

'Raucous' seagulls: Parisians' new noisy neighbours

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From a few couples in the early 1990s, the Parisian gull population has risen to between 50 and 60 breeding pairs that produce three chicks a year

Parisians need no longer go to the beach, in the time-honoured August tradition, to hear the plaintive cries of seagulls, but the birds' growing

cacophony is ruffling many feathers in the French capital.

Despite being a two-hour drive from the sea, Paris has attracted a growing number of gulls jostling with pigeons for a perch on the city's rooftops.

"In the spring we used to hear sparrows, it was the sound of dawn and was very pleasant. But now it's the raucous cries of these bothersome gulls!" said Anne Castro, a psychiatrist in the hilly Belleville district in the city's northeast, one of the birds' favourite nesting places.

Rodolphe Ghelfi, a security guard in his fifties who also lives in the neighbourhood, also feels tormented by the cawing.

"When I moved to Paris 20 years ago I had the pleasure of listening to pigeons cooing and sparrows singing. But in recent years these huge gulls have landed on the roofs of Paris and begin bawling early in the morning," he said.

"I no longer have to set the alarm," he told AFP, clearly riled by what he called the "hellish" sound.

Gilles Teillac took a more benign view of his feathered neighbours, whose presence has lent a maritime air to the French capital.

"You can be two blocks from your home and make your wife believe you're calling from a telephone booth in Le Havre," on the Normandy coast, the affable pensioner joked.



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Among the spots where the gulls tend to congregate are the environs of the fire-damaged Notre-Dame Cathedral, on an island in the middle of the Seine, as well as the old Jewish quarter of Le Marais.

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In the open-air dumps on the outskirts of Paris, the omnivores have found rich pickings.

"In winter they think nothing of flying dozens of kilometres to an open-air dump... they eat plenty and are therefore more likely to survive, which means each year they are more numerous to return (to Paris)," Siblet said.

The roofs of Parisian buildings, most of which have seven or more storeys, also offer the gulls a haven from predators.

"The only predators they need to watch out for are cats and foxes, which rarely make it to those heights," Siblet said.



Seagulls tend to fall silent after the end of the nesting season that runs from March to late August, noted ornithologist Jean-Philippe Siblet

'Nicer than police sirens'

From a few couples in the early 1990s, the number of Parisian gulls has risen to between 50 and 60 breeding pairs that produce three chicks a year, according to Siblet, a number on a par with a 2013 estimate from the ornithology centre for the greater Paris region.

Over the years the population has become more diverse, with the dominant herring gull now sharing the Parisian skies with a handful of black-backed gulls, yellow-legged gulls and at least one Caspian [gull](#).

Siblet described the increased numbers as "reasonable".

Defending the gulls from their detractors, he noted that the birds tended to fall silent after the end of the nesting season that runs from March to late August.

Plus, he argued, their cries are "much nicer than all the noise pollution we hear on the street, whether it's the sound of police or ambulance sirens, or crowds shouting, or the neighbour drilling a hole in the wall to hang a mirror."



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Paris is not the only city where seagulls have raised the hackles of locals.

Two years ago, authorities in the southern port of Marseille issued a statement branding yellow-legged gulls "shameless" in their hunt for food, and gave the green light for wounded birds to be euthanised and nests containing eggs or chicks destroyed if they constituted a threat to public safety or hygiene.

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