Appendix 6-5 Bird Report

SDCC Rathcoole Housing Development

Volume 2 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report

South Dublin County Council

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Delivering a better world

Quality Information

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This Appendix presents the methods and results of breeding and non-breeding (wintering) bird surveys that were conducted as part of the ecological baseline surveys to inform the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposed SDCC Rathcoole Housing Development (the Proposed Development). Full details of the Proposed Development are presented in Chapter 02 Description of Development of the EIA Report (EIAR). This Appendix accompanies Chapter 06 Biodiversity of the EIAR and should be read in tandem.

For ease and clarity of reference, all land within the proposed application boundary is referred to as the Site. The Site location is shown in Figure 1-1 (EIAR Volume 03). However, it must be noted that the application boundary was reduced after the bird surveys were completed, therefore the surveys extend beyond the Site.

Within this Appendix, species are given their common and scientific names when first referred to and their common names only thereafter. Locations are given as Irish Grid References (IGR), and all distances are cited as the shortest distance as the crow flies, unless otherwise specified. Figures A6-5 and A6-6, which accompanies Chapter 06 of the EIAR, are relevant to this Appendix.

1.2 Previous Survey

The Site and immediate surrounds has been subject to extensive ecological survey, including one breeding bird survey and several wintering bird surveys. One breeding bird survey was carried out in May 2020 (Wilson and Denyer, 2021). During this survey, many bird species were identified as breeding or potentially within the Site, including Amber-listed bird species goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, greenfinch *Chloris chloris*, house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, linnet *Carduelis cannabina*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, and kestrel *Accipiter nisus*.

Four wintering bird surveys were carried out monthly between December 2020 and March 2021 (JBA, 2021). During these surveys, a number of birds were recorded onsite, including Red- and Amber-listed species on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI) for wintering (redwing *Turdus iliacus*, herring gull *Larus argentatus*, and black-headed gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*). Other BoCCI species for breeding were also noted during survey (house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, meadow pipit *Anthus pratensis*, and starling *Sturnus vulgaris*).

Two wintering bird surveys were carried out in February and March 2023 (AECOM, 2023). During the surveys, four Amber-listed species for wintering in Ireland (coot *Fulica atra*, mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* black-headed gull and herring gull), and two Red-listed species for wintering in Ireland (snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and redwing) were identified during the surveys.

1.3 Quality Assurance

This Appendix has been completed in line with AECOM's Integrated Management System (IMS). The IMS places great emphasis on professionalism, technical excellence, and quality, as well as covering all aspects of environmental and Health and Safety management. All staff members are committed to establishing and maintaining our accreditation to the relevant international standards, including ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015, and ISO 45001:2018. In addition, the IMS requires careful selection and monitoring of the performance of all sub consultants and contractors.

2. Relevant Legislation and Policy

This Section sets out the legislation, policy, and guidance sources which are potentially relevant and have informed the scope and method for survey and assessment of effects on birds. Further information is provided in Appendix 6-1 Relevant Supporting Information (EIAR Volume 02).

2.1 Legislation

All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2018 and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 (collectively referred to as the Wildlife Acts). Under the Wildlife Acts, it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly:

- Kill, injure or take a protected wild bird.
- Take, destroy, injure, or remove the eggs or nest of a protected wild bird.
- Disturb a protected wild bird on or near a nest containing eggs or unflown young.

In addition, a number of bird species important in relation to the Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds (the Birds Directive). The Birds Directive instructs Member States to take measures to maintain populations of all bird species naturally occurring in the wild state in the EU. Such measures may include the maintenance and/or re-establishment of habitats to sustain these bird populations. A subset of bird species has been identified in the Birds Directive and are listed in Annex I as species requiring special conservation measures in relation to their habitats. These species have been listed on account of their risk of extinction, vulnerability to specific changes in their habitat, and/or due to their relatively small population size or restricted distribution. Special Protection Areas (SPA) are identified and classified for these Annex I listed species and for regularly occurring migratory species, paying particular attention to the protection of wetlands.

2.2 Planning Policy

The following planning policies and documents are also relevant to birds:

- Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF) (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG), 2018).
- Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 (NPWS, 2023).
- South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028 (South Dublin County Council, 2022).
- South Dublin County Biodiversity Action Plan 2020-2026 (South Dublin County Council, 2020).

3. Methods

3.1 Field Survey

Field surveys were conducted by an experienced AECOM ecologist to establish the breeding and wintering bird assemblage within the Site. Surveys followed the industry-standard best practice guidelines.

3.1.1 Breeding Birds

Two breeding bird surveys were caried out, one each in May and June 2025, under suitable weather conditions. The breeding bird surveys were completed using adapted British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Common Bird Census method (Marchant, 1983 (as summarised in Bibby *et al*., 2007 and Gilbert *et al*. 1982)). The survey also had regard to the National Road Authority's (NRA) *Ecological Surveying Techniques for Protected Flora and Fauna during the Planning of National Road Schemes* (NRA, 2008)[1].

The surveyor walked a pre-determined transect at a steady pace and recorded all bird species observed, their abundance, and activity. Binoculars were used to identify species and to scan the Site and immediate surrounding area. The surveyor included regular stops to listen for singing or calling birds. All birds observed (either by sight or sound), their locations and activity/behaviour were recorded on field maps and/or mobile mapping software using standard BTO species codes. If encountered, the locations of nests were noted.

[1] N.B. the NRA has since been subsumed within the umbrella body of Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), however the guidance is considered relevant, as the original NRA guidance has not since been renamed or otherwise updated.

3.1.2 Non-breeding Wintering Birds

Four wintering bird surveys were caried out between November 2025 and February 2026, under suitable weather conditions. The method employed was similar to the breeding bird surveys, an adapted BTO Common Bird Census (and with regard to NRA (2008)), wherein a pre-determined transect was walked at a steady pace. The surveyor recorded all bird species observed, their abundance, and activity. Binoculars were used to identify species and to scan the Site and immediate surrounding area. All birds observed (either by sight or sound), their locations and activity/behaviour were recorded on field maps and/or mobile mapping software using standard BTO species codes.

3.2 Data Collection

All spatial survey data were recorded onto specific bird survey maps using Esri Field Maps on a hand-held mobile mapping device (Samsung Galaxy Active range) in the field. By using the inbuilt device GPS and in context with recognisable features on the ground visible from downloaded orthophotography, generally accurate locational data of evidence was recorded.

3.3 Survey Personnel

The breeding and wintering bird surveys were carried out by experienced AECOM ecologist Alison Donnelly. This Appendix was prepared by Aoife Keenan, reviewed by Alison Donnelly and Jenny Hunter, and verified by Dr Paul Lynas.

Relevant experience for all AECOM ecologists involved in preparation of this Appendix, including all field survey, is presented in Appendix 6-1 Relevant Supporting Information.

3.4 Limitations

No limitations that constrain the results of the surveys were identified.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Survey Conditions and Effort

Two breeding bird and four wintering bird surveys were carried out within the Site between May 2025 and February 2026 inclusive. Survey dates, weather conditions, and start and end times are presented in Table 1. The transect routes walked for the breeding and wintering surveys are presented in Figures A6-5 and A6-6 respectively.

Table 1: Survey Dates, Times and Weather Conditions Recorded

Date	Times	Weather Conditions
Breeding Birds		
29/05/2025	07:00-09:30	15-16°C, overcast, gentle breeze from the northeast, recent rain, drizzle at end of survey, good visibility
17/06/2025	06:45-08:00	14-15°C, partly cloudy, light breeze from the southwest, dry, good visibility
Wintering Birds		
07/11/2025	09:30-11:30	12°C, overcast, still to light air from the north, drizzle at start of survey, good visibility
16/12/2025	10:05-12:20	5-6°C, fine, still to light breeze from the north, dry, excellent visibility
08/01/2026	10:40-13:15	5°C, overcast, light breeze from northeast to light air from northwest, dry, good visibility
04/02/2026	13:30-16:00	7°C, overcast, light breeze from the south, dry, good visibility

4.2 Breeding Bird Surveys

Across both breeding bird surveys, a total of 20 bird species were recorded; 18 species were recorded in May and 16 species were recorded in June. This comprised 98 and 83 individual birds recorded in May and June respectively. Species and abundance, including a peak count (i.e. highest number of each species observed (either singly or in a group) over both surveys), are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Breeding Bird Surveys

BTO Code	Common Name	Scientific Name	May Count	June Count	Peak Count	Conservation Status
B.	Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	3	3	1	
BC.	Blackcap	*Sylvia atricapilla*	11	10	1	
BF	Bullfinch	*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*	3	2	1	
BT	Blue tit	*Cyanistes caeruleus*	2	0	1	
CC	Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*	2	1	1	
CH	Chaffinch	*Fringilla coelebs*	2	2	1	
D.	Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*	1	1	1	
GC.	Goldcrest	*Regulus regulus*	0	2	1	Amber-listed (breeding)
GO	Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*	1	0	1	
JD	Jackdaw	*Coloeus monedula*	3	7	7	
LT	Long-tailed tit	*Aegithalos caudatus*	1	1	1	
MG	Magpie	*Pica pica*	4	5	2	
R.	Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*	3	0	1	
RO	Rook	*Corvus frugilegus*	4	1	3	
SG	Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	17	0	6	Amber-listed (breeding)
SL.	Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	0	1	1	Amber-listed (breeding)
ST	Song thrush	*Turdus philomelos*	2	6	1	
WP	Woodpigeon	*Columba palumbus*	8	7	3	
WR	Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*	21	21	1	
WW.	Willow warbler	*Phylloscopus trochilus*	10	13	1	Amber-listed (breeding)

No bird nests or confirmed evidence of breeding was observed during the breeding bird surveys. Four Amber-listed species for breeding (goldcrest, starling, swallow and willow warbler) were recorded during the surveys. Other species recorded are not particularly notable and are generally common of these habitat types. The majority were recorded as individuals, or otherwise in very low numbers/small groups.

Willow warbler was the only Amber-listed species recorded during both breeding bird surveys. In May, willow warblers were observed singing in nine locations across the Site, with a tenth individual recorded alarm calling. In June, willow warblers were observed singing in 13 locations across the Site, however it is unclear how many individuals this represented. Observations of willow warbler were located throughout the mosaic of scrub and grassland habitat within the centre and south of the Site. These behaviours likely indicate breeding within the Site.

Starling was only recorded in May, albeit in relatively high numbers. Two groups, both comprising six starlings, were recorded flying into the northern and southern boundaries of the Site, with other observations comprising four feeding individuals in amenity grassland to the northeast corner of the Site, and one calling bird within the grassland/scrub mosaic toward the southwest of the Site. Alarm calling may indicate breeding behaviour.

Goldcrest and swallow were only recorded in June, both in low numbers. Two individual goldcrests were observed singing in two separate locations, whilst one swallow was observed in flight. Both species were recorded within a mosaic of scrub and grassland habitat within the centre and towards the south of the Site.

In general, bird behaviour noted during surveys largely comprised feeding, calling, and song, with occasional flights noted from starlings, swallow, magpie and bullfinch. With the exception of the groups of starling (and also of jackdaw in June), peak counts of other species were relatively low, comprising only a few birds present across the Site.

The locations of birds recorded during the surveys is presented in Figures A6-5a-b. Records are coloured relevant to their BoCCI status.

4.3 Non-breeding Wintering Bird Surveys

Across the four non-breeding wintering bird surveys, a total of 12 bird species were recorded. Numbers of species recorded per month were: 11 in November, one in December, three in January, and two in February, comprising 39, 43, 17 and 37 individual birds recorded in these respective months. Species and abundance, including a peak count (i.e. the highest number of each species observed (either singly or in a group) over both surveys) are presented in Table 3.

One Red-listed species for wintering (snipe) and two Amber-listed species for wintering (and also breeding; black-headed gull and mallard), were recorded during the wintering bird surveys. In addition, kestrel, a Red-listed species for breeding was also observed. Other species recorded are not particularly notable and are generally common of these habitat types. The majority were recorded as individuals, or otherwise in small groups of relatively low numbers.

Snipe was recorded on two occasions, with one individual observed each time in November 2025 and February 2026. On both occasions, one individual was flushed from alluvial woodland adjacent to the Site to the west.

Mallard was recorded on two occasions, comprising a group of five individuals in November 2025 and a pair in January 2026. On both occasions, these were observed associated with a water feature within in the wider Rathcoole Park, adjacent to the northwest of the Site.

Black-headed gull was recorded on all survey dates. In November, a group of three were observed flying over the Site, whilst a group of 11 were observed loafing beyond the Site in the wider Rathcoole Park. In December, a group of 42 were observed loafing beyond the Site in the wider Rathcoole Park, whilst one was recorded loafing within the Site. Similarly, in January a group of 11 were observed loafing beyond the Site in the wider Rathcoole Park, whilst one was recorded feeding within the Site. In February, a group of 36 were observed loafing/roosting within the Site.

Kestrel was only recorded in November, flying over the centre of the Site across the area of grassland and scrub. The Site contains suitable foraging habitat for this species, though it is worth noting that the species is only Red-listed in relation to breeding.

In general, bird behaviour noted during surveys largely comprised feeding, loafing, and calling, with flights noted from kestrel, snipe and black-headed gull. Birds were largely recorded individually during surveys, however, some species were noted in small groups. With the exception of the groups of black-headed gull (which were largely beyond the Site), peak counts of other species were relatively low, largely comprising individuals or groups of relatively small numbers.

The locations of birds recorded during the surveys is presented in Figures A6-6a-d. Records are coloured relevant to their BoCCI status.

Table 3: Summary of Wintering Bird Surveys

BTO Code	Common Name	Scientific Name	November Count	December Count	January Count	February Count	Peak Count	Conservation Status
B.	Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	1	0	0	0	1	
BF	Bullfinch	*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*	5	0	0	0	5	
BH	Black-headed gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	14	43	12	36	42	Amber listed (breeding and wintering)
GS	Great spotted woodpecker	*Dendrocopos major*	1	0	0	0	1	
HC	Hooded crow	*Corvus cornix*	0	0	3	0	3	
K.	Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	1	0	0	0	1	Red-listed (breeding only)
MA	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	5	0	2	0	5	Amber listed (breeding and wintering)
R.	Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*	4	0	0	0	4	
RO	Rook	*Corvus frugilegus*	3	0	0	0	3	
SN	Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*	1	0	0	1	1	Red-listed (wintering)
WP	Woodpigeon	*Columba palumbus*	3	0	0	0	3	
WR	Wren	*Troglodytes troglodytes*	1	0	0	0	1	

5. Summary

The Site contains habitats of use to a variety of breeding and non-breeding wintering bird species, particularly woodland and scrub habitats, which provide ample cover and foraging opportunities. Open grassland also provides an additional foraging opportunity, especially to flocking birds. The Site is also well connected to further suitable habitats for birds in the wider area, with further woodland to the west, agricultural/pastoral lands to the south, and the wider Rathcoole Park to the north.

During the breeding bird surveys, a total of 20 bird species were recorded with similar numbers of species and individuals recorded across both surveys. Birds were recorded across most of the Site, and were observed using the mosaic of woodland, scrub, and open grassland habitats, which provide suitable habitat for nesting and foraging. Four Amber-listed species for breeding (goldcrest, starling, swallow and willow warbler) were recorded during the surveys. Other species recorded, such as corvids (e.g. jackdaw, magpie), tits (e.g. long-tailed tit, blue tit), finches (e.g. bullfinch, chaffinch) are not particularly notable and are generally widespread species that are common of these habitat types.

Birds were generally observed individually, or as groups of relatively low numbers, with behaviours observed including feeding, calling, and song, with occasional flights noted. No bird nests or confirmed evidence of breeding was observed during the breeding bird surveys, however several species, such as willow warbler, goldcrest, and starling, displayed behaviours that may indicate breeding within or close to the Site. Woodland, scrub, and hedgerow habitats onsite provide good cover and foraging opportunities for the species. These species are generally common and widespread across Ireland.

The 2025 bird assemblage recorded is similar to that recorded during the previous breeding bird survey in May 2020, although fewer species overall were recorded in 2025. For example, species such as buzzard *Buteo buteo*, collared dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, grey heron *Ardea cinerea*, meadow pipit and house sparrow were recorded in 2020, but not in 2025.

During the non-breeding wintering bird surveys, a total of 12 bird species were recorded. November saw the highest number of species (11 species, 39 individuals), however numbers of species were much reduced across December (one species,43 individuals), January (three species, 17 individuals), and February (two species, 37 individuals). One Red-listed species for wintering (snipe) and two Amber-listed species for wintering (and also breeding; black-headed gull and mallard) were recorded. In addition, kestrel, a Red-listed species for breeding was also observed. Other species recorded, such as corvids, blackbird, and robin, are not particularly notable and are generally common of these habitat types.

With the exception of black-headed gulls, the majority of birds were recorded as individuals, or otherwise in small groups of relatively low numbers. Birds were observed within woodland and grassland, where loafing and feeding behaviours were largely recorded, along with several flights over the Site by black-headed gull and kestrel. In terms of important species noted, snipe, a Red-listed species, was only recorded on two occasions, both individual sightings within the alluvial woodland adjacent to the Site to the west. This was incidentally the same general location as in previous surveys (AECOM, 2023). There is potential for snipe to occur in larger numbers within the further area of alluvial woodland adjacent west of the Site. Mallard, an Amber-listed species, was only recorded in the wider Rathcoole Park adjacent to the Site. The habitats within the Site are suboptimal for mallard. Black-headed gull was recorded in relatively large groups primarily in the wider Rathcoole Park outside the Site, though were occasionally recorded loafing within grassland within the Site. Gulls are a general component of bird assemblages within suburban-rural areas, and their presence is not particularly notable, nor are the habitats within and surrounding the Site particularly important for the black-headed gull, which are habitat generalists. Kestrel was only recorded once in November, flying over the centre of the Site. Whilst only Red-listed for breeding, nonetheless the habitats onsite provide suitable hunting opportunities for kestrel.

The wintering bird results are largely comparable to previous surveys in terms of species identified. The 2025/26 surveys recorded several species which were not previously recorded within the Site (for example goldcrest, great-spotted woodpecker, and kestrel), however, there was an absence of species previously recorded in 2023, such as coot, coal tit *Periparus ater*, great tit *Parus major*, herring gull, reed bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*, and, notably, redwing (AECOM, 2023).

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