COILLTE
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Breeding Cormorant Survey

[redacted]

[redacted]

Contents

1. Background

This survey aims to determine the presence / absence of breeding Cormorant at a proposed clearfell forest site located at [redacted] Co. Tipperary, located approximately [redacted] Figure 1 below. The survey was carried out in respect of the potential presence of breeding Cormorant within or adjacent to the proposed clearfell project, as suggested in the Appropriate Assessment carried out for this project which noted potentially suitable habitat for breeding Cormorant adjacent to the project site.

Figure 1 Location of project site in relation to SPA.

2. Methodology

Desk Review

A desk review of available information on breeding Cormorant of Lough Derg SPA was carried out. Consultation also took place with ornithologist Alan Lauder of ALC*nature*. Aerial maps of the project site and surrounding area were examined to assess the habitat suitability within and adjacent to the project site and to identify any features or areas of interest on the project site that may provide suitable nesting habitat for Cormorant.

Site survey

The site was surveyed on 13/04/2023 in clear weather conditions. Zeiss Terra ED 8x42 binoculars were used for the survey as well as a Nikon Coolpix P1000 camera.

A 2 hour VP (Vantage Point) watch was carried out from the north-west of the project site (see location in Figure 1 above) to observe any Cormorants flying between [redacted] and the project area.

A walk-over survey of the project site was also carried out to determine if the site was occupied by Cormorant. Transects spaced at approximately 50m intervals were walked through the project area and trees, and the woodland floor below the trees, checked for any signs of Cormorant nests or guano. Any features / areas of interest which were identified from the desk review was also inspected further on the ground.

Other notable species were recorded.

3. Results

Desk review

Cormorants tend to nest on sea cliffs and rocky islands but in some cases use trees or the ground in inland areas, typically on lake islands, to nest. They are a colonial nester with colonies in Ireland normally ranging from 10-100 pairs (Tierney *et al*. 2011). Cormorant is a designated SCI (Special Conservation Interest) of [redacted] where the islands of the lake support a nationally important breeding population (NPWS, 2014 and Cummins *et al*., 2019). The project area is located approximately [redacted].

From the desk based assessment of the site and the surrounding area the project area is not considered to provide optimal habitat for Cormorant. The project area is approximately [redacted]. The intervening area between the project site and the SPA consists of agricultural land as well as roads and houses situated adjacent to the project site. Additionally, there are SPA colonies associated with the islands on [redacted]. The nearest islands to the project area are at a distance of >1.5km from the project area, and the nearest nesting cormorant sites are likely further.

Published disturbance set-back distances for nesting Cormorant species range from 40m to 750m (Chatwin *et al.* 2013 and Madden, 2020). Several cormorant colonies are notable in Ireland within close proximity of significant disturbance stimuli (e.g <20m at Bray Head, <200m at Shannon tunnel, Limerick, boat proximity to Lough Derg colonies regularly within 50m). Thus the project area is well beyond even the most conservative setback distances.

The desk based review of the project area highlighted features of interest to be assessed further on the ground during the site survey, this included a section of broadleaf trees adjacent the project site at the north-west and a number of steep drops or excavated sections which appeared to be old gravel/borrow pits.

Site survey

No Cormorants were observed using the project area during this survey. There were 4 Cormorants observed on the lake during the VP watch, which were over 1.5km from the project site at the western side of [redacted].

The steep excavated sections identified in the desk review, were found to be vegetated and not flooded, i.e. did not provide any waterbodies suitable to support Cormorant. No Cormorant nests or evidence of presence were found within the project site or within the adjoining broadleaf section at the north-west of the project site.

A range of common woodland birds were noted during the survey, including: Hooded crow, Raven, Woodpigeon, Wren, Magpie, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Willow Warbler, Robin, Blackbird, Mistle Thrush.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

There is no evidence of breeding Cormorants on or in the immediate vicinity of the project area. The site and the immediate surrounds do not provide optimal habitat for breeding Cormorant. More suitable habitat and nesting opportunities are available and being occupied by the species within the SPA on the main lake waterbody and these lie at considerable distance from the project area.

In the AAD attached to the granted felling licence [redacted]) for this clearfell operation, it is specified that as a mitigation measure for the protection of breeding Cormorant associated with the nearby [redacted] works on this project site should not be undertaken during the breeding period. However, this survey confirms that the proposed project area and adjoining broadleaf trees are not used by breeding Cormorant and that the nearest cormorants are well in excess of suitable set-back distances. Therefore, on the basis of these findings it is recommended that operations should proceed on this site during the summer period when weather and ground conditions are ideal for the proposed works.

5. References

Chatwin, T.A. et al. (2013) Set-back Distances to Protect Nesting and Roosting Seabirds off Vancouver Island from Boat Disturbance. *Waterbirds: The International Journal of Waterbird Biology* 36 (1) pp. 43-52

Cummins, S., Lauder, C., Lauder, A. & Tierney, T. D. (2019) The Status of Ireland's Breeding Seabirds: Birds Directive Article 12 Reporting 2013 – 2018. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 114. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Ireland. IWM114.pdf (npws.ie)

Madden, B., (2020) Guidance on disturbance to birds During forestry operations (felling and reforestation) – Report to Coíllte from BioSphere Environmental Services.

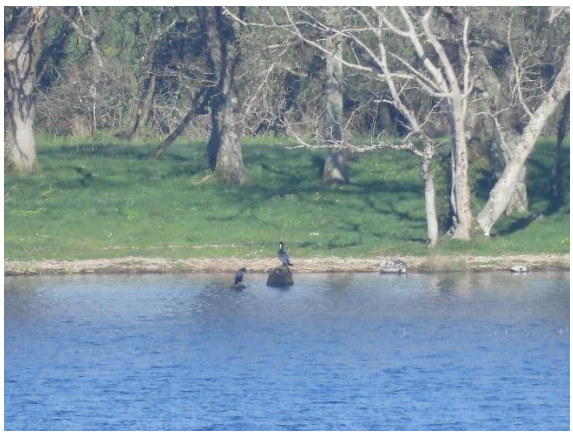
NPWS (2014). Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA (004058) Site Synopsis. https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/synopsis/SY004058.pdf

Tierney, N., Lusby, J., & Lauder, A. (2011) A preliminary assessment of the potential impacts of Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo predation on salmonids in four selected river systems. A Report Commissioned by Inland Fisheries Ireland and funded by the Salmon Conservation Fund http://www.slaneyrivertrust.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Cormorant-Study.pdf

6. Photos

Broadleaf trees at the NW of the project area and alongside the adjacent public road.

Agricultural land occupying the area between [redacted] and the project area.



Two Cormorants observed at the opposite side of [redacted] (>1.5km away) during the VP survey.