

Calls to make controlling seagull population easier rejected

Calls to make it easier to control Edinburgh's "menacing" seagull population have been rejected after the RSPB raised concerns over "serious recent declines" in some gull species.

Conservative city councillor Max Mitchell argued there should be "more flexibility" to allow removal of nest and eggs where the birds are disturbing residents.

"Lord Provost, seagulls are a menace," he said while tabling a motion calling for changes to the current system. "They foul over the property which is not only unpleasant but a health hazard.

"They tear apart the bin bags and strew waste across the pavements and parks of this city. They squawk through the day and through the night impacting on the sleep and amenity of the residents."

He said residents and businesses were increasingly worried about "the number of urban seagulls nesting in the city, especially within tenement areas, and the negative impact this is having on amenity and health".

Anyone who wants to take action to manage gull populations, including the council, must apply for a licence from

NatureScot. The government agency approves the destruction of nests or eggs where there is seen to be a risk to public health and safety. However, culling seagulls is seen as a "last resort" and is rarely licensed as applicants have to prove all non-lethal measures have been exhausted.

Cllr Mitchell's motion, asking the council leader to "write to the Scottish Government requesting they instruct NatureScot to adapt the licensing scheme to allow local authorities more ability to react and control the numbers of seagulls and their nests within urban areas" was rejected after only getting the backing of the Conservative group at a full council meeting on Thursday, November 7.

In a letter to the council the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Scotland said it was "concerned" by the proposal. "Due to serious recent declines in the UK populations of Herring Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Greater Black-backed Gulls . . . RSPB Scotland do not believe that these proposed measures are justified or proportional and urges the council to reject this motion."

NatureScot's website says the latest seabirds count census showed all five breeding species of gull have continued to decline in Scotland by between 44% and 75% depending on species. This is attributed to changes in food availability and land use, and recent outbreaks of avian flu.

Furthermore Green councillors said advocating for action to kill species designated as a UK conservation priority "would make a mockery of the council's declaration of a nature emergency".

"The best action the council can take to manage possible conflicts between humans and gulls in urban settings," an amendment lodged by the group and passed by councillors stated, "is to take meaningful action to address the climate and nature emergencies in order to reverse the degradation of

the natural habitats of gull species, as well as to reduce waste in order to make the urban environment less attractive to them.”

Councillor Mitchell quipped that the arguments made against his motion were “for the birds”.

He called the figures quoted by the RSPB “unreliable” due to “the underestimation of roof-nesting gulls”.

He added: “I am appalled that the other political parties did not back my reasonable request of writing to the Scottish Government to ask for more flexibility in nest and egg removal.

“Every year, seagulls nest en masse in tenement areas causing enormous distress to residents.

“Nest removal is essential for breaking the annual cycle of these pests returning. At the moment, a licence application for removal takes longer than the laying and hatching of eggs leaving residents stuck with a protected species living above them squawking day and night disturbing sleep and making a mess.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter