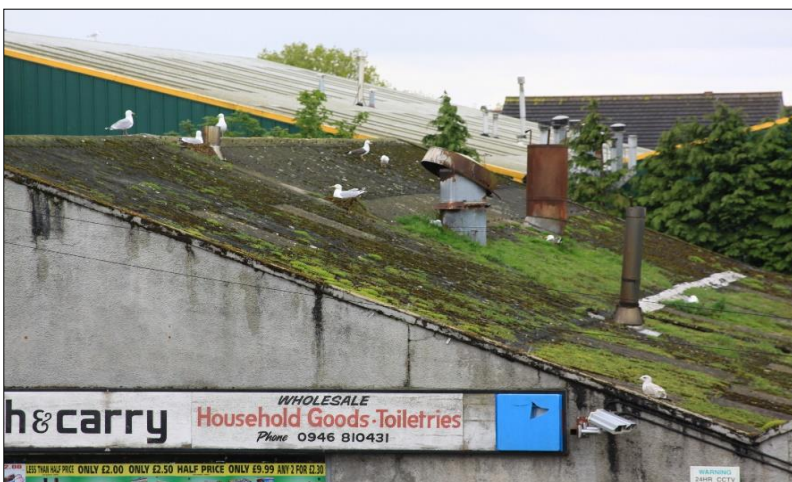


INVENTORY OF URBAN GULL COLONIES IN CUMBRIA

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Inventory of urban gull colonies in Cumbria

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Abstract: The past fifty or so years have seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls breeding in urban areas in Cumbria. Great Black-backed Gulls have also taken to breeding in built-up areas but in much smaller numbers. To the end of the 2017 breeding season a total of 53 urban gull colonies had been identified in the county. This short report provides an inventory of these colonies, together with an indication of their current size, nesting habitat, and, where known, their date of formation.

Keywords: breeding, built-up areas, Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, roof-nesting gulls, Cumbria.

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Introduction

Cumbria has been an important breeding area for Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* and Herring Gulls *L. argentatus* for the past half century or so. The colony at South Walney was the largest in Britain at the time of *Seabird 2000*, the national seabird survey carried out between 1998 and 2002, whilst that at Rockcliffe Marsh was ranked the fourth largest (Mitchell *et al* 2004). Both have shown substantial declines in recent years. By contrast urban gull colonies in Cumbria have grown in size and number in recent decades, such that by 2009, when all colonies of large gulls in Cumbria were surveyed, there were 29 Lesser Black-backed Gull colonies and 30 Herring Gull colonies in urban areas in the county (Sellers and Shackleton 2011; these figures omit one small colony that was probably overlooked during the 2009 survey – details below). These held around 10% and 23% respectively of the county's Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull populations. A few pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls *L. marinus* can also sometimes be found in these urban colonies, but overall make up only about 7% of the county's population of this species.

The early history of urban gull colonies in Cumbria is not well known, but the first seem to have been established in the 1960's. New colonies continue to be formed, and the purpose of the present document is to provide an up-to-date summary of the whereabouts, extent, approximate composition, size, type of sites used for nesting and date of establishment of these colonies.

Material and Methods

This inventory draws mainly on information collected as part of the 2009 survey (Sellers & Shackleton 2010a, b, 2011), an update covering the period to the end of 2013 (Sellers & Shackleton 2015) and unpublished data collected by the compiler between 2014 and 2017 inclusive. As previously, a colony was defined as any nest or group of nests separated by more than 500 m from the nearest nest or group of nests. Some colonies were separated from one another by only 500-1,500 m and such clusters are referred to here as 'colony groups'.

The 2009 survey sought to identify all colonies of large gulls in Cumbria, whether in coastal, urban or rural locations. All coastal towns and villages as well as all inland towns were investigated, and further checks have been made in most subsequent years. Every effort has been made to identify all urban colonies and ensure that the details provided here are as complete as can be, but it is possible that one or two have been overlooked. One colony, that at Durrannahill, Carlisle, was not identified until 2010 and it is probable that it was overlooked in the 2009 survey – locating small, isolated urban colonies is a considerable challenge.

The type of nesting habitat used in these colonies was assigned to one of the following categories:

- (i) warehouses and other commercial premises;
- (ii) factories;
- (iii) the ground;
- (iv) houses;
- (v) other (specified separately).

Obtaining information about when these colonies were established has proved difficult, and the only really reliable dates are those collected since 2009, though even with these some uncertainties remain. Earlier data derive in the main from records collected as part of the 2009 survey (Sellers & Shackleton 2010a, b).

Information on the location and extent of colonies is based on Sellers & Shackleton (2010a) for colonies extant at the time of the 2009 survey, updated as appropriate, or data collected since in the case of colonies established since 2009.

Results and Discussion

A list of the urban gull colonies identified in this investigation is shown in Table 1. By the close of the 2017 breeding season they numbered 53 in total. Of these, Lesser Black-backed Gulls were present in 35 colonies, Herring Gulls in 52 and Great Black-backed Gulls in five. Overall 34 colonies held both Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls, and five held all three species.

At the time of the 2009 survey there were 34 urban gull colonies in Cumbria (this figure takes into account the colony at Durranhill thought to have been overlooked in 2009 (see above), but ignores another, that at St. Bees (Town), established in 2005 but at which no birds bred in 2009, though they have bred there each year since). Ignoring the colony at Parton (colony 32) for the reasons outlined in footnote (f) in Table 1, a total of 18 new colonies have been formed or reformed in the nine breeding seasons since 2009, a mean rate of 2.0 colonies established per annum. All 18 of these newly established colonies (numbers 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 36, 37, 43, 51 and 52 in Table 1) were small in size, typically being founded by either a single pair of birds (11 instances) or a small number of pairs (seven instances). Most involved Herring Gulls, but three (colonies 14, 51 and 52) appear to have been established jointly by Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Most urban areas within 10 km of the coast in Cumbria are already occupied by gulls so the possibilities for the formation of further colonies in such areas is limited. Indeed several of the recent additions appear to have been local extensions of nearby colonies, for instance Durranhill and Rosehill in Carlisle, Silloth (Town), Skinburness and West Silloth in the Silloth colony group, Netherton in Maryport and so on. Some further developments of this kind can be expected. Urban areas further inland would appear to be more promising in terms of the establishment of new colony groups, but again the number of such places in the county is limited.

The approximate location of most colonies will be apparent from their names (which have been selected with this in mind). Nevertheless it is useful to have a more detailed knowledge of the location of colonies, not least to aid any future surveys and the information in Table 2 is a first step in this direction. Many of the colonies listed are increasing in size, and in consequence the area covered by individual colonies, their 'footprint', is expanding. The number of occupied 1 km squares gives a very rough indication of the extent of colonies, but more accurate information is required to characterise this more fully, a task for the future.

It is proposed to produce updates of this document to track further changes in the development of Cumbria's urban gull population. The compiler would be pleased to receive details of any colonies not listed here or significant changes to those that are.

Changes since the appearance of Issue 1

The main changes introduced since the appearance of Issue 1 of this publication in December 2015 are as follows: (a) updating of the information about the 45 colonies identified to the close of the 2015 breeding season, (b) the inclusion of information about eight new colonies identified during the 2016 and 2017 breeding seasons, and (c) the inclusion of a table summarising the location of all these 53 colonies.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr Bart Donato for drawing attention to the existence of the colony in Kendal.

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Table I. Inventory of urban gull colonies in Cumbria

Colony ^a	Habitat	When Established	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Herring Gull	Great Black-backed Gull
Kingmoor Park colony group					
1. Crookdyke	C	before 2000	◆	◆◆	-
2. Heathlands	C	before 2000	◆◆◆	◆◆	-
3. Low Harker	C	before 2000	◆◆◆	◆	-
4. Kingmoor Park (North)	C	2000's?	◆◆	◆	-
5. Kingmoor Park (Central)	C	2000's?	◆◆	◆◆	-
6. Kingstown	C	before 2009	◆◆	◆◆	-
Carlisle colony group					
7. Carlisle (Central)	C H	before 1990	◆◆◆	◆◆	-
8. Durranhill	C	before 2010	◆◆	◆	-
9. Rosehill	C	2011-17	◆	◆	-
Silloth colony group					
10. Skinburness	H	2016	-	◆	-
11. Silloth (Airfield)	C	before 1970	◆	◆◆	-
12. Silloth (Town)	(C) H	2010	-	◆◆	-
13. West Silloth	H	2016	-	◆	-
14. Wigton	F	2015	◆	◆	-
15. Allonby	H	2013	-	◆	-
Maryport colony group					
16. Maryport (Town)	(C) H	before 1990	◆	◆◆	-
17. Netherton	H	ca.2017	-	◆	-
18. Glasson & Grasslot	C G (H)	before 1990?	◆◆	◆◆	-
Flimby colony group					
19. Risehow	C	before 2009	◆	◆	◆
20. Flimby	H	ca.2009	-	◆	-
21. St. Helens	C	2017	-	◆	-
22. Cocker mouth	H	2013 ^b	-	◆	-
Workington colony group					
23. Siddick	F	ca.2010	-	◆	-
24. St. Helen's Business Park ^c	C	2014	-	◆	-
25. Northside	O ^d	2015	-	◆	-
26. Workington (Town)	C H	ca.1970?	◆◆	◆◆	-
27. Mossbay	G	before 2009	◆	◆	-
28. Salterbeck	F	before 2009	◆	◆◆	-
29. Harrington	H	2014	-	◆	-
30. Lillyhall	C	before 2009	◆◆	◆ ^e	-
31. Cleator Moor	C (H)	before 2007	◆	◆◆	-
Whitehaven colony group					
32. Parton	H	see footnote (f)	-	◆	-
33. Whitehaven (Town)	C H	1976-90?	◆◆	◆◆◆	◆
34. Moresby Parks	C	before 2009	◆	◆◆	-
35. Hensingham	C H	ca.1992?	◆	◆◆	-
St.Bees colony group^g					
36. St.Bees (West)	H	ca.2005	-	◆	-
37. St.Bees (East)	H	2017	-	◆	-
38. Sellafield	F	ca.1960	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆
Haverigg & Millom colony group^h					
39. Haverigg Haws	G O ⁱ	before 2000	◆◆	◆◆	◆

40.	Haverigg (Town)	C H	HG before 2009 LBBG 2010-14	◆	◆◆	-
41.	Millom	H	before 2008	◆◆	◆◆	-
42.	Askham-in-Furness	C H	ca.1990's	◆◆	◆◆	-
43.	Dalton-in-Furness	H	2015	-	◆	-
44.	Sowerby	C	2000's	◆	-	-
Barrow-in-Furness colony group						
45.	Barrow (Town)	C F G H	ca.1980	◆◆◆	◆◆◆	◆
46.	North Scale	H	ca.2009?	-	◆	-
47.	North Walney	H	ca.2009?	-	◆	-
48.	Vickerstown (North-east)	H	ca.2000?	◆	◆◆	-
49.	Vickerstown (West)	H	ca.2000?	◆	◆◆	-
Ulverston colony group						
50.	South Ulverston	F	before 1986	◆◆	◆◆	-
51.	Ulverston (Town)	C H	2010-13	◆◆	◆◆	-
52.	Kendal (Town) ^j	C	ca.2016	◆	◆	-
53.	Penrith	C	before 2009	◆◆◆	◆◆	-

Abbreviations: LBBG, Lesser Black-backed Gull; HG, Herring Gull; GBBG, Great Black-backed Gull.

Abundance codes: - no birds, ◆ 1-9 aon, ◆◆ 10-99 aon, ◆◆◆ 100-999 aon (aon, apparently occupied nest).

Habitat codes: C warehouses and other commercial premises (typically with large flat or gently sloping roofs), F factories, G ground, H houses, O other (specified in footnote); in brackets if minor habitat only.

- (a) For greater clarity, some of the colony names used in the 2009 survey have been revised as follows: Carlisle has become Carlisle (Central), Silloth has become Silloth (Airfield) to distinguish it from the newly established Silloth (Town) colony, Barrow (Park Road Industrial Estate) has been shortened to Sowerby, and Ulverston has become South Ulverston to distinguish it from the newly formed Ulverston (Town) colony.
- (b) A pair is reported to have bred in Cockermouth in 2013 (Shackleton 2015); no breeding birds could be found here in 2014, but a pair certainly bred in 2015 (RMS unpublished observations).
- (c) St. Helens Business Park is located on the opposite side of the A596 to Dunmail Park, and should not be confused with St. Helens, ca.3 km to the north-east.
- (d) Northside – nests on office building.
- (e) Lillyhall was originally colonised by Lesser Black-backed Gulls (before 2009) and only later (between 2010 and 2017) by Herring Gulls.
- (f) At the time of the 2009 survey Parton was included with the Whitehaven Town colony; since then breeding has ceased at Briscoe Bank and Parton is now separated by a little over 500 m from the nearest part of the Whitehaven Town colony at Bransty and hence is treated as a separate colony.
- (g) With the establishment of a new colony at the eastern side of St. Bees in 2017, the original colony (referred to earlier as St. Bees (Town) to distinguish it from the colony on the cliffs at nearby St. Bees Head) has been renamed St. Bees (West), and the new colony named St. Bees (East).
- (h) The coastal (*i.e.* non-urban) colony at Hodbarrow also forms part of the Millom colony group.
- (i) Haverigg Haws – colony partly on roofs of prison buildings, partly on the ground within the prison boundary and in some seasons on buildings just outside the prison boundary.
- (j) Details supplied by B.Donato. The non-urban colony at Kendal Fell Quarry forms a colony group with the Kendal (Town) colony.

Table 2. Location of urban gull colonies in Cumbria

Colony ^a	Species	1 km squares occupied
1. Crookdyke	LBBG/HG	NY3660
2. Heathlands	LBBG/HG	NY3760, NY3761
3. Low Harker	LBBG/HG	NY3860, NY3960
4. Kingmoor Park (North)	LBBG/HG	NY3959
5. Kingmoor Park (Central)	LBBG/HG	NY3859
6. Kingstown	LBBG/HG	NY3859, NY3959
7. Carlisle (Central)	LBBG	NY3856, NY3955, NY3956, NY4055, NY4155 ^a
	HG	NY3955, NY3956, NY4055, NY4056
8. Durranhill	HG/LBBG	NY4154
9. Rosehill	HG/LBBG	NY4255
10. Skinburness	HG	NY1156
11. Silloth (Airfield)	LBBG/HG	NY1253
12. Silloth (Town)	HG	NY1053, NY1153, NY1154
13. West Silloth	HG	NY1152, NY1153
14. Wigton	LBBG/HG	NY2548
15. Allonby	HG	NY0842
16. Maryport (Town)	LBBG	NY0336
	HG	NY0336, NY0337
17. Netherton	HG	NY0436
18. Glasson & Grasslot	LBBG	NY0335
	HG	NY0235, NY0335
19. Risehow	LBBG/HG/GBBG	NY0234
20. Flimby	HG	NY0233
21. St. Helens	HG	NY0132
22. Cockermouth	HG	NY1130, NY1230
23. Siddick	HG	NY0031
24. St. Helen's Business Park	HG	NX9930
25. Northside	HG	NX9929
26. Workington (Town)	LBBG	NX9828, NX9928
	HG	NX9827, NX9828, NX9829, NX9927, NX9928, NY0027, NY0028
27. Mossbay	LBBG/HG	NX9827
28. Salterbeck	LBBG/HG	NX9926
29. Harrington	HG	NX9925
30. Lillyhall	LBBG	NY0124, NY0125
	HG	NY0124
31. Cleator Moor	LBBG/HG	NY0115
32. Parton	HG	NX9720, NX9820
33. Whitehaven (Town)	LBBG	NX9717, NX9718
	HG	NX9616, NX9617, NX9618, NX9716, NX9717, NX9718, NX9719, NX9816, NX9817, NX9818, NX9819, NX9820
	GBBG	NX9616, NX9717
34. Moresby Parks	LBBG/HG	NX9918
35. Hensingham	LBBG/HG	NX9917
36. St. Bees (West)	HG	NX9611
37. St. Bees (East)	HG	NX9711
38. Sellafield	LBBG/HG	NY0203, NY0204, NY0303, NY0304
	GBBG	? ^b
39. Haverigg Haws	LBBG/HG/GBBG	SD1479
40. Haverigg (Town)	LBBG/HG	SD1578
41. Millom	LBBG/HG	SD1578, SD1678, SD1679
42. Askham-in-Furness	LBBG/HG	SD2177
43. Dalton-in-Furness	HG	SD2273, SD2274, SD2374
44. Sowerby	LBBG	SD1972
45. Barrow (Town)	LBBG	SD1869, SD1968, SD1969, SD1970, SD2069, SD2070
	HG	SD1869, SD1968, SD1969, SD1970, SD2068, SD2069, SD2070

46.	North Scale	HG	SD1870
47.	North Walney	HG	SD1769
48.	Vickerstown (North-east)	LBBG/HG	SD1868, SD1869
49.	Vickerstown (West)	LBBG	SD1868
		HG	SD1768, SD1868
50.	South Ulverston	LBBG/HG	SD3077
51.	Ulverston (Town)	LBBG/HG	SD2877, SD2878, SD2977, SD2978
52.	Kendal (Town) c	LBBG/HG	SD5191
53.	Penrith	LBBG/HG	SD5029, SD5030

Abbreviations: LBBG, Lesser Black-backed Gull; HG, Herring Gull; GBBG, Great Black-backed Gull.

(a) NY4155 colonised since 2009 survey.

(b) The precise distribution of nests on the Sellafield site is unknown; Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Herring Gulls are assumed to have roughly the same distributions; only a few pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls are present but where they breed on the site is unknown.

(c) Details supplied by B.Donato.

Cover illustrations

Top left: Spikes do not always discourage gulls from nesting on roofs, as this Herring Gull on a nest in Swingpump Lane, Whitehaven in June 2009 illustrates (R.M.Sellers).

Top right: Street sign in West Tower Street, Carlisle (R.M.Sellers).

Bottom left: Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls nesting on a roof in Cleator Moor, May 2009; the building has since been renovated and is no longer used by the gulls (R.M.Sellers).

Bottom right: Adult and juvenile Herring Gulls, Workington, November 2013 (R.M.Sellers).