

[News story: General licences for bird control: major changes to licensing requirements](#)

Natural England is revoking three general licences for controlling certain wild birds as of Thursday 25 April 2019.

These licences (GL 04/05/06) cover 16 species of birds including several members of the crow family, Canada goose, some gulls and pigeons.

The change follows a legal challenge to the way the licences have been issued, which could mean users who rely on them are not acting lawfully.

Natural England is working at pace to put in place over the next few weeks alternative measures to allow lawful control of these bird species to continue where necessary. In the meantime, once the licences have been revoked and until new licences are issued, anyone needing to control one of these 16 bird species where there is no reasonable non-lethal alternative will need to apply for an individual licence.

The action is the first stage of a planned review of general and class licences, which will be completed this year.

Natural England's interim chief executive Marian Spain said:

We recognise this change will cause disruption for some people, but we are working hard to ensure it is kept to a minimum.

We will bring forward interim measures as quickly as possible as the first stage of our planned review of the licences. We want to make sure our licensing system is robust and proportionate, taking into account the needs of wildlife and people.

What to do if you use a general licence

It is expected that, over time, many situations currently covered by the three general licences will be covered by new licences.

Natural England is undertaking new licensing assessments to support lethal control of certain birds in defined situations, such as to prevent serious damage to livestock from carrion crow and to preserve public health and safety from the impacts of feral pigeons. It intends to start issuing these licences on gov.uk from the week commencing 29 April when more details will be available.

If people need to take action in the meantime they will need to apply for an individual licence, using a simplified process which will be available on

gov.uk from 25 April.

In limited circumstances, people may be allowed to undertake urgent action in accordance with the existing requirements of section 4 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Anyone exercising lethal control of birds after Thursday 25 April 2019 without taking the above steps will not be covered by a general licence and could be committing an offence.

If you are unsure what you should do on your land, [visit the Natural England licensing webpage for more information and advice](#).

Background on the general licences

General licences were introduced in the 1990s to allow the legal control of bird species of low conservation concern to protect public health and safety, prevent serious damage and disease, and protect plants and wildlife.

Further details of the wider review into the operation and provision of general licences will be shared shortly. We will seek feedback from those using them and from wildlife protection and other groups. We expect to complete this review by the end of the year.

Part of Natural England's role is to ensure relevant provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 are upheld to protect wildlife, as well as recognising the needs of people.

Background

Currently the three licences subject to the legal challenge cover 16 bird species, including several members of the crow family (crows, magpies, rooks, jackdaws and jays), feral and wood pigeon and number of invasive non-native species (such as Canada goose).

The specific licences:

- General licence GL04: To kill or take certain species of wild birds to prevent serious damage or disease
- General licence GL05: To kill or take certain species of wild birds to preserve public health or public safety
- General licence GL06: To kill or take certain species of wild birds to conserve wild birds or flora or fauna