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Health Protection, Public Health Department

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Message: from Jersey Ornithologist Mike Stentiford.

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Dear Sir or Madam:

SOS – SAVE OUR SEAGULLS

I'm sure you agree that one of the greatest pleasures in life is making a real and positive connection with the natural environment.

Although this can sometimes prove a little difficult, putting ourselves in direct contact with wild birds is by far the best and most direct way of doing so.

Providing them with daily helpings of food, for instance, always proves the easiest and most satisfying of ways of helping them.

Unfortunately, not all birds fall into the small but tidy category – a few can be hugely troublesome, not only to ourselves but to our neighbours as well.

Sadly, certain herring gulls have over-reached their nuisance value particularly when they choose to nest on rooftops and cause all kinds of problems in the neighbourhood.

Gulls select a rooftop for nesting because of the availability of food which, in many cases, is regularly provided by kind but sadly misguided bird lovers.

During each summer, for instance, many gull chicks have to be taken away from their parents who, because of the availability of food scraps, have been encouraged to build their nest on a convenient rooftop.

Seeing this happen can be quite heartbreaking, not only for us but for the parent birds as well who fly around for hours afterwards in an obvious state of confusion.

I am quite certain that none of us would want to cause such anguish to what is, after all, a beautiful and highly intelligent seabird.

We sometimes imagine that roof-nesting gulls have no means of food other than the scraps we generously provide them with.

Being the opportunists they are, however, ensures that they will never go hungry.

Always on the lookout, they constantly find a wide variety of food including the eggs and chicks of other gulls, shellfish from the beach, worms from ploughed fields plus all kinds of road kill - especially rats and rabbits.

In other words, gulls are not in the least dependent on the food scraps we throw into the garden for them.

If food is put out, however, they will certainly take advantage of the situation but, because of the noise, the mess and the bird's aggressiveness, gulls can cause a huge amount of distress and upset to nearby residents.

Feeding nesting gulls in a residential area, therefore, invariably means that controllers have to be brought in to deal with a situation that frequently results in the death of the chicks, distress to the parent birds and undoubted anguish to us.

Without realising it, perhaps, we are actually killing the birds with our kindness!

My sincere hope, as a devoted enthusiast of all wildlife, is that by not receiving scraps of food, herring gulls will eventually abandon their roof-nesting habits and one day return to their natural habitat – the sea-cliffs and headlands of Jersey's splendid coastline.

That indeed would be good for everyone, especially the gulls!

Thank you for kindly taking the time to read this guidance.