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EUROPEAN UNION MANAGEMENT PLAN 2009-2011

COMMON GULL

Larus canus

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Executive summary

The Common Gull *Larus canus* is listed on Annex II/2 of the EU Birds Directive as a species for which hunting is permitted in a number of Member States.

The Common Gull is a relatively abundant species. More than 50% of its global breeding population lies in Europe, which hosts 590,000-1,500,000 pairs, 270,000 - 420,000 of which in the EU 25. Over 910,000 birds are thought to winter in Europe. However, it has been evaluated by Birdlife International as having an Unfavourable Conservation Status within Europe and the EU 25, and is thus included in the SPEC (Species of European Conservation Concern) 2 Category. At Pan-European level the species is classified as "Depleted" due to moderate historical declines suffered during 1970-1990 from which the population has not yet recovered. At EU level, the species has suffered recent moderate declines during 1990-2000 preceded by stability over 1970-1990 (BirdLife International 2004b).

Beyond Russia and Norway, the most important European breeding populations are in Sweden, Finland, UK, Denmark, Germany, Estonia and the Netherlands. Of these seven EU countries, three – the Netherlands, UK and Sweden – have experienced significant declines in breeding numbers during 1990-2000. The UK has by far the biggest European wintering population although this too has declined.

The main threats to breeding and wintering Common Gull in the EU are identified as (1) habitat loss and degradation, (2) human disturbance, (3) introduced ground predators – especially the American Mink, (4) predation on chicks by the increasing Herring Gulls and (5) pollutants. Hunting is not considered to be a cause of the decline of this species. Blackfly outbreaks have sometimes been reported to cause local declines

This Management Plan presents a framework for the restoration of Common Gull populations in the EU. It is aimed at all Member States with breeding, staging or wintering populations. It is the responsibility of the relevant authorities of each Member State to decide how to implement the management prescriptions of this plan, which should be followed by new versions with revised objectives that take into account the results achieved during the first phase.

The long-term objective (10 years) of the plan is to restore the Common Gull to an appropriate (conservation) status in the EU. The short-term (3 year) objectives, which are outlined in this plan, are to (1) better protect breeding sites, (2) implement control of terrestrial predators at large colonies exposed to nest predation, (3) acquire quantitative data on population regulation for impact assessment and (4) improve the population monitoring scheme. To achieve these short-term objectives the plan specifies the following results to be reached during the initial three-year period:

1. A quantitative estimate of the annual number of Common Gulls taken and the reason for harvesting is available from all Member States where hunting is permitted.

2. Important breeding and wintering sites for Common Gulls, especially in the Netherlands, Sweden and UK are identified and protected, including SPAs where appropriate.

3. Management actions are taken to increase breeding success and reduce nest loss due to predation, especially by introduced, and due to unfavourable water level control during the breeding season.

4. Key breeding sites are protected from human disturbance and egg collection.

5. An EU-wide monitoring scheme for breeding and wintering populations with habitat description is implemented.

6. Member States with important breeding populations of Common Gulls support research to improve knowledge about survival rates and fecundity allowing for population modelling and assessment of additional factors causing mortality (e.g. pollutants).

0 Introduction

The Common Gull *Larus canus* is listed on Annex II/2 of the EU Birds Directive as a species for which hunting can be permitted in Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland and Sweden.

The Common Gull has been identified as having an unfavourable conservation status within Europe, where its global population is also concentrated (50-74% of the global population breeds in northern Europe). It is thus a Category 2 Species of European Conservation Concern (SPEC). It is provisionally classified as "Depleted" because the European populations have not recovered yet from the moderate decline that they underwent from the 1970s to the 1990s (BirdLife International 2004a). At EU level the species also has an unfavourable conservation status due to recent moderate declines during 1990-2000 (BirdLife International 2004b).

It is therefore important to assess the current conservation status of this species and research information in order to appraise the current effectiveness of conservation actions, identify reasons for the observed trends and recommend options for future management to reverse the downward trend in numbers. Hence, this plan will focus upon the full implementation of the provisions of the Birds Directive as these apply for this species.

The overall format of this management plan follows the Single Species Action Plan format developed by BirdLife International for the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat. However, some parts of the plan including some tables have been modified to make it meet the specific need of a plan that covers a relatively widespread species in the EU.

Ideally, the management prescriptions of this plan should cover the entire geographical range of the Common Gull. However, as the implementation of the plan is part of the fulfilment of the EU Birds Directive the geographical scope of the plan is at this stage limited to the 25 EU Member States.

The first chapter of the management plan briefly presents key information on Common Gull populations. The second chapter provides tables with information on breeding and wintering populations that occur in Europe with the focus on the 25 EU Member States. Chapter 3 analyses the threats that are believed to be the causes of the decline, while chapter 4 lists the policies and legislation relevant for Common Gull management in Europe.

Chapter 5 evaluates the status of the Common Gull in the EU and sets out long-term and short-term objectives for its future management.

Chapter 6 describes the actions to be taken in the EU in the short term (initial three year period). These activities cover all Member States with breeding, staging or wintering Common Gull.

It is the intention that this management plan shall be revised after three years.

1 Biological Assessment

General Information	The Common Gull has a wide global distribution, breeding in temperate and sub-Arctic areas throughout the Palaearctic (from Iceland, Britain and Ireland in the west to the coasts of the Bering Sea in the east) as well as in north-west North America, where it is known as Mew Gull. Over 50% of the global population breeds in Europe, being concentrated in northern regions (Tasker 1994). Beyond Russia, the largest numbers are in Norway and Sweden where most colonies are on, or near, the coast. Outside the breeding season, Common Gulls occur mainly at sea, as well as locally inland in parts of central Europe (Snow & Perrins 1998). With almost half the European population wintering in the UK. Although the species is not threatened globally, its European breeding population suffered a moderate decline between 1970 and 1990 and has not yet recovered to the previous level. Consequently, the species is provisionally evaluated as Depleted within the EU (BirdLife International 2004a) and declining in the EU due to recent moderate declines.
Taxonomy	The Common Gull is a polytypic species: four subspecies have been described, two of them occurring in Europe. The nominate form, *L. c. canus*, breeds in Britain extending through north-west Europe and reaching the White Sea in Russia. *L. c. heinei*, or Eastern Common Gull, is found further east, to the Lena River in Central Russia and western Siberia. The other two subspecies are *L. c. kamtchatschensis* in north-east Siberia and *L. c. brachyrhynchus* in north-west North America. (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Note: Malling Olsen & Larson (2003) relying on structure, plumages and mitochondrial DNA differences (Zink *et al*. 1995), consider the American subspecies as a separate species *L. brachyrhynchus* or MewGull.

Populations	The total number of breeding pairs in Europe was estimated by BirdLife International (2004b) between 590,000 and 1,500,000, which constitutes 50-74% of the world population. As shown in Table 2, Russia, Fennoscandia and the United Kingdom hold the most numerous breeding populations. Regarding the wintering European population (see Table 3), the total number of individuals is estimated at over 910,000, which represents approximately 25-49% of the global population. The United Kingdom, with almost half of the European wintering population, and the Netherlands, with about a third, hold the biggest wintering populations (BirdLife International 2004b). It should be noted under either Taxonomy or Population that a large part of the wintering population in western Europe are Russian ssp. *heinei*.
Population develop-ments	Population levels of Common Gull have experienced diverse trends depending upon countries. There has been a marked population expansion in most parts of the breeding range during the 20th century (Cramp & Simmons 1983). This increase would appear to have slowed down in some countries, whilst others have shown a moderate decline in recent decades. Hario (1985, cited by Tasker 1994) recorded in Finland local declines of 70-75% in the 1970s but the population increased during 1990-2000. Between 1970 and 1990, population decreases were recorded in **Denmark**, **Norway** and **Estonia** (Christensen 1990), while the large population of **Russia** was apparently increasing, as were numbers in **Germany and the Netherlands**. Numbers in other countries holding large populations, such as the **United Kingdom**, **Sweden** and **Finland** remained about constant. Overall, 35% of the EU population has shown a marked decline (Tasker 1994). Although the species was stable or increasing in some countries during 1990-2000, it still declined across much of north-western Europe (see Table 2) and the population has clearly not yet recovered to the previous level (BirdLife International 2004b). Beyond Russia and Norway (where trends were unknown and declining, respectively), the most important European breeding populations are in Sweden, Finland, UK, Denmark, Germany, Estonia and the Netherlands. Of these seven EU countries, three – the Netherlands, UK and Sweden – have experienced significant declines in breeding numbers during 1990-2000. Hence the species is assessed to have undergone moderate declines overall in the EU during 1990-2000.
Distribution throughout the annual cycle	The Common Gull is a short- or medium-distance migrant. Migration in *L.c. canus* is mainly coastal, with large movements of Fennoscandian and Baltic breeders wintering mainly on the western seaboard south to Brittany (France). Small numbers reach the Iberian Peninsula and Morocco, especially during cold winters. Some eastern Swedish and Finnish birds cross Europe in south/southeast direction penetrating into central

	Europe as far as Italy and Greece, while North Sea breeders migrate to England. Dutch and Faroë/Iceland birds are mostly sedentary or travel to the British Islands, whereas British birds do not emigrate but make extensive internal dispersals (Snow & Perrins 1998). Autumn migration occurs in two main waves: the first one peaking in June-July with second-year individuals followed by adults, and the second one in October by adults and first-years. Spring migration begins in mid-February with first-years following adults (Malling Olsen & Larson 2003). *L. c. heinei* leaves northern Siberia and central Russia to winter from the southern Baltic to the Mediterranean, Black and Caspian Seas from October to March (Malling Olsen & Larson 2003).
Survival and productivity	At present, no European-wide monitoring schemes exist to measure annual mortality and annual productivity of the Common Gull. The data presented are from observations made on three colonies on offshore maritime islands in Matsalu Bay in western **Estonia**, where 212-390 pairs breed each year. According to ringing data (n = 6,095), first-year birds experience a 54-59% mortality, in contrast to 25-29% for second-year, and 19-25% for third-year individuals. The observed average annual mortality of breeding birds is 13-15%. Mortality of first-time breeders is relatively high (15-18%), decreasing to 9-11% and rising again for >9-year-old age group (10-33%). Survival of first-time breeders was shown to be lower (86.5%) during cold winters, than in normal (89.6%) and warm (93%) winter seasons. For older birds, survival of males appears to be slightly higher (85-90%) than that of females (75-85%), but this difference could be due to lower site tenacity in females. First-time breeding in males occurs at 2 years (8.6%), 3 years (59.4%) or 4 years (32%) of age, being slightly delayed in females (respectively 7.1%, 42.9% and 50%). Only *c*. 9% of each cohort of eggs reaches age of first breeding. Although 25% of the birds are active breeders during eight seasons (with up to 18-19 seasons exceptionally), mean breeding time span is 5 years. Anecdotally, the oldest bird found in the Estonian colonies had bred for 25 years, living at least up to 27-28 years (Rattiste & Lilleleht 1986, 1987) In the Netherlands, breeding success varies greatly between colonies, from 0.47 to 1.43 fledged chicks per pair (Keijl & Arts 1998).

Life history	**Breeding:** The Common Gull is a facultative colonial breeder. Proportion of solitarily nesting pairs varies from 1 to 100% across breeding range. Most often breeds in small colonies of 3-40 nests. Colonies of up to 10,000 pairs reported in the southern coast of the Baltic Sea. Season: The egg-laying takes place from the second half of May in Fennoscandia, whereas in northern Britain it begins in early May with a peak in late May or June. A single clutch is laid each year. Clutch size: 2-3 oval and variably spotted eggs. Nest: A shallow cup made of vegetation or seaweed, 20-30 cm wide and 3-7 cm high. Incubation: 22.5-28 days. Fledging: *c*. 35 days. (Snow & Perrins 1998).	**Feeding:** Forages by day, mainly upon terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates and fish, obtained by direct predation, and also occasionally, by food-piracy and scavenging, and by following the plough (Snow & Perrins 1998).	**Outside breeding season:** Generally gregarious, often form flocks of up to *c*. 100 in winter, though flock size depends greatly on habitat and time of year (Snow & Perrins 1998). Large roosts along migration route, up to 10,000, exceptionally 40-50,000 (Malling Olsen & Larsson 2003).
Habitat requirements	**Breeding/ Moulting** Common Gulls breed in a great diversity of habitats: from semi-desert, steppe, and temperate to boreal and subarctic zones, and from continental interiors to ocean coast and islands (Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003). It prefers lowlands but breeds up to 900 m in Scotland and over 1,300 m on mountain lakes in Norway (Sharrock 1976, Byrkjedal *et al*. 1986). It can be found on coastal islands as well as inland. On islands, it breeds in places that minimize slope and distance to vegetation, and maximize cover		

	around nest (Bukaciński 1998). On islands of White Sea, it prefers maritime meadows and areas covered with crowberries (Bianki 1967). In the Baltic Sea, it breeds throughout the entire archipelago, strongholds on the offshore islands, where largest colonies exceed 200 pairs, exceptionally reaching 500. In the inner zone, increasingly solitary, on small rocks and rocky peninsulas of wooded islands (Bergman (1986 von Haartman 1980)). The species also nest in dune depressions in France (Sueur & Dupuich 1999) and the Netherlands (Keijl & Arts 1998), and on small offshore rocky islands in Estonia (Rattiste & Lilleleht 1986). Inland, breeding may take place far from water, either on dry or on wet ground, such as moorland hills overlooking arable land in Scotland (Tasker *et al*. 1991), mountain heaths with sedges, crowberries, grasses, lichens, dwarf birch and willow shrubs in Sweden (Götmark & Anderson 1980), peat-bogs in Scandinavia, Latvia and Estonia (Ytreberg 1960, Kumari 1976, Viksne 1978), and a variety of marshes including creek bogs, moss muskeg, open marshes, wet marshes or salt marshes in Russia and France (Bianki 1967, Vincent 1985). In Poland, single pairs have been found on stumps surrounded by crops (Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003), and in the Netherlands some birds nested in potato and sugar beet fields (Bremer 1995 cited by Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003). On the German coast of the Baltic Sea, roof-breeding occurs more often since the mid-1990s (Kubetzki 2002), as is the case in the Netherlands (Keijl & Arts 1998). Roof-nesting and nesting in man-made habitats is becoming increasingly common in Fennoscandia. On land, Common Gulls can breed in habitats modified or created by man such as artificial islands, dam lakes, quarries, industrial areas and decantation basins (Sueur & Dupuich 1999). **Winter** The species is even more eclectic in its use of wintering sites. Habitats selected in winter may be similar to those found in the milder regions of breeding range, being often located on the coast towards their southern limits. On the British Isles, wintering Common Gulls can be found on heather moorlands (Picozzi 1981). In the Netherlands, apart from coastal areas, meadowlands are an important wintering habitat (Keijl 2002). Over the last 20 years, it has been increasingly observed in towns and their vicinity, while foraging on refuse dumps, meat factories, in harbours or on rivers by water outflows. The species is also observed in parks or even in streets of large cities, foraging in dustbins or directly from people (Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003).

Table 1. *Geographical distribution of the Common Gull Larus canus during the annual cycle (EU 25 only).*

Breeding	Formerly breeding (date of extinction)	Migrating (June-October & February-May)	Non breeding visitor (October-March)
• Austria • Belgium • Czech Republic • Denmark • Estonia • Finland • France • Germany • Hungary • Ireland • Latvia • Lithuania • Netherlands • Poland • Slovakia • Sweden • UK		• Belgium • Cyprus • Denmark • Estonia • Finland • France • Germany • Latvia • Lithuania • Netherlands • Poland • Sweden	• Belgium • Cyprus • Finland • France • Latvia • Netherlands • Poland • Spain • UK

2 Available key knowledge

In a number of tables, this chapter provides a summary of up-to-date knowledge on the size of breeding and wintering populations of the Common Gull, with population distribution and trends throughout Europe and the EU.

Table 2. *European breeding population of the Common Gull Larus canus.*

Country	Breeding pairs	Quality	Year(s) of the estimate	Breeding population trend	Baseline population	Reference
Austria	1-5	1	1998-2002	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Belarus	500-1,200	2	1997-2002	-1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Belgium	66-77	1	2001-2002	+1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Czech Rep.	2-3	1	2000	-2	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Denmark	26,000-31,000	3	2000	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Estonia	10,000-20,000	2	1998	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Finland	60,000-80,000	2	1998-2002	+1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
France	2-35	1	1996-2001	F	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Germany	19,000-25,000	1	1995-1999	+1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Hungary	1-2	2	1995-2002	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Iceland	400-500	2	2000	+1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Ireland	1,060	2	1999-2002	-2	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Latvia	500-600	2	1990-2000	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Lithuania	120-150	1	1999-2001	+1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Netherlands	5,600-6,500	1	1998-2000	-2	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Norway	60,000-120,000	2	1989-2001	-2	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Svalbard	1-5	2	1989-2001	-1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Poland	3,000-3,500	1	1997-2000	-1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Russia	250,000-1,000,000	3	1990-2000	?	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Slovakia	0-3	1	1980-1999	F	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Sweden	100,000-200,000	2	1999-2000	-1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Switzerland	2-5	1	1998-2002	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Ukraine	50-150	2	1990-2000	+1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
UK	48,700	1	1998-2002	-1	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Total	**590,000-1,500,000**					

Breeding population data quality:

1 reliable quantitative data, 2 incomplete quantitative data, 3 no quantitative data

Breeding population trend:

-2 Large decrease, -1 Small decrease, +2 Large increase, +1 Small increase, 0 Stable, F Fluctuating

Table 3. *Wintering population numbers of the Common Gull Larus canus in Europe*.

Country	Wintering birds	Quality	Year(s) of the estimate	Wintering population trend	Baseline population idem?	Reference
Belgium	112,000	1	1995-2000	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Finland	10,000-100,000	3	1998-2002	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
France	20,000-80,000	3	1998-2002	?	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Germany[1]	70,000	2	Winter 2005/2006			German Avifaunisten (DDA)
Latvia	10,000-20,000	2	1990-1999	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Netherlands	270,000-350,000	2	1999-2001	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Poland	20,000-40,000	3	1990-2000	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Romania	5,000-120,000	2	1990-2000	F	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Spain	100-300	2	1987-1999	-	-	Carrera 2003
Turkey	8,000-12,000	2	1991-2001	F	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Ukraine	10,000-20,000	2	1990-2000	0	-	BirdLife International 2004a
UK	430,000	2	1993	-	-	BirdLife International 2004a
Total	**>910,000**					

Wintering population data quality:

1 reliable quantitative data, 2 incomplete quantitative data, 3 no quantitative data

Wintering population trend:

-2 Large decrease, -1 Small decrease, +2 Large increase, +1 Small increase, 0 Stable, F Fluctuating

[1] The Storm Seagull can be found also as a winter guest in Germany. The federal counting of their sleeping places carried out by the central organisation of German Avifaunisten (DDA) pointed out a minimum stock of 70,000 animals in winter 2005/06. The actual number might be higher since this program of registration just started (see Wahl & Bellebaum 2006).

Table 4. *National conservation and hunting status bag statistics of the Common Gull Larus canus in the EU.*

Country	Status in national Red Data Book	Year of protection status	Hunting Status	National open season	Annual bag size (period)	Annual Statutory Bag Statistics	Highest responsible national authority
Denmark	Least Concern	1994	P	No	-	-	Ministry of Environment
Estonia			H	August 20 – October 31	120* (2007)		
Finland	Least Concern	1923 2006 (Åland)	P	No	-	-	Ministry of the Environment Åland Government
*Germany**	Least concern	2002	H	October 1 – February 10	6,235 (2003/04) (Hirschfeld & Heyd 2005)**	no	Federal Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Consumer Protection; Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.
*Sweden***			H	August 31 – March 31	15,000 birds/year (1999-2006)***		SEPA

* Data provided by the Estonian Ministry of the Environment. It includes Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Herring Gull and Black-backed Gull.

** Hirschfeld & Heyd (2005) identified the number of hunted species according to the individual numbers of its winter stocks in the respective region. This proceeding appears allowable because also from hunt side it is confirmed that the hunting depends on the frequency. It cannot replace however type-sharp hunting statistics with secured message and control system

*** Controlled hunting all year. Normal hunting: Hunting period 1 Aug to 31 March. National bag statistics = 15,000 birds/year (1999-2006), but real figures probably closer to 30,000 birds/year.

Key: P = protected; H = species is huntable and open season declared; NH = species is huntable, but no hunting season is established; L = species protected, but may nevertheless be killed with government authorisation (licence) under conditions defined by national legislation.

Hunting of the Common Gull may be authorized in three Member States, however no information on regulations or bag statistics are currently available.

3 Threats

This chapter gives an overview of current human activities that are believed to have a negative impact on the European population of the Common Gull. To describe the importance of threats to the EU Common Gull population, the following categories are used:

Critical*:* a factor causing or likely to cause **very rapid declines** (>30% over 10 years);

High: a factor causing or likely to cause **rapid declines** (20-30% over 10 years);

Medium*:* a factor causing or likely to cause relatively **slow, but significant, declines** (10-20% over 10 years);

Low: a factor causing or likely to cause **fluctuations**;

Local: a factor causing or likely to cause negligible declines;

Unknown: a factor that is likely to affect the species but it is unknown to what extent.

1. Habitat loss/degradation (human induced)

Breeding

Transformation and/or elimination of existing breeding and foraging habitats are leading to large scale declines of Common Gull populations.

The main human activities responsible for habitat loss differ among countries: land reclamation and drainage in **Denmark;** forestry plantations and agricultural drainage in **the United Kingdom**; dam constructions and other engineering activities on rivers in **Poland** (Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003), as well as urbanisation, afforestation and vegetation succession in dunes in the Netherlands (Keijl 2002). Succession of open dune habitats to scrub and woodland is in turn a result of lack of natural coastal dynamics. Decrease in foraging habitats during breeding may be related to an increased use of winter crops, reduction of meadows and availability of human refuse (**Germany, Poland).**

Wintering

Land reclamation and drainage in the wintering areas also threaten Common Gull populations since they reduce feeding opportunities at this time of year (Tasker 1994).

Importance of habitat loss/degradation

- For **breeding areas** in the EU the importance of habitat loss/modification is set at Medium/High.

- For the **winter areas** in the EU the importance of habitat loss/modification for the European wintering group is set at Medium.

2. Human disturbance

Breeding

The most important breeding colonies (generally on uninhabited isolated islands) are much better protected now than in the 1970s, so human disturbance cannot be a major threatening factor. However, the decline or disappearance of smaller colonies outside sanctuaries may be attributed to increased human disturbance (Tasker 1994).

The nature of activities leading to human disturbance is varied and so are their effects. Tourism development and fishing may disturb breeding sites and sometimes limit colony site availability. At the River Vistula, in **Poland**, grazing by sheep and cows was the cause of locally large breeding failure (up to 60-80% of nest in some years). Inappropriate water management resulting in nest flooding has been identified as a major cause of breeding failure in **France** (Géroudet *et al*. 1994). Egg collection by man (**Germany**, **Russia**, **United Kingdom**, **Poland**), and intensive research activities during the egg-laying period can sometimes result in nest desertion and increase their vulnerability to other predators (Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003).

Birds breeding in urban areas (having been forced to leave colonies in preferred habitat due to predation) may be considered a pest and are locally disturbed or breeding is discouraged.

Wintering

In wintering areas, fishery activities are important in providing food to Common Gulls. According to Bukaciński & Bukacińska (2003), reduction of fishing effort, economic exploitation of formerly non-commercial fish species and increase in mesh size may decrease availability of discards and so increase competition with other bird species behind fishing vessels, on land or in littoral zone.

Importance of human disturbance

- For **breeding areas** in the EU the importance of disturbance is set at Local.
- For the **wintering areas** in the EU the importance of disturbance is set at Local.

3. Introduced ground predators

Breeding

In large areas of north and west Europe (Finland, Norway, Denmark, United Kingdom), predation by introduced ground predators such as the American Mink *Mustela vison* is the most important limiting factor, being responsible for some whole-colony breeding failures, reducing number of colonies and causing heavy turnover at many colonies. In response to this, some colonies appear to have moved to more inaccessible sites (Tasker 1994). At inland

sites, attacks by local predators such as Crows *Corvus corone* and Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* may also be an important factor limiting breeding success (Géroudet *et al*. 1994, Kubetzki 2002). In the Netherlands, the increase of Red Fox in coastal dunes caused disappearance of large colonies in this habitat, forcing birds to disperse to rooftops and other sites outside the dunes in more and smaller colonies. Smaller colony size may affect breeding success negatively (Keijl & Arts 1998).

In an experimental study in SW Archipelago of Finland (Nordström *et al*. 2001), Mink were removed from two large archipelago areas consisting roughly of 120 islands, and the results were compared with areas (c. 100 islands) where Mink were not removed. The experimental areas were kept Mink-free for 9 years, during which time the Common Gull breeding density markedly increased compared with the control area.

Importance of introduced ground predators

- For **breeding areas** in the EU the importance of introduced ground predators is set at Medium/High.

4. Man-induced increase of avian predators

Breeding

In mixed colonies of the Gulf of Finland, 2-5% of breeding Herring Gulls were responsible for killing and devouring up to 70% of Common Gull chicks from the neighbourhood (Hario & Rudbäck 1996). Yet, these individuals were also using man-induced feeding opportunities (fish offal, garbage dumps etc.). Currently, this predatory behaviour is increasingly common in the northern Baltic, and many Common Gull colonies have been decimating to less than 10% of their former size.

Importance of man-induced increase of avian predators

- For **breeding areas** in the EU the importance of man-induced increase of avian predators is set at Medium/High.

5. Blackfly (outbreaks)

Breeding

For inland colonies situated near rivers, mass outbreaks of Blackflies (Simuliidae) can be sometimes the most important threat. On River Vistula, **Poland**, Blackfly outbreaks induced death of adults caused by anaemia, nest desertion and less parental care during hatching period, and as a result of this, chicks hatched in only 21-25% of nests (Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003).

Importance of Blackfly outbreaks

- For **breeding areas** in the EU the importance of Blackfly outbreaks is set at Local.

6. Pollutants

The concentrations of mercury and organochlorines (DDT, HCHs, PCBs, HCBs) in eggs, feathers and blood of Common Gulls nesting on the **German** North Sea coast was measured in the late 1980s and mid 1990s: concentrations were lower in mid-90s than in 1987, and not endangering reproductive success. Other measurements of pollutants in eggs along the Baltic Sea coast of **Germany** and in southern Karelia (**Russia**, south to the White Sea) showed low pollutant levels, not affecting reproductive success. Only in the central Gulf of **Finland**, was chick mortality observed with symptoms similar to those associated with organochlorine contamination. The lower levels of pollutants in these individuals compared to chicks of other Gull species (*L. argentatus* and *L. fuscus*) that died with the same symptoms, might indicate that the Common Gull is less tolerant to toxicants in the environment (Hario *et al*. 2000, cited by Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003).

In **Norway**, fluorine concentration was higher in egg shells and bones of birds at sites exposed to fluoride emissions from aluminium smelters, compared to unexposed sites but no changes in other egg characteristics or in bone morphology where found (Bukaciński & Bukacińska 2003).

In **France**, contamination of eggs by industrial pollutants is considered as a major cause of low breeding productivity (Géroudet *et al*. 1994).

Importance of pollutants

- For **breeding areas** in the EU the importance of pollutants is set at Unknown.
- For the **winter areas** in the EU the importance of pollutants is set at Unknown.

4 Policies and legislation relevant for management

Table 5. *International conservation and legal status of the Common Gull Larus canus.*

World Status (Criteria)	European Status	EU Status	SPEC category	EU Birds Directive Annex	Bern Convention Annex	Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species
Not listed	(Depleted)	Declining	2[2]	II/2	Appendix III[3]	Not listed

Member States / Contracting parties obligations

The Common Gull is listed on Annex II/2 in the EU Birds Directive, which indicates that it can be hunted in all those Member States, which have defined a hunting season for this species.

Table 6. *Brief overview of management measures and restoration planning processes currently underway, which benefit the Common Gull Larus canus in Member States*.

MEMBER STATE	TITLE	CATEGORY	HUNTING ACTIONS	HABITAT/ SPECIES ACTION	OTHER ACTIONS
Finland	Removal of predatory Herring Gulls in mixed colonies				

[2] SPEC 2: species concentrated in Europe and with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe.

[3] Appendix III of Bern Convention Annex: protected fauna species.

Sweden	No specific measures for Common Gull, but the species pop. status favoured by general ongoing nature conservation measures (e.g. Nature reserves, Natura 2000), improving water quality, bird protection areas, and elimination of Mink in certain areas (with the main purpose to protect various red-listed bird species).				

Key:

Category: I=integrated management plan

Action Status: C=completed, P=in progress

Hunting actions: g=general ban, b=bag limits, r=regional hunting ban, s=shortened hunting period, d=limit to hunting days, h=limit to hunting hours, o=other

Habitat/species actions: h=habitat improvement, a=modifications to agricultural activity, m=minimisation of adverse effects of harvesting, roads, etc., p=predator control, d=prevention of disturbance, s=site safeguard, o=other

Other actions: r=research, p=public awareness, e=education campaigns, s=survey, census and monitoring, o=other

5 Framework for Action

Priority statement/evaluation

The Common Gull is a relatively abundant but overall declining species in the EU. More than half of the global population breeds in northern Europe (25-49% in the EU) where numbers are estimated at 590,000-1,500,000 breeding pairs, and over 910,000 wintering individuals. Although the population levels of the species have been stable or increasing during the 20th century in many countries, declines were observed across much of north-western Europe, namely in Norway, Sweden, UK and the Netherlands.

Habitat loss and degradation along with nest predation due to introduced or indigenous ground predators are considered as the most significant causes responsible for the decline of the Common Gull in the EU. Because many large colonies are generally located in protected and isolated areas, direct human disturbance during breeding activities is considered of secondary importance, affecting mainly small colonies located outside sanctuaries. Blackfly outbreaks may be locally important on inland sites, leading to nest desertion and reduced parental care by the adults. The chick mortality observed in some areas suggests that the Common Gull could be more sensitive to toxicants in the environment than its congener species. Modification of fisheries practices may lead to food competition and limitation during winter.

This management plan presents a framework for the restoration of the Common Gull populations in the EU and its habitats. But for this plan to be effective, each EU country with breeding and/or wintering populations should develop its own national plan that describes management activities on the basis of what is presented here.

Purpose of the Management Plan

Recognising that the assessment by BirdLife International of the Common Gull is a Species of European Conservation Concern (SPEC2) and has an unfavourable Conservation Status in the EU due to a continuing decline in some countries, the long-term objective (10 years) of the plan is:

To restore the Common Gull population to an appropriate conservation status in the EU.

This plan aims to address the most urgent issues to halt the decline of the Common Gull population in EU, but at the same time restricts the activities to be carried out to a realistic level. Thus, the short-term objectives outlined in this plan will focus on:

- Increase protection of breeding sites.

- Creation of new potential breeding sites or restoration of breeding habitat if and where appropriate.

- Implementation of management of terrestrial and avian predators at large colony sites exposed to nest predation. Although mammals (Fox and Marten) in some Storm Seagull colonies act as predators and therefore have great influences one should not forget to improve the habitat quality (inclusive decrease of disturbances).

- Acquisition of quantitative data on population regulation or hunting for impact assessment.

- Improvement of population monitoring scheme.

This plan applies for a three-year period after which it should be evaluated and revised. This should include an assessment of the results during the first three years. During this process the short-term objectives for the next Common Gull Management Plan should be identified so that the most effectively will lead to the recovery of the north-western European populations and the achievement of the long-term objective to restore the Common Gull population to an appropriate (conservation) status.

Results for the period 2009-2011

This section outlines the Results to be achieved during the first 3-year period of Common Gull management within the EU. The results outlined below (and the corresponding Activities in Chapter 6) are targeted at the authorities responsible for the implementation of the provisions of the Birds Directive in the Member States. In the Logical Framework Analyses (LFA) table 9, the Results with corresponding Activities, verifiable indicators, means of verification and assumptions are summarized.

Policy and legislative actions

An essential component when managing a harvested species is the detailed information on the number of birds shot or culled per year. This type of information is currently lacking from Member States where hunting is permitted. Collection of reliable and updated data on population regulation is therefore a key activity of this plan.

Results of the implementation of this Management Plan should therefore be that by the end of 2010:

1. A quantitative estimate of the annual number of Common Gulls taken for harvesting is provided by all Member States where hunting is permitted or where derogations are issued, and the numbers killed and the reasons for those derogations.

Management of breeding and wintering populations

The breeding populations are declining in some Member States holding large numbers of Common Gulls. The Netherlands suffered a marked decline, and Sweden and UK a moderate one. Causes of these declines are mostly attributed to habitat loss (agricultural drainage vegetation succession, urbanisation, afforestation and nest predation). Important sites for migratory species should be protected as SPAs. Some 13-17% of the wintering population is

located within Important Bird Areas (BirdLife International 2004a). Results for the implementation of this Management Plan should be that by the end of 2011:

2. Important breeding and wintering sites for Common Gulls, especially in the Netherlands, Sweden and UK are identified and protected, included as SPAs where appropriate. Where possible, former breeding sites can be restored or new sites created.

3. Management actions are taken to increase breeding success and reduce nest loss due to predation, especially by introduced terrestrial predators, and due to unfavourable water level control during the breeding season.

Management of human activities

Because the Common Gull often breeds in colonies, human disturbance during nesting activities may have a strong impact on population recruitment.

4. Key breeding sites are protected from human disturbance and egg (collection). Alternative breeding sites are created, where practicable, close to urban breeding sites to prevent persecution.

International co-operation

Populations of Common Gulls show contrasting trends among countries (breeding populations stable, increasing or decreasing). An increased use of urban areas has been noticed during winter in some countries but it is unknown whether this phenomenon reflects population increase or habitat shift. A European-wide monitoring scheme to monitor population levels more accurately in summer and winter, as well as a characterisation of breeding and wintering habitats could help to better assess population trends as well as the factors affecting population levels and habitat distribution.

5. An EU-wide monitoring scheme for breeding and wintering populations with habitat description is implemented.

Research and Monitoring

Few data are available on demographic parameters (breeding success, survival) of the Common Gulls throughout Europe. These data would be useful for understanding the underlying causes of population fluctuations that vary among countries.

6. Member States with important breeding populations of Common Gulls support research to improve knowledge about survival rates and fecundity, allowing for population modelling and assessment of additional factors causing mortality (e.g. pollutants).

6 Activities

In the following two tables are listed the Results to be achieved by the end of 2011 for breeding and wintering Common Gulls respectively, with the corresponding activities to be carried out by the relevant Member States.

Table 7. *Actions in all countries in the EU with breeding populations of Common Gulls – the scale for Priority and Time Scale is given at the bottom of table 8.*

Result	***Priority***	***National Activities***	***Time Scale***	***Means of verification***
A quantitative estimate of the annual number of Common Gulls taken for harvesting is provided by all Member States where hunting is permitted or where derogations are issued, as well as the numbers killed and the reasons for those derogations.	Medium	Ensure that an annual estimate of Common Gull harvest is available in Estonia, Germany and Sweden.	Short	Publication/web-site with official statistics in relevant Member States available by the end of 2010.
Important breeding sites for Common Gulls, especially in the Netherlands, Sweden and UK are identified and protected, included as SPAs where appropriate.	High	Identify and protect all important breeding sites of Common Gulls in north-western European Member States.	Short	Publication/web-site of relevant national authority in Member States and report to ORNIS Committee by national delegates.
Where practicable take measures to restore former or create new breeding sites.	High.	Take measures to counter vegetation succession (scrub removal) and predation risk (island, control, fencing) at former and potential breeding sites (Netherlands a.o.).	Medium.	Publication/web-site of relevant national authority in Member States and report to ORNIS Committee by national delegates.
Management actions are taken to reduce nest loss due to predation by introduced terrestrial predators and unfavourable water level control during the nesting	High	Promote the use of effective management actions at major breeding sites.	Short	Publication/web-site of relevant national authority in Member States and report to ORNIS Committee by national

season.				delegates.
Key breeding sites are protected from human disturbance and egg collection.	High	Protect key breeding sites of Common Gulls from human disturbance and egg collection in north-western European Member States.	Short	Publication/web-site of relevant national authority in Member States and report to ORNIS Committee by national delegates.
An EU-wide monitoring scheme for breeding populations with habitat description is implemented.	Medium	Support development and implementation of summer surveys with habitat description.	Medium	Data on breeding population levels and habitat distribution.
Member States with important breeding populations of Common Gulls support research to improve knowledge about survival rates and fecundity, allowing for population modelling and assessment of additional factors causing mortality (e.g. pollutants).	Medium	Support applied research on Common Gull breeding biology and ringing, with clear time-bound expected outputs.	Medium	Reports and publications with applicable results on demographic data on Common Gull populations.

Table 8. *Actions in all countries in the EU with wintering populations of Common Gulls – the scale for Priority and Time Scale is given at the bottom of the table*.

Result	***Priority***	***National Activities***	***Time Scale***	***Means of verification***
A quantitative estimate of the annual number of Common Gulls taken and the reason for harvesting is available from all Member States where hunting is permitted.	Medium	Ensure that an annual estimate of Common Gull harvest is available in Estonia, Germany and Sweden.	Short	Publication/web-site with official statistics in relevant Member States available by the end of 2010.
Implementation of an EU-wide monitoring scheme for wintering populations with habitat description.	Medium	Support development and implementation of winter surveys with habitat description.	Medium	Data on wintering population levels and habitat distribution.

The **Priority** of each Result is given, according to the following scale:

- Essential: an action that is needed to prevent a large decline in the population, which could lead to species or subspecies extinction.
- High: an action that is needed to prevent a decline of more than 20% of the population in 20 years or less.
- Medium: an action that is needed to prevent a decline of less than 20% of the population in 20 years or less.
- Low: an action that is needed to prevent local population declines or which is likely to have only a small impact on the population across the range.

The **Time scales** attached to each Activity use the following criteria:

- Immediate: completed within the next year.
- Short: completed within the next 1-3 years.
- Medium: completed within the next 1 – 5 years.
- Long: completed within the next 1 – 10 years.

Table 9. *Summary of objectives/results and activities of the Common Gull Management Plan 2009-2011.*

DESCRIPTION	VERIFIABLE INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
Overall objective: *To restore the Common Gull to an appropriate conservation status in Europe.*	The Common Gull population has an appropriate conservation status.	The European Threat Status classification of Common Gull.	Common Gull Management Plan approved and supported by EU and Member States.
***Short-term Results*:** 1. Data on annual number of Common Gulls hunted/culled in Member States is available. 2. Important breeding and wintering sites for Common Gulls, especially in the Netherlands, Sweden and UK are identified and protected, including as SPAs where appropriate. 3. Management actions are taken to increase breeding success and reduce nest loss to predation by introduced terrestrial predators and to unfavourable water level control during the breeding season. 4. Key breeding sites are protected from human disturbance and egg collection. 5. Implementation of an EU-wide monitoring scheme for breeding and wintering populations with habitat description. 6. Member States with important breeding populations of Common Gulls support research to improve knowledge of survival rates and fecundity allowing for population modelling and assessment of additional factors causing mortality (e.g. pollutants).	1. Data on annual number of Common Gulls hunted/culled in the EU is available. 2. Important breeding populations and wintering concentrations of Common Gull located within protected areas. 3. Management Plans and Schemes are being implemented at key Common Gull breeding sites. 4. Key breeding sites of Common Gulls are being protected from human disturbance and egg collection in north-western European Member States. 5. Database available. Winter counts submitted to the International Waterbird Census (IWC) database managed by Wetlands International 6. Funds available for research programs to launch studies.	1. Publication/web-site with official statistics in relevant Member States available. 2. Publication/web-side of relevant national authority in Member States and report to ORNIS Committee by national delegate. 3. Publication/web-site of relevant national authority in Member States and report to ORNIS Committee by national delegate. 4. Publication/web-site of relevant national authority in Member States and report to ORNIS Committee by national delegate. 5. Wetlands International publications. 6. Papers and/ or reports produced documenting new information.	Member States have adequate resources and commitment to take responsibility for Common Gull management.

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