

## Appendix 6.2 Wintering Bird Survey

# Report on The Winter Birds Present on Lands at Woodbrook, Dublin Road, Cork Great, Co Dublin.

Compiled by John Fox Dip field ecology.

December 2018 to March 2019.



Fig 1. View of Woodbrook Lands looking to the West and St James Church. Photo by J Fox.

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## Summary:

Between 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018, and 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019, four day-time visits were made to the Woodbrook Lands, Dublin Road, Cork Great, Co Dublin. Visits were generally done in the morning when birds are most active and for a duration of between three and four hours.

During each visit the lands were observed from various vantage points and were walked. All birds detected were recorded on field sheets. Information regarding the present or absence of Light Bellied Brent Geese and any other waterbirds was gathered. Had flocks of Light-bellied Geese been found it was intended to record their numbers, activities, whether juvenile or adults were present, together with any events that might cause disturbance to the birds present. Other waterbirds found were counted and their numbers, behaviour and location recorded

No Light-bellied Brent were observed on the lands during any of the survey periods and none of their droppings were found there either. Small numbers of foraging waterbirds were found on the lands on two occasions only. 31 other bird species were recorded as present on the lands 3 of which are red listed and 4 amber listed by Birdwatch Ireland due to declining numbers. Many of the species found on the lands will probably breed on the land later in the year. One additional species was seen flying over the lands, also red listed.

## Introduction:

Monitoring of the lands at Woodbrook Lands, Dublin Road, Cork Great, Co Dublin was commissioned by Brady Shipman Martin, Canal House, Canal Road, Dublin 6.

Monitoring was undertaken specifically to identify, whether Light-bellied Brent Geese were using the lands as an inland feeding area and to identify if other waterbirds were using the lands as a foraging or roosting area. All additional bird species found on the lands were also identified where possible.

The site is located to the north of Bray and is to the south of Shankhill, It is bounded on the west by the R119 Dublin Rd and a church grounds and to the north and west by Shanganagh Cemetry. It is bounded to the south by a small area of woodland an open field and a carparking area and to the east by Woodbrook Golf Club lands.

The lands can be entered from the Woodbrook Golf Club car parking area. The lands are approximately 17km from Dublin City centre, are approximately 500m from Shankhill Beach and the Irish sea. The Dalkey Island SPA (Site Code 004172) is approximately 5.5km to the north. The South Dublin Bay and River Tolka SPA (Site Code 004024) and South Dublin Bay SAC (Site Code 00201) are approximately 9km to the north. The Murrough SPA (Site Code 004186) is approximately 19km to the South.

**The Dalkey Island SPA (Site Code 004172)** encompasses Dalkey Island, Lamb Island and Maiden Rock, the intervening rocks and reefs, and the surrounding sea to a distance of 200 m. it gets its designation from 3 species of birds, listed below. (NPWS 2018)

- Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii*
- Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
- Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

**South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary SPA (Site Code 4024)** encompasses the intertidal area of the Tolka estuary and Sandymount strand. The features of interest for which it gets its designation include 13 species of birds, listed below, together with its wetlands. (NPWS 2018).

- Light Bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicula hrota*)
- Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)
- Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)
- Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)
- Knot. (*Calidris canutus*)
- Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)
- Dunlin (*Caladris alpine*)
- Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)
- Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*)
- Black-headed Gull (*Croicocephalus ridibundus*)
- Roseate Tern. (*Sterna dougallii*)
- Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)
- Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)

**The Murrugh SPA (Site Code 004186)** encompasses a coastal wetland complex that stretches for 13 km from Kilcoole Station, east of Kilcoole village in the north, to Wicklow town in the south, and extends inland for up to one kilometre. The site includes an area of marine water to a distance of 200 m from low water mark. There is a railway on top of the beach and much agricultural reclamation of the marshes/saltmarshes. The features of interest for which it gets its designation include 8 species of birds, listed below, together with its wetlands. (NPWS 2018).

- Red-throated Diver (*Gavia stellate*)
- Greylag Goose (*Anser answer*)
- Light-bellied Brent Goose (*Branta bernicla hrota*)
- Wigeon (*Anas Penelope*)
- Teal (*Anas crecca*)
- Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)
- Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)
- Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*)

Birdwatch Ireland do not provide specific bird counts for Dalkey Island SPA, South Dublin Bay and River Tolka Estuary or The Murragh SPAs, but do provide counts for Dublin bay as a whole. From these counts Dublin Bay is recognised as of international importance for waterbirds as it supports over 20,000 individual birds. (BWI 2018). Most recent figures suggest that more than 34,000 waterbirds have been recorded wintering in the bay. (Nairn et al 2017). There are also internationally important populations of four species of waterbird in Dublin Bay, that is, Dublin Bay holds more than 1% of the world population of those four species. The internationally important species are, Light-bellied Brent Goose, (*Branta bernicula hrota*); Black-tailed Godwit, (*Limosa limosa*); Bar-tailed Godwit, (*Limosa lapponica*); and Knot (*Calidris canutus*). (Bowland & Crowe 2012).

#### **Light-bellied Brent Goose:**

The whole Light-bellied Brent Goose population winters almost entirely in Ireland, with small numbers in parts of Britain and France. They are a winter migrant from high-Arctic Canada. Most occur in Ireland between October and April. (BWI 2018).

Their Conservation Concern is that they are Amber-listed, as the majority winter at less than ten sites. The Irish population is also internationally significant, another amber listing criterion. The European population has been evaluated as Vulnerable as several important populations have declined. (BWI 2018).

Light-bellied goose is a small dark goose, with a black head, neck and breast, and dark-brown upperparts and pale underparts. Almost whitish flanks, and small white crescent on the upperparts of the neck visible at close range. (BWI 2018).

During the winter, they feed mostly on eel-grass, which grows on muddy estuaries, and also on grasslands. They usually move to grassland when food supplies have been depleted at estuarine sites. (BWI 2018).

They breed in small, loose colonies by coastal tundra, with pools and small inlets. (BWI 2018).

They are mostly found on coastal estuaries during the autumn and early winter, and on grasslands from mid-winter, until departure for the breeding grounds begins in late April. (BWI 2018).

Highest numbers (c. 30,000) are seen at Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland in October, where most congregate on arrival. Thereafter, they move to other estuarine sites. Lough Foyle in County Derry, Dublin Bay in County Dublin, Tralee Bay, Lough Gill & Akeragh Lough in County Kerry, Rogerstown Estuary in County Dublin, Wexford Harbour & Slobs in County Wexford are other well-used sites. (BWI 2018).

## **Study Area:**

The development lands are circa 19Ha in area and are outlined in red at Fig 1. There is an entrance gate to the land from the cemetery road that bounds the north of the site. Access however was gained for the purposes of the survey work from the southern boundary. The lands rise slightly to the north east of the site. Much of the land has been in tillage recently which is evidenced by the presence of bare earth and the stubble remains of the last crop harvested.

There are several mature hedgerows that bound the lands and others that divide the lands into smaller fields. These hedgerows contain a mixture of plant species including many mature trees.

One additional areas of land also forms part of the study area but is not part of the development lands described above. These lands are outlined yellow on the attached aerial photograph at fig 1. This area of approximately 2.8Ha is part of the Woodbrook Golf Course. It comprises mostly areas of amenity grassland typical of golf courses including areas of rough, fairways, greens and sand filled bunkers. There is also a small area of mixed woodland in the north west corner which contains a badger set. There are hedgerows along the north and eastern boundaries while the southern boundary is undefined and is open to other parts of the golf course.

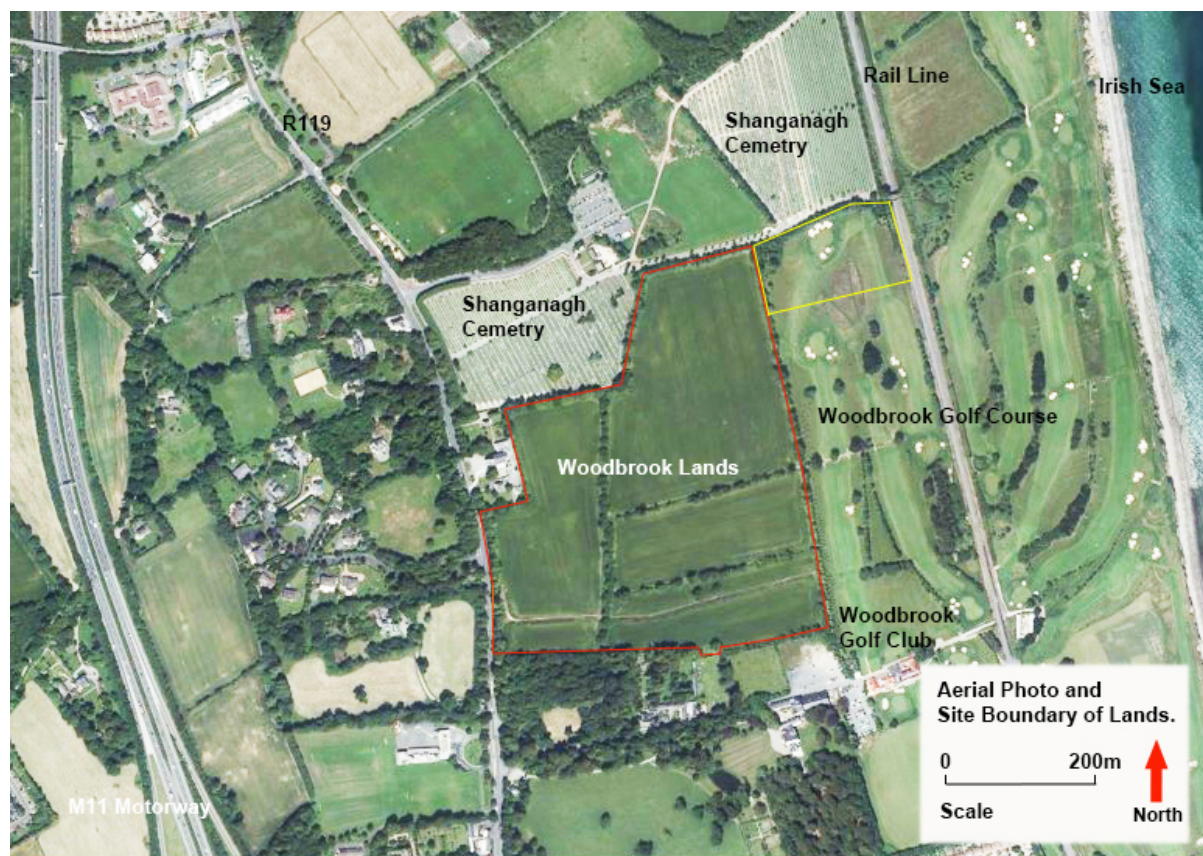


Fig 2. Woodbrook Lands, Aerial Photo.

## Methodology:

Work commenced on site on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018 and continued until 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019. Each survey period was for a minimum of three to four hours. A total of 4 visits were made during the work period.

During each visit the Woodbrook lands were walked extensively. All fields were entered and much of the ground was covered by walking up and down each field several times at different locations. All hedgerows and boundaries were also walked. The secondary area of Woodbrook Golf Course was also walked in a similar manner during each of three of the visits. During each visit all birds present on the land or seen close to the lands were identified where possible and their locations noted.

Observations were made primarily with the naked eye and through 42x10 binoculars. An 80x20-60 telescope was also used on several occasions. The songs and calls of birds were also used to identify various species and their locations on the lands.

The lands were also observed from various vantage points using a telescope to identify more distant birds without disturbing them.

All water birds seen on the land were identified, counted and their behaviour noted.

Night time visits were not undertaken to the lands as Light-bellied Brent are not known to feed on inland sites after dark.

The Woodbrook lands were walked during each of the 4 visits and were examined for the presence of geese dropping which would indicate that geese had been present recently. Walkers and golfers

that were encountered on the lands or nearby were also questioned regarding any geese sightings they may have had on the lands.

## Results:

Between 20<sup>th</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019, four visits of between 3 and 4 hours were made to the lands. No Light-bellied Brent Geese were observed on the Woodbrook Lands during any of those visits. No evidence in the form of geese droppings were found either to suggest that geese might have been present recently. Geese were neither heard or seen in flight at any time during the visits.

During the first visit on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018 a single lapwing was observed foraging on the lands and during the last visit on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019 a flock of 25 Curlew was observed also foraging on the lands. No other waterbirds were observed on the lands during these or any of the other visits.

A few Herring Gulls were seen flying over the site during each visit.

Local walkers and golfers that were asked about geese sightings on the lands suggested that geese do not use the lands as they said that they had never seen any geese on the lands.

The other species of birds recorded on or over the lands are as follows.

• Common Buzzard	<i>(Buteo buteo).</i>	Green listed
• Sparrowhawk	<i>(Accipiter nisus)</i>	Green listed
• Lapwing	<i>(Vanellus vanellus)</i>	Red listed
• Curlew	<i>(Numenius arquata)</i>	Red listed
• Herring Gull	<i>(Larus Argentatus)</i>	Red listed
• Stock Dove	<i>(Columba oenas)</i>	Amber listed
• Wood Pigeon	<i>(Columba palumbus)</i>	Green listed
• Skylark	<i>(Alauda arvensis)</i>	Amber listed
• Wren	<i>(Trogladytes trogladytes)</i>	Green listed
• Dunnock	<i>(Prunella modularis)</i>	Green listed
• Robin	<i>(Erithacus rubecula)</i>	Green listed
• Song Thrush	<i>(Turdus philomelos)</i>	Green listed
• Mistle Thrush	<i>(Turdus pilaris)</i>	Green listed
• Blackbird	<i>(Turdus merula)</i>	Green listed
• Goldcrest	<i>(Regulus regulus)</i>	Green listed
• Great Tit	<i>(Parus major)</i>	Green listed
• Blue Tit	<i>(Parus Caeruleus)</i>	Green listed
• Coal Tit	<i>(Parus ater)</i>	Green listed
• Magpie	<i>(Pica pica)</i>	Green listed
• Jay	<i>(Garrulus glandarius)</i>	Green listed
• Jackdaw	<i>(Corvus monedula)</i>	Green listed
• Rook	<i>(Corvus frugilegus)</i>	Green listed
• Hooded Crow	<i>(Corvus corone cornix)</i>	Green listed
• Raven	<i>(Corvus corax)</i>	Green listed
• Starling	<i>(Sturnus vulgaris)</i>	Amber listed
• Chaffinch	<i>(Fringilla coelebs)</i>	Green listed
• Linnet	<i>(Carduelis cannabina)</i>	Amber listed
• Goldfinch	<i>(Carduelis carduelis)</i>	Green listed

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|----------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| • Bullfinch    | ( <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i> )    | Green listed |
| • Greenfinch   | ( <i>Curdualis chloris</i> )    | Green listed |
| • Reed Bunting | ( <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i> ) | Green listed |
| • Yellowhammer | ( <i>Emberiza citrinella</i> )  | Red listed   |



Fig 3. Male Reed Bunting seen on the Woodbrook Lands. Photo J Fox.

## Discussion:

The data gathered from 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018 to 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019 indicates that Light-bellied Brent Geese did not use the Woodbrook lands to graze during that period. No Light-bellied Brent Geese were seen on the lands or in flight at any time over or close to the lands during the survey period. No geese droppings were found on the lands either.

Light bellied Brent Geese tend to forage on well-maintained amenity grassland such as is commonly found on football playing pitches, golf courses, urban parks and other urban green areas. (Benson 2009). These lands tend to be flat or gently sloping have smooth surfaces and are not tightly enclosed by tall trees or other tall objects.

The Woodbrook development lands in their current state are not suitable for Light-bellied Brent to graze because there is no well-maintained amenity grassland within its boundaries. The section of Woodbrook Golf Course which did form part of the survey area however could be suitable for Brent to graze. That said no Brent were seen on or close to these lands and no Brent droppings were found there either.





Fig 4. Looking north within the Woodbrook Lands showing typical habitat present. Photo J Fox.

One Lapwing and a flock of 25 Curlew were seen on the lands on one occasion each, which confirms that some waterbirds do forage on the development lands.

### **Conclusion:**

The observations undertaken by the author to date indicate that no Light-bellied Brent Geese have been using the Woodbrook lands during the survey period. It is the author's further belief that the development lands, in their current state are not suitable for grazing Light-bellied Geese. Their unsuitability is due to the nature of the habitats present within the lands. That is primarily, stubble and unmaintained improved grassland.

Small numbers of waterbirds do use the development lands. Two species were identified Curlew and Lapwing both of which are Red listed as species of highest concern by Birdwatch Ireland. (BWI 2018) However their numbers and frequency of occurrence on the lands was low.

Neither of the waterbird species found on the lands are included in the bird species lists for which the nearby SPAs get their designations.

31 additional species of bird were identified on the development lands of which three are red listed and four are amber listed.

## References:

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