are protected and removal of gulls requires a special licence.

Any gull-related problems should be tackled by contacting the Avian Control Unit on 20066588.