Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

FAUNA NOTES

Silver Gulls (Seagulls) – Damage Prevention and Control

Identification and Distribution

The silver gull *Larus novaehollandiae*, commonly known as the seagull, is mostly white with silver grey wings with black tips, white eyes with a red eye ring, an orange-red bill and orange-red bill legs. Juveniles have black eyes, a dark grey-brown bill, dark grey-brown legs and mottled grey-brown wings.

Silver gulls occur along Australia's coast, offshore islands, rivers and inland waters. Refer to www.naturemap.dpaw.wa.gov.au to find further information on the species distribution.

Behaviour

Silver gulls nest on or near the ground in rock, sand, grass and shrubs and in other sites such as jetties, boats and buildings. They breed continuously between March and November, laying between 2-4eggs. Gulls are generalised feeders and will feed on both land and water on worms, insects, hatchling marine turtles, young birds, bird eggs, plant remains, carrion (dead animals) and refuse. They use water in ponds, lakes, creeks and drainage channels to drink and preen.

Environmental Law

All fauna native to Australia, including fauna that naturally migrates to Australia, are afforded protection under both State and Commonwealth legislation.

Depending on the type of fauna-related activity, a licence issued by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions may be required. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure, trade, keep or move them unless authorised by a permit. To obtain a licence, the applicant needs to demonstrate that all reasonable non-lethal methods have been attempted and environmental impacts have been assessed. Further information is available on the Department's website.

Silver Gull-Human Interactions

Increasing numbers of seagulls has led to a variety of problems, including fouling recreational areas, cars, machinery and infrastructure with their faeces, harassing people for food, and creating a high volume of noise. They can also be a hazard to helicopters on offshore oil and gas rigs, and airplanes at airports. They can also impact on other native wildlife, by preying on the eggs and young of other native birds and hatchling marine turtles, and crowding other native birds at breeding sites.

If you find a sick or injured silver gull contact the Wildcare Helpline on (08) 9474 9055 for information on registered wildlife rehabilitators and centres who can assist with your enquiry.

Disease Risk

Silver gulls carry *Salmonella* species. and thus there is a risk of transmitting diseases and infections, such as Salmonella, to humans from contact with faeces.

Damage Prevention and Control

Exclusion and Barriers

Preventing seagulls from accessing garbage dumps, sewage treatment ponds, airports, restaurants and fast food areas, food processing plants, shopping centres, recreational areas and schools can significantly reduce their use of the surrounding area. Other barriers can be installed to prevent silver gulls from landing, and scaring techniques can be employed to deter them from an area.

The following steps may be effective:

- Ensure rubbish bins have lids;
- Deny access to areas by installing netting/wiring;
- Prevent gulls from landing by installing spring wires/spikes/spinning wires on surface such as ledges and lamp posts;
- Drain or cover standing water;
- Use artificial predators (e.g. images/plastic figures of snakes, owls, hawks etc.);
- Employ noise and/or light emitting devices (gas guns, electronic noise generators, sirens, bright lights); and
- Shooting

A combination of techniques is likely to be more effective than a single technique and the type, intensity and location should be varied because seagulls can learn that there is no threat associated with scaring techniques. These measures are also likely to be most effective if managed across a regional area. This will prevent the gulls from just moving onto another nearby site and therefore will help to manage population growth in the longer term.

Education

Install signs in public areas to discourage feeding seagulls and to encourage people to clear way their food scraps. Education material on the negative impacts associated with feeding gulls should be made available. Negative impacts include: fouling and pollution of water with food and faeces; increasing harassment of people; causing an artificial increase in population size and breeding rate; and increasing the risk of spreading disease. Feeding can also have a negative health effects for the birds as they are not eating a natural die

Population Control

Population control using lethal methods should be viewed as a last resort after all other control options have been attempted.

Shooting is most effective as a scaring technique rather than a population reduction measure, because it is difficult, time consuming and usually only results in the removal of a small number of birds. Egg pricking and oiling may provide longer term population control. Coating eggs in oil is highly effective in preventing hatching regardless of time in the breeding cycle it is applied, and the adults will continue to sit on infertile eggs for an extended period of time, and therefore will not immediately breed again. Use of alpha-chloralose, which acts as an anaesthetic rather than a poison, is another humane method of control. Access to this chemical is restricted in Western Australia and can only be supplied to or used by authorised pest controllers.

Firearms must be licenced and a licence issued by the Department may be required for shooting and other population control activities. Further information is available on the Department's website.

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