TOBIN

BNRG – Ballycunneen Solar and Battery Energy Storage System Project
Ornithology Survey Report - February 2025 to January 2026

From:	Michael O'Clery
Ref:	12099
Re:	**South Galway Solar Farm Ornithological Surveys**

Introduction

Goldcrest Environmental were appointed by TOBIN to carry out transect walkover bird surveys at the proposed BNRG Ballycunneen Solar and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Project (hereafter referred to as the proposed project site), located at south and west of Shannon, County Clare.

The surveys were undertaken monthly from February 2025 to January 2026 to capture breeding and wintering bird survey period.

This report provides a February to January 2026 survey results.

Given the wide spatial spread and complexity of the site, and its likely ecological sensitivity due to it being adjacent to the *River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries Special Protection Area* [Site Code: 004077], the primary objectives of the monthly transect walkover were to:

1. Establish suitable transect routes for monthly ecological monitoring
2. Assess and report on the likely usage of lands by bird species.
3. Identify key areas of ecological interest.

Methodology

Guidance

Bird transect surveys were undertaken using the following guidance:

- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (2017) '*Recommended Bird Survey Methods to Inform Impact Assessments of Onshore Wind Farms'.*
- Hardy, J., Crick, H., Wernham, C., Riley, H., Etheridge, B., Thompson, D. (2013). *Raptors: A Field Guide for Surveys and Monitoring*.
- Gilbert, G Stanbury A., Lewis, L. (2021). *Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020-2026*. Irish Birds 9: 523-544.

Survey Area

The study area comprises the proposed project site and key habitats in neighbouring areas of the proposed project boundary as per the Scottish Natural Heritage guidelines (SNH, 2017).

Survey Methodology

Transect Surveys

Transect surveys were also undertaken within the proposed project site. A transect survey follows a defined linear route through a specific area. To achieve maximum coverage of suitable habitat, 4 transect routes were needed for the proposed project site. These transects covered a large and representative portion of the 4 survey areas.

The transect surveys were walked at a standard walking speed. Notes on aural and visual registrations of bird species were recorded during field surveys. Visual registrations were recorded with the aid of binoculars (e.g., 8 x 42) and, where necessary, with the aid of a telescope (e.g., 20-45 x 60 scope). The 4 survey areas are shown below.

Figure 0.1: Site Location

The transect routes (in white) for each of the 4 survey areas bordered in red) are shown in Figure 1.2 below.

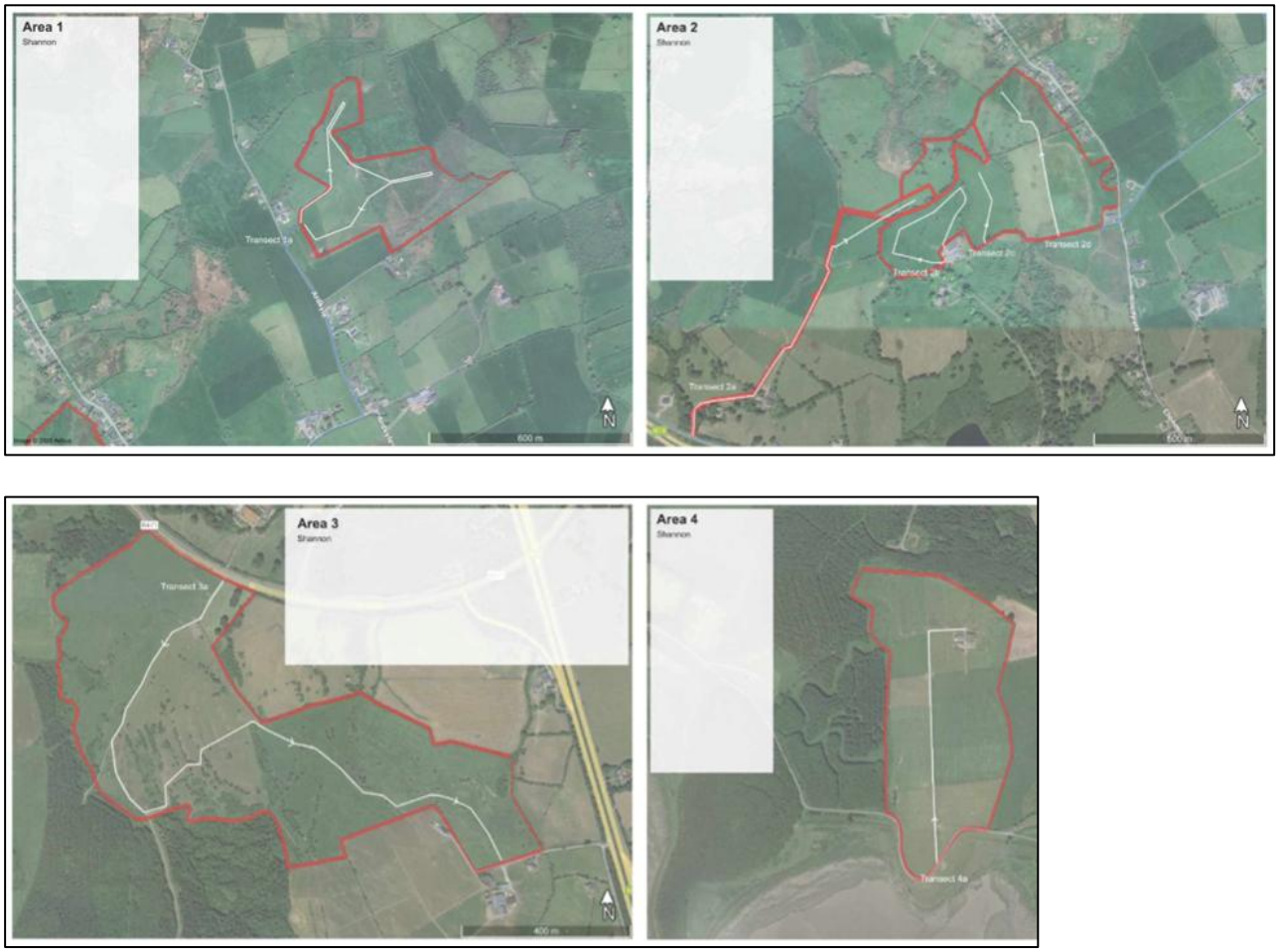

Figure 0.2: Transect Routes

Transect Survey Results

5th February 2025
Area 1: Kestrel x1.
Area 2: No target species recorded.
Area 3 Little Egret x1; Lesser Black-backed Gull x1; Herring Gull x1; Buzzard x1.
Area 4: Curlew x51.

12th March 2025
Area 1: Buzzard x1; Snipe x1.
Area 2: Buzzard x2.
Area 3: Buzzard x1.
Area 4: No target species recorded.

5th April 2025
Area 1: No target species recorded.
Area 2: Buzzard x2; Grey Heron x1; Buzzard x1.
Area 3: Kestrel x1.
Area 4: No target species recorded.

5th May 2025
Area 1: No target species recorded.
Area 2: Buzzard x1.
Area 3: No target species recorded.
Area 4: Kestrel x1.

4th June 2025
Area 1: Lesser Black-backed Gull x2.
Area 2: Buzzard x2, Sparrowhawk x1
Area 3: Lesser Black-backed Gull x1
Area 4: No target species recorded.

18th July 2025
Area 1: No target species recorded.
Area 2: Buzzard x2.
Area 3 Lesser Black-backed Gull x1.
Area 4: Buzzard x1.

1st August 2025
Area 1: Buzzard x1.
Area 2: Buzzard x2. Lesser Black-backed Gull x1.
Area 3: No target species recorded.
Area 4: No target species recorded.

8th September 2025
Area 1: Lesser Black-backed Gull x2.
Area 2: No target species recorded.
Area 3: Buzzard x1, and Lesser Black-backed Gull x5.
Area 4: No target species recorded.

21st October 2025
Area 1: Mallard x2.
Area 2: Buzzard x2. Herring Gull x3.
Area 3: Buzzard x1. Lesser Black-backed Gull x1. Grey Heron x1.
Area 4: No target species recorded.

5th November 2025
Area 1: Lesser Black-backed Gull x2, Snipe x1.
Area 2: No Target Species recorded.
Area 3: Herring Gull x1, Grey Heron x1.
Area 4: Herring Gull x16, Curlew x10, Common Gull x22, Black-headed Gull x110, Lesser Black-backed Gull x4.

30th December 2025
Area 1: No Target Species recorded.
Area 2: No Target Species recorded.
Area 3: Black-headed Gull x1.
Area 4: Black-headed Gull x3

31st January 2026
Area 1: No Target Species recorded.
Area 2: Buzzard x2, Sparrowhawk x1.
Area 3: Buzzard x1, Snipe x1.
Area 4: Small mixed flock feeding on field comprising Black-headed Gull x7, Lesser Black-backed Gull x2, and Oystercatcher x5.

Conclusion

The transect surveys undertaken in February 2025 identified 6 sightings of 56 wintering target species within the proposed project site. The most significant sighting was of a flock of 51 Curlew feeding on short grassland at the SE side of Area 4. This flock moved after approximately ten minute to land east of Area 4.

The transect surveys undertaken in March 2025 identified 5 sightings of 2 wintering target species within the proposed project site.

The transect surveys undertaken in April 2025 identified 5 sightings of 4 target species within the proposed project site.

The transect surveys undertaken in May 2025 identified 2 sightings of 2 target species within the proposed project site.

The transect surveys undertaken in June 2025 identified 4 sightings of 6 target species within the proposed project site. All 6 sightings were of birds in flight, with none recorded on the ground in any of the survey areas.

The transect surveys undertaken in July 2025 identified 4 sightings of 4 target species within the proposed project site. All 4 sightings were of birds in flight, with none recorded on the ground in any of the survey areas.

The transect surveys undertaken in August 2025 identified 4 sightings of 4 target species within the proposed project site. All 4 sightings were of birds in flight, with none recorded on the ground in any of the survey areas.

The transect surveys undertaken in September 2025 identified 4 sightings of 8 target species within the proposed project site. Two sightings were of birds in flight, with one sighting of x2 Lesser Black-backed Gulls feeding on the ground, in Area 1 and x1 Buzzard perched by a gate.

The transect surveys undertaken in October 2025 identified 7 sightings of 10 target species within the proposed project site. All 10 sightings were of birds in flight, with x3 Herring Gulls recorded as feeding on field, in Area 2.

The transect surveys undertaken in November 2025 identified 9 sightings of 166 target species within the proposed project site. A large mixed flock feeding on a field in Area 4 accounted for the bulk of the sightings of 16 Herring Gulls, 10 Curlew, 22 Common Gulls, 110 Black-headed Gulls and 4 Lesser Black-headed Gull. The remaining sightings were of 4 individuals (a single Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Herring Gull, Grey Heron and Snipe), 3 of which were in flight, and 1 (a single Snipe flushed during the transect) on the ground.

The transect surveys undertaken in December 2025 identified 2 sightings of 1 target species Black-headed Gulls x3 feeding in a field in Area 4 and a single and a single Black-headed Gull flying above Area 3.

The transect surveys undertaken in January 2026 identified 7 sightings of 19 target species within the proposed project site. 3 of 7 sightings were of birds in flight (Buzzard x3 and Sparrowhawk) with the remaining four (Black-headed Gulls x7, Lesser Black-backed Gull x2, Snipe x1 flushed, and Oystercatcher x5) feeding on fields.

References

Directorate-General for Environment (European Commission), 2019, The birds directive: 40 years of conserving our shared natural heritage, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Hardy, J., Crick, H., Wernham, C., Riley, H., Etheridge, B., Thompson, D. (2013). Raptors: A Field Guide for Surveys and Monitoring.

SNH (2017) Recommended bird survey methods to inform impact assessment of onshore wind farms.

Gilbert, G Stanbury A., Lewis, L. (2021). Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020-2026. Irish Birds 9: 523-544.