



Gull cries bring peace to area Burger Kings

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They prey on the weak and unsuspecting at boardwalks and fast-food joints all along the coast.



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While many seashore residents simply look the other way as they steal what they can, the management of Burger King restaurants in Atlantic and Cape May counties is fighting back.

Not with bullets or prison bars.
No, this menace calls for something far more punishing: Bird sounds.

And it seems to be working.
At the Pleasantville Burger King, Nettie Koonce was happy to see that the aggressive thieves were nowhere to be found Monday as she ate a burger in her car with the windows bravely rolled down.

"They'll come in your car if you let them," she warned.

Stephanie Harmon of Pleasantville recalled the time not long ago when a visit to her favorite restaurant often meant enduring an attack - by seagulls.

"If you drop a fry, they swoop all around to get it," Harmon said.

On Monday, seagulls were absent from the Black Horse Pike parking lot. Gulls occasionally flew overhead, but none landed during the busy noon lunch-hour.

Franchise supervisor Drew Burman credits the gulls' scarcity with recorded bird sounds that he first tried out in Pleasantville last year and that he's now expanded to restaurants in Somers Point, Absecon, English Creek and Cape May Cou

The bird sounds are played at random intervals by the BirdXPeller, a 4-pound device installed on the roof of the restaurants for about \$300 each, Burman said.

To the untrained ear, the digital recording sounds like gulls being typically raucous.



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But the device is playing the cries of ring-billed gulls in various forms of distress interspersed with hawks crying that it's dinnertime, said Mike Schless, a salesman at Bird-X Inc., the Chicago-based manufacturer.

The combination instinctively scares away the real gulls, whether they are laughing gulls or black-backed gulls, because they believe one of their own is in trouble, Schless said.

The device can be programmed to play the distressed cries of five bird species and the predatory cries of three species, all of them recorded by Cornell University. Different combinations scare away different bird populations, Schless said. For instance, the Atlantic City Hilton has a BirdXPeller programmed to rid the building of nesting pigeons. Combating gulls with recorded distress sounds isn't new. Distress calls have been used for years in conjunction with noise cannons to drive seagulls away from Atlantic City International Airport in Galloway Township and from blueberry fields in Hammonton, said Chris Boggs, a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture overseeing the airport's bird strike program.

Mike Shapiro, director of the Avian Rehabilitation Center in Egg Harbor Township, praised audio-deterrents as an excellent alternative to monofilament, spikes and other physical devices used to keep unwanted birds away from buildings.

"Burger King, hats off to you," Shapiro said. "This is really the intelligent humane way to do that."

Burman said he is just happy he has a way to keep gulls from messing the parking lot and pilfering his customers' food.

"I've seen it happen where they swoop down and grab it as you come out the door," Burman said.

Despite the BirdXPeller's success on the mainland, don't expect to see it deployed against the winged crooks at Burger Kings in Ocean City and Wildwood, he said. Those Boardwalk restaurants are lost causes, he said, so close to other avian temptations and bread-crumbs tossing tourists that nothing can drive away the gulls.