

PARENTAL QUALITY, REPRODUCTIVE PERFORMANCE AND CHICK BEGGING BEHAVIOUR IN LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULLS

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A three year study was undertaken on the breeding biology of Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus fuscus*) on Flat Holm Island, UK, which is home to a colony of approximately 12,000 individuals (including 4,000 breeding pairs). A 7,700m² area of this colony was visited daily from early April until late June of each year to examine nesting behaviour during the laying and hatching periods. Nest location, nest quality, nesting materials and surrounding vegetation were recorded, together with laying date and hatching date. Spatial analyses were undertaken using ArcGIS and R to explore the factors influencing nest distribution and hatching success. The timing of egg laying and egg size was also recorded, along with some aspects of chick morphology and begging behaviour. Compared to poor quality nests, laying commenced earlier in high quality nests located closer to cover. These nests were well spaced, with larger clutch and egg sizes, and had a higher hatching success. Despite this variation, no clear differences in the intensity of chick begging towards a standardized stimulus were observed.