



PestAware Advice Sheet

Bothered by birds?

British Pest Control Association 'Bothered by birds?' pest awareness advice


BPCA is the trade association for the professional pest management sector. It's our role to help everyone understand the importance of proper pest control, provide pest

prevention advice, and help you find an appropriately trained and trusted pest management company. Our PestAware guides are designed for home and business owners

and are packed with practical advice and tips for getting to grips with British pest species.

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Driving excellence in pest management

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Bothered by birds? Pest advice for controlling birds

Sick of sea gulls? Petrified of pigeons? Bothered by birds? Have you been stepping in excessive amounts of bird poo around your home or business?

This guide is packed full of everything you need to know about bird management in the UK. The guide includes why we sometimes have to control birds, how to deter birds, and how to get rid of them if you have an infestation.

Whether you're thinking about doing some DIY bird control or you're looking to enlist the help of a professional bird management company, this guide is for you.



Ornithosis, also known as parrot fever, and psittacosis is a zoonotic (passed from animal to human) infectious disease caused by a bacterium called Chlamydia psittaci.

We love British birds. Every wild bird and their eggs in the UK is rightfully protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

There are hundreds of species of birds in the UK. Having birds visit your garden is a wonderful treat, and we're all happy to see them.

Unfortunately, a few species of

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In this guide

- The dangers: why do we control birds?
- Birds around businesses
- Bird control licences and the law
- Signs of a bird problem or infestation
- Pigeons
- Gulls
- Starlings
- Sparrows
- DIY bird control
- Discouraging and preventing bird infestations
- Professional bird control and management
- Finding a pest controller.

birds come into direct conflict with humans when they take roost in or around our homes or businesses.

These birds can cause real problems, including excessive nuisance and public health concerns.

Urban birds such as gulls and pigeons are great opportunists.

Handed a ready food source and sheltered nesting site, these birds can grow rapidly and what initially attracted a few birds can soon become a thriving colony.

That's when a professional can step in and help you control and manage pest birds.

The dangers: why do we control birds?

Pathogens and disease

There are more than 110 pathogens reportedly carried by pigeons, and there is plenty of research to suggest other wild birds pass on diseases to humans. Some of the more common diseases and pathogens that birds can spread:

Air-borne diseases	Food-borne diseases
Chlamydia psittaci (Ornithosis)	Salmonella spp.
Cryptococcus neoformans	Escherichia coli
Histoplasma capsulatum	Campylobacter jejuni
Allergenic particles (bird fancier's lung)	Listeria monocytogenes
	Vibrio cholerae

In 2019, two patients died in a Glasgow hospital who had contracted a cryptococcal fungal infection which was subsequently linked to pigeon droppings.

Diseases can be transmitted from bird droppings and the birds themselves. When dry, pigeon droppings can become airborne in small particles, which can lead to respiratory complaints.

Bothered by birds?

Pest advice for controlling birds

You should always wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when cleaning up bird droppings. Food-borne bacteria can be spread to humans if you have poor food hygiene standards or come into direct contact with droppings (wash your hands straight away)!



Bird droppings are acidic and can corrode and erode metals, stonework and brickwork.

Pigeons, gulls, house sparrows and starlings have the potential to carry food-borne diseases - it is therefore essential to keep them away from food manufacturers and distributors.

DID YOU KNOW?

Research suggests that up to 49% of feral pigeons could be infected with *Chlamydia psittaci*. Human infection is called ornithosis, and symptoms include chills, fever, sweating, severe weakness, headache, blurred vision, pneumonia, possibly death.

Safety concerns

All bird droppings can be slippery and can cause a serious risk on pavements, particularly under roosting birds.

As funny as it might seem to see a gull steal someone's chips at the seaside, gulls can pose a serious safety concern.

During the breeding season,

gulls have been known to attack people unprovoked. Gulls have the potential to startle and even draw blood when they attack.

All birds have the potential to cause real problems on airfields.



When birds are sucked into plane engines (bird strikes) - while rarely fatal - they can cause damage to aircraft and emergency landings.

Damage to property and brickwork

Bird droppings are acidic and can corrode and erode metals, stonework and brickwork.

Nesting materials birds use can block chimneys, flues and guttering, causing possible issues with carbon monoxide and damage to buildings as water overflows from blocked gutters.

Buildings covered in fouling looks unpleasant, can smell, and projects a poor image of a business, potentially ruining an organisation's reputation.

If customers spot evidence of a bird infestation on your premises, they may not want

to do business with you.

A professional pest management company can help protect your building using proofing and bird deterrent measures.

Secondary insect infestations

Where birds go, so too go the parasites that live on them. Bird mites, ticks, fleas and beetles can all cause complicated secondary infestations.

If you have a current or past problem with birds, you may find you'll suffer from a parasite infestation too. These little critters can quickly multiply into thousands, leaving you feeling overwhelmed.

The relentless biting, itching, crawling sensation and lack of sleep are the physical symptoms that can propagate a whole host of secondary mental health issues.

Bird mites are parasitic arthropods feed on living organisms. It is the female mite that needs a blood meal to reproduce viable eggs.

Bothered by birds? Pest advice for controlling birds

They are attracted to mammals by receptors for moisture, heat and CO2, and they often bite humans when their original food source has gone – like when the young birds leave the nest.

If you have a parasite issue because of a bird infestation, contact a professional pest management company as soon as possible.



Allowing birds to infest a food business violates the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995.

Birds around businesses

If you have birds roosting in and around your business then you'll want to seek professional help as soon as possible.

In the UK, allowing birds to infest a food business violates the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995, and could result in prosecution of the food company.

If you don't address health and safety hazards, you could be putting your staff and customers at risk.

By investing in a professional bird management contract, you can save money in the long run by reducing damage to your property or stock.

The reputational damage caused by a bird infestation can be

catastrophic. Bird droppings make any business appear unclean and imply a state to disrepair.

Would you choose to use a company covered in dangerous poo?

Find a professional to help stop bird infestations at your work and protect your business today.

Birds control licences and the law

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protects all wild birds, their nests and eggs.

However, specific exemptions permit certain species to be controlled by particular methods for specific reasons.

This exemption is given in the way of a wildlife licence issued by Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage or Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

General licences are issued to allow certain actions to be carried out that would otherwise be illegal under the legislation, without the need for people to apply for a specific licence.

Individual licences are sometimes granted for specific situations not covered by a general license. These do need to be applied for.

The law only allows competent people such as professional pest controllers to deal with certain species.

You should always consult with a professional before you consider any form of bird control measures, as the list of birds that are considered pests can change regularly.

You can be prosecuted in the UK if you illegally interfere with a bird, its nests or eggs and you're not doing under a wildlife licence.

Types of birds that can be a pest

While most species of birds coexist with humans and rarely come into conflict with us, some species of birds in certain



Feral pigeons originally descended from domesticated rock doves.

situations are considered pests. It's important to note that even species typically considered "pest birds" are protected by law.

Control of feral pigeon (Columba livia)

Lifespan	Up to 4 years
Sexual maturity	4 months
Weight	360g
Wingspan	62-72cm
Eggs	2-3 eggs (6 times a year)

The feral pigeon is a widespread pest bird found in cities, towns and rural settings in the UK and around the world.

Bothered by birds?

Pest advice for controlling birds



Signs of a bird infestation

What do you need to look out for to spot a bird infestation? Some bird species like pigeons and gulls have adapted to live around us.

By their nature, birds will normally be at height keeping away from us.

Here are the seven signs that you have a bird problem:

- Spotting lots of birds settling on roofs or ledges
- Loud bird noises and cries from young chicks
- Finding nesting materials thrown about your home of business
- Damaged stock from pecking
- Bird fouling/droppings
- Blocked guttering and drainage systems with feathers and nest materials
- Secondary infestations from bird parasites (such as bird mites).

Pigeons can harbour a large variety of diseases and insects on their bodies. Its nests and fouling are also public health concerns.

Biology of a pigeon

Feral pigeons originally descended from domesticated rock doves. The population is supported by escaped racing pigeons.

Pigeons usually make their nests in bridges, buildings or any structures with easily accessible shelter.

Males and females help build nests

out of grass, twigs, features and even litter such as plastics and wire. The nests can be quite large and quickly become thick with droppings.

Depending on breeding conditions, pigeons can have up to seven broods (birds produced at one hatching) in their breeding season between March and July.

Two eggs hatch in around 18 days. With access to enough food, the young pigeons will become independent adults in just 30 days.

More eggs can be hatched before the young have even left the nest, meaning a population can quickly grow.

Wild pigeons will live up to four years, relying on human food scraps and spillages, or taking from newly sown farmland.

Behaviour of a pigeon

You'll often see pigeons in town centres feeding in huge flocks, ranging in size from 50 to 400-plus birds.

Pigeons have a social order, so the more dominant birds feed first and get the best breeding sites.

Management and control of pigeons

The best way to get rid of pigeons is to remove a food source. Cover bins, clean up spillages and restrict access to food.

Proofing with nets, spikes and mesh can stop pigeons perching and roosting in structures.

Scaring techniques rarely work with pigeons. Visual and audio scaring doesn't tend to work very well or for very long. Pigeons adapt very quickly to new things.



Most importantly - don't feed the pigeons!

Flying birds of prey regularly can be useful.

Lethal control can be an option when a bird has entered a food premises or overcome the proofing measures.

Culling pigeons to reduce flock sizes is rarely successful unless access to food is restricted, otherwise population numbers soon recover.

This should only ever be done as a last resort and in accordance with a wildlife licence (general or individual) issued by an appropriate government department.

Control of gulls (Laridae) Herring gull (*Larus argentatus*) and Lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*)

Lifespan	Up to 30 years
Sexual maturity	4 years
Weight	700-830g (herring) 1-1.5kg (LBB)
Wingspan	120-125cm
Eggs	Up to 3 eggs (once a year)

Bothered by birds?

Pest advice for controlling birds

Biology of gulls

Once a breeding site is chosen, gulls will usually return to it every year.

They start breeding when they're around five years old and have a lifespan of up to 25 years!

Eggs are laid in April and May, with up to three eggs being laid per season. The eggs hatch after around 30 days, and only 10 days after that, they can take their first flight.

Behaviour of gulls

Opportunist gulls make their nest on buildings, and regularly feed from refuse tips, particularly in the winter

Gulls fly huge distances for food, which they often find at landfill sites, sewage outlets, agricultural land, and by scavenging from urban areas.

During the winter, neighbouring gulls from Europe and further afield migrate to the UK.

Management and control of gulls

There are lots of ways to stop gulls from nesting on your property.

Proofing measures such as netting, sprung and parallel wires or bird spikes.

Gulls can be huge, so the equipment involved in keeping them out of somewhere has to be very heavy duty.

Electric ledge deterrents, audio deterrents and regularly flying birds of prey can all scare away gulls from sites.

Killing a gull is only done as a very last resort and in a way detailed in a wildlife licence (general or individual) issued by a government department.

Control of European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Starlings may roost in their thousands on ledges on buildings and in trees in city centres.

Their droppings deface and erode stonework and make pavements slippery. The population of Starlings has dropped dramatically in the UK.



Aberystwyth Pier is the site of one of the best known Starling murmurations, as during the winter large groups fly in at dusk from the surrounding countryside to roost under the pier, with the total number of birds in the 10,000s.

Biology of European starling

Although a native to this country, our permanently resident starling population is swelled every autumn by migrating birds arriving from mainland Europe and Russia.

In residential lofts, their nesting activities can build large piles of twigs, leaves and associated fouling.

Four to six pale blue eggs are laid in early April and hatch in about 11 to 15 days.

Starlings have a lifespan between five and seven years.

Behaviour of European starling

Starling's chattering song sounds like several birds and can imitate other species, or

even phones and car alarms.

Most starlings roost communally from late summer until the following breeding season.

The local population is bolstered in autumn by large numbers of visitors from Northern Europe.

At dusk, starlings fly together in

huge numbers going in and out of their roosts. As spectacular as thousands of birds in a single roost might be, the noise and fouling produced can be considerable.

Management and control of European starling

Proofing with nets on buildings and mesh on entry points to houses are the most effective methods.

Scaring devices used by trained personnel can be effective in some situations.

This work can be carried out by a professional pest controller subject to having an appropriate wildlife licence (general or individual) issued by an appropriate government department.

Bothered by birds?

Pest advice for controlling birds

Starlings are not killed unless a special licence is issued by a government department.

Control of House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

Normally these birds aren't a problem in domestic homes, however they're regularly an issue for commercial premises such as bakeries and warehouses.

The population of sparrows has dropped dramatically in the UK.

Biology of sparrows
Nests can be built anywhere from holes in the walls, trees, rainwater pipes, and the eaves of houses.

Sparrows lay around six eggs per brood between April and August.



Sparrows can enter buildings through tiny gaps. Once they're in your property, they're very difficult to remove.

Eggs hatch in about two weeks.

Behaviour of sparrows
House sparrows are closely associated with humans as they're grain eaters, benefiting from our crop fields.

In an urban setting, house sparrows scavenge for any available food but prefer cereals.

Sparrows pose a significant risk to food factories, warehouses and supermarkets, as they

regularly get trapped and peck through food packaging.

Their fouling can contaminate our food and ruin vast amounts of stock.

Management of sparrows
Because sparrows are so small, they can be really tough to keep out of buildings.

Proofing with nets and blocking of entry holes are usually the preferred options used by professionals. As a last resort, the sparrow can be physically removed from buildings using nets and traps, then released off-site.

Sparrows are not killed unless a special licence is issued by a government department.

DIY bird control

Bird prevention, proofing and control are highly specialised skills, requiring specialist equipment and tools.

Birds are only killed as a last resort, and we are all required to try reasonably practicable non-lethal bird control methods before we look at culling.

All wild birds, their eggs and their nests are protected by law, so we strongly recommend that you don't try to control or manage birds yourself.

Professional bird control and management

For proofing, professional pest controllers will use preventative methods such as:

- Bird netting
- Bird spikes
- Electric bird wire
- Non-toxic optical bird gel
- Laser deterrents



How to prevent and deter birds

All urban birds require is:

- A nesting/ roosting sites (eg balconies, window ledges and roof areas of surrounding buildings)
- A reliable food source.

Removing bird food sources or blocking off sites where they perch or roost is the best way to prevent birds causing a problem.

The number of birds attracted to an area will depend on what food is available.

Therefore if birds are being fed, more will be attracted to that area, so food sources must be kept to a minimum. Keep your bin lids closed and cover compost bins.

- Shock stripes
- Audible scares.
- All of these methods of proofing have their merits, and some can offer a stronger and more lasting deterrent.

All netting must be installed in a way so that a bird cannot be trapped in the net.

All of these methods of proofing have their merits and some can offer a stronger and more lasting deterrent, but as with any method of control, they may become less effective over an extended period of time.

Bothered by birds? Pest advice for controlling birds

Flying a bird of prey can be a great way of deterring birds from a certain area.

For a heavy bird infestation, your professional contractor may have to employ methods of control such as egg and nest removal, shooting, trapping or flying of predatory birds.

Having problems with birds?

For any bird work, we would strongly recommend contacting a professional pest control company.

BPCA members employ trained technicians and have been audited to the British Standard EN 16636 in Pest Management.

They are trained in bird control and will have access to a range of professional use products and tools which are not available to the public.

A BPCA member company will be able to treat infestations quickly and safely.

“A BPCA member company will be able to treat infestations quickly and safely.”

They can help minimise pest activity with a range of techniques and have the technical knowledge and experience to apply products in an efficient manner, while minimising risk to the environment and non target species.

BPCA members all have:

- The correct insurances
- Trained and qualified technicians
- Been audited to the British Standard in pest management EN 16636
- To follow BPCA's Codes of Best Practice.



Find a pest controller

A BPCA member company will be able to treat infestations quickly and safely.

You can find a BPCA member, local to you, using our Find a pest controller tool.

bpca.org.uk/find
01332 294 288

BE PROTECTED. PROFESSIONALLY. How do you know your pest management contractor is fit for the fight?



British Pest Control Association is the trade association for professional pest management companies in the UK.

By choosing an audited BPCA member you can be assured that the services you receive are from a trained and trusted company that meets our strict membership criteria.

Our member companies meet or exceed all legal and 'due diligence' requirements and comply with the most current legislation.

No other trade body gives you this security.

Make sure you stay safe.

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**Stay protected.
Always look for
the logo.**