# Aggressive seagulls coordinate in packs to steal food as encounters soar along UK coasts



The phenomenon of aggressive seagulls has reached new heights, prompting both curiosity and concern among coastal populations. Recent studies reveal that these notoriously brazen birds have evolved clever tactics for stealing food in groups. Researchers from Ghent University in Belgium found that herring gulls, known for their boldness, exhibit a marked increase in confidence when hunting in packs, often targeting unsuspecting humans indulging in snacks. Individually cautious, these birds rely on their companions to provide the encouragement needed to engage in riskier behaviours, making the sight of a solitary gull less alarming than that of a flock.

This surge in aggressive behaviour by seagulls mirrors a broader trend observed along the UK’s coastlines, where reports of food-snatching incidents have soared dramatically in recent years. Data indicates that the percentage of people experiencing these ambushes spiked from 20% in 2020 to 52% by the end of 2024, affecting an estimated 35 million individuals nationwide. Notably, coastal hotspots like Brighton and Blackpool have been identified as the most prominent locations for such encounters. Surveys reveal that nearly 20% of participants in these areas reported aggressive interactions with the birds, highlighting the urgent need for effective management strategies.

In response to increasing complaints about aggressive gull behaviour, several councils have invested in controlling seagull populations. Dumfries and Galloway Council in Scotland allocated £84,000 for measures including egg and nest removal, as well as installing spikes to deter nesting on rooftops. Their efforts reportedly led to a 75% decrease in seagull-related complaints. Parallel initiatives implemented in Yorkshire towns such as Scarborough and Whitby aim to develop alternative nesting sites and educate the public on the consequences of feeding these birds.

The situation represents a complex interplay of urbanisation and wildlife behaviour. While there has been a notable increase in aggressive gull incidents, it is crucial to acknowledge the population decline of these birds. The herring gull, once a common sight, has experienced a staggering drop of 72% in breeding pairs over the past five decades, primarily attributed to habitat changes, food scarcity, and recent outbreaks of avian flu. This decline places the species on the red list, identifying them as a concern within the British bird population.

Importantly, local conservation organisations and experts have issued warnings against the repercussions of feeding gulls human food. Relying on snack offerings can lead to unhealthy diets for the birds and potentially exacerbate aggressive behaviours, as they become conditioned to associate humans with food. Therefore, maintaining an awareness of healthy interactions with wildlife is essential, not just for seagulls, but for the reassurance of those enjoying seaside locales.

For individuals defending their chips or ice creams from these feathered thieves, research suggests that maintaining eye contact may help deter their bold advances. Scientists have documented that gulls take significantly longer to approach food when they perceive themselves to be watched. Hence, the advice for the next seaside outing is to stay vigilant, as these clever avian scavengers continue to adapt and evolve their tactics in pursuit of human treats.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/psycho-seagulls-hunt-packs-rob-35264437)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/psycho-seagulls-hunt-packs-rob-35264437), [[4]](https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/survey-says-blackpool-is-uks-second-hotspot-for-seagull-attacks-4629298), [[5]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/18688561.brighton-beach-worst-spot-seagull-attacks-uk/), [[6]](https://www.caravanguard.co.uk/news/we-reveal-the-uk-hotspots-for-seagull-attacks-24320/)
3. Paragraph 3: [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cglkxjy3dxyo), [[3]](https://www.gbnews.com/news/seaside-towns-draw-up-strategy-deter-aggressive-seagulls)
4. Paragraph 4: [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gevqv3zxlo)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/psycho-seagulls-hunt-packs-rob-35264437), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cglkxjy3dxyo)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/psycho-seagulls-hunt-packs-rob-35264437> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cglkxjy3dxyo> - Dumfries and Galloway Council in Scotland has allocated £84,000 to combat seagull-related issues, including 'dive-bombing' incidents where gulls snatch food from people. The council plans to continue these measures for a third year, with complaints about the birds dropping by over 75% since their introduction. The strategy includes egg and nest removal and installing spikes on roofs to deter nesting. The council aims to assess the success of its 'gull management strategy' through a seagull headcount in the coming year.
3. <https://www.gbnews.com/news/seaside-towns-draw-up-strategy-deter-aggressive-seagulls> - Four Yorkshire coastal towns—Scarborough, Whitby, Filey, and Bridlington—have launched a £36,000 strategy to deter aggressive seagulls that have been terrorizing visitors and locals. The initiative includes exploring alternative nesting sites along the Yorkshire coast and educational campaigns to discourage feeding seagulls. The strategy responds to over 60 reports of aggressive behavior from the birds, which have been linked to an increase in their urban population along the Yorkshire coast. Similar measures have been implemented by other councils, including those in Scotland and Bath, to manage seagull populations and reduce conflicts with residents and tourists.
4. <https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/survey-says-blackpool-is-uks-second-hotspot-for-seagull-attacks-4629298> - Blackpool has been identified as the UK's second-biggest hotspot for seagull attacks, with 18.93% of participants in a recent survey reporting encounters with aggressive gulls there. Brighton Beach topped the list with 19.92%. The survey highlights the prevalence of seagull-related incidents in popular seaside locations, emphasizing the need for effective management strategies to address the issue.
5. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/18688561.brighton-beach-worst-spot-seagull-attacks-uk/> - Brighton Beach has been ranked as the worst spot in the UK for seagull attacks, with more than half of the 1,640 Brits surveyed reporting ambushes by the birds. The seafront in Brighton was listed as the most common place for seagulls to dive-bomb and steal food, followed by Blackpool Beach and Whitby Beach. The survey highlights the prevalence of seagull-related incidents in popular seaside locations, emphasizing the need for effective management strategies to address the issue.
6. <https://www.caravanguard.co.uk/news/we-reveal-the-uk-hotspots-for-seagull-attacks-24320/> - A survey of over 2,000 Brits revealed that more than half have experienced a seagull attack at popular caravanning locations across the UK. The top 20 locations reported for gull swooping and food stealing were: 1. Brighton Beach 2. Blackpool Beach 3. Whitby Beach 4. Cornwall Town 5. Scarborough Beach 6. Cornwall, St Ives 7. Devon, Woolacombe Beach 8. London City 9. Bridlington Beach 10. Hastings Beach 11. Newquay Beach 12. Llandudno Pier 13. Skegness Beach 14. Weymouth Beach 15. Bournemouth Beach 16. Southport Beach 17. Porthcawl sea front 18. Lake Windermere 19. Cleethorpes Beach 20. Aberdeen Beach. The survey highlights the prevalence of seagull-related incidents in popular seaside locations, emphasizing the need for effective management strategies to address the issue.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gevqv3zxlo> - Experts have reported a significant decline in seagull populations, with some species experiencing a 72% drop over 55 years. Despite their presence in urban areas, seagulls are on the red list for British bird species of concern due to this decline. The herring gull, the most commonly found species around UK coastlines, has seen its population decrease by 72% since 1969, dropping from about 200,000 breeding pairs to approximately 50,000. This decline is attributed to factors such as changes in food availability and land use, as well as recent outbreaks of avian flu.