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Appendix 5

Your Ref: MRF/gulls

RSPB Cymru

30 September 2016

Mr Matthew Frankcom
Conwy County Borough Council
Civic Offices
Colwyn Bay
LL29 8AR

By email to :
matthew.frankcom@conwy.gov.uk

Dear Mr Frankcom

Inland Urban Gulls

Thank you for your letter dated 7th September 2016 regarding Conwy County Borough Council's Urban Gull Control Task and Finish Group. Please find below information which I hope that you will find helpful.

As you mention in your letter, the numbers of gulls (both herring and lesser black-backed) in towns and cities has been increasing since first recorded over 70 years ago. However this is despite serious overall declines nationwide. Coastal populations are crashing at an alarming rate, with herring gull populations declining by 50% since 1970. As a consequence herring gull now feature on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK, and are a priority species for biodiversity conservation in England and Wales.

You specifically requested data on gull numbers in Conwy. Unfortunately there is a notable absence of urban population data for both herring and lesser black-backed gulls across the UK. A comprehensive national census is therefore urgently required in order to ascertain the importance of urban gull populations. Despite how it may appear in many towns and cities these are endangered species, and to wipe out urban populations may be devastating for UK populations as a whole. The RSPB therefore does not believe that a cull of urban gulls is either appropriate or necessary.

We do, however, recognise that in the breeding season adult gulls may be aggressive if they believe that their eggs or young are in danger, and therefore steps are necessary to reduce the negative interactions between urban gulls and people. Such conflict is best tackled by reducing the availability of food (both on the streets and at landfill sites) and nest sites (using physical barriers on flat roofs etc). It is these features which attract the gulls, and if these should remain then lethal control will not help in the long term, but will simply open vacancies that will be filled by other gulls moving in. Your statutory nature conservation organisation – i.e. Natural Resources Wales – should be able to provide advice on measures that local councils can take.

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Chairman, Committee for Wales/Cadeirydd Pwyllgor Cymru: Dr Havard Prosser Director, RSPB Cymru/Cyfarwyddwr RSPB Cymru: Katie-Jo Luxton

In response to your query about the legal protection currently afforded to herring gulls, all wild birds, their eggs and nests are protected throughout Great Britain under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and it is not possible or desirable to remove a native species from this protection. The law does permit exemptions for specific purposes, and Natural Resources Wales issues a licence each year permitting authorised persons to control herring gull eggs and nests. This licence may only be used in isolated cases where herring gulls pose a genuine and proven risk to human health and safety, and when there is no other (non-lethal) satisfactory solution. The terms and conditions of the licence must be consulted by the user prior to action in order to ensure that they are meeting all legal requirements.

In response to David Cameron's statement that it was time for a "big conversation" around the issue of urban gulls last summer, RSPB wrote to Defra to propose a National Gull Summit. We wanted to bring together expertise from the wildlife sector, academics, local and national government to look not only at management of the birds in urban areas, but also at how we can best look after our wider marine environment to support healthy seabird populations. However our proposal was rejected and we have heard nothing since.

Finally, I would suggest that you consult with colleagues in Conwy County Borough Council, who can provide guidance and appropriate support on ecological issues, including gulls. The following contacts should be able to advise the task and finish group:

Barbara Owsianka
County Ecologist
Phone: 01492 575310
Email: barbara.owsianka@conwy.gov.uk

Anne Butler
Biodiversity Project Officer
Phone: 01492 575123
Email: anne.butler@conwy.gov.uk

I hope that the above has addressed your concerns, although if you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Simon Hugheston-Roberts
Conservation Officer (Casework & Sites Policy)