

# St George's Barracks

## Winter Bird Survey

May 2019

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Report Ref: DFA19029V2

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 In November 2016, the Government announced through 'A Better Defence Estate', a commitment to invest in a more efficient built military estate that will reduce in size by thirty per cent by 2040. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is required to maximise value through the disposal of sites and has a target to provide land for 55,000 dwellings this Parliament. Within the November announcement it was confirmed that St George's Barracks would be surplus to operational requirements and programmed for disposal in 2020.
- 1.1.2 In recognition of this, Rutland County Council (RCC) and the MOD (Defence Infrastructure Organisation - DIO) have agreed a Memorandum of Understanding that builds upon their willingness to jointly explore the opportunities for the future of the St George's Barracks site post 2020/21 and an appetite to work together in a new and innovative way to maximise Government growth and efficiency objectives for the site. There are currently proposals to re-develop part of the Site. A masterplanning exercise is currently being undertaken, exploring several potential re-development proposals for the Site.
- 1.1.3 Rutland Water, which holds the multiple designation of Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar Site and Site of Species Scientific Interest (SSSI), lies approximately 450m to the north of the Site at its closeted point. Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 there is a duty to ensure that there is no likely significant impact upon a SPA, or its qualifying features, as part of a plan or project. Although there would be no direct impact upon the SPA as a result of a re-development of St George's Barracks, it is possible that some of the qualifying features of the SPA utilise the grassland areas within the airfield and golf course that form part of the Barracks. Hence there is a requirement to explore whether any of the qualifying bird species utilise the Site. After initial discussions with Natural England, it was deemed appropriate to undertake a winter bird survey across the former North Luffenham airfield and adjoining North Luffenham Golf Course, which lie contiguous with the eastern boundary of St George's Barracks, herein referred to as the 'Site', to assess whether any of the qualifying features of the SPA are present in significant numbers and, if so, evaluate any potential impact upon the SPA and its qualifying features.
- 1.1.4 The following report, therefore, presents the methodology and results of a winter survey undertaken across the Site during the period September 2018 to March 2019. The survey concentrated on the presence, or otherwise, of the qualifying species of the SPA, although all bird species encountered were noted.

## 2 RUTLAND WATER

### 2.1 Rutland Water Special Protection Area

2.1.1 Rutland Water has been designated a Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site as it regularly holds internationally significant population of several over wintering waterfowl species (Table 1), as well as holding an internationally important assemblage of winter birds, with a five-year mean peak of over 25000 birds.

**Table 1.** Maximum number of waterfowl recorded at Rutland Water SPA (JNCC, 2015)

Species		Population
Common Name	Scientific name	
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	526
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	1420
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	4236
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	1156
Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	2289
Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	399
Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	285
Coot	<i>Fulca atra</i>	3962
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	48
Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	762

2.1.2 The 1555ha SPA, which was first designated in 2010, lies approximately 450m to the north of the St George's Barracks site. Whilst there would be no direct impact upon the SPA as a result of any potential re-development of the Barracks site, any project in the vicinity of the SPA must ensure that there is no likely significant effect on the integrity of the SPA or its qualifying features in line with Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

2.1.3 Due to the presence of extensive areas of semi-improved grassland in reasonable proximity to the SPA boundary, there is, at first inspection, a possibility that some of the qualifying features of the SPA (see Table 1) may use the airfield and/or golf course as grazing habitat, principally the *Anas* duck species and mute swan. A loss, or alteration, to the grassland areas would have an impact upon the SPA if it were to be shown that the grassland provide important foraging habitat for the bird species that underpin the SPA designation.

2.1.4 Therefore, there is a need to assess the level of usage, if any, of the airfield and golf course by any of the qualifying features of the SPA.

### 3 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Field Survey

- 3.1.1 A winter bird survey was undertaken across the North Luffenham airfield and Golf Course between September 2018 and March 2019; two survey events were conducted in each month. The methodology was based on the transect route presented by Bibby *et al.* (2000). A surveyor walked a pre-determined transect route around the airfield; given the visibility of the target species, it was decided that the runway and taxiways would provide sufficient coverage of the grassland areas. Due to the nature of the habitats present, and the relative flatness of the airfield, it was not deemed necessary to attempt to calculate relative density of any species encountered using the distance measuring method; it was possible to count all individual birds within any flocks encountered.
- 3.1.2 The surveys were undertaken in the morning. As Rutland Water is not tidal, it was not necessary to time the surveys to coincide with any specific tide pattern.
- 3.1.3 Due to the numerous buildings within the Barracks themselves, the paucity of semi-natural vegetation and the high level of human activity, the Barracks were scoped out of the assessment.
- 3.1.4 Swarovski 10x42 EL WB binoculars and a Swarovski ATX 25-60 x 65 scope were used to assist in the survey as necessary.
- 3.1.5 The survey was conducted by Derek Finnie CEnv MCIEEM, Director of Derek Finnie Associates, who has over 30 years' experience conducting ornithological surveys.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Survey Results

4.1.1 The results of the field survey are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Maximum Count of Species within Luffenham Airfield.

Species	30/10/18	09/11/18	13/11/18	21/11/18	12/12/18	19/12/19	24/01/19	30/01/19	22/02/19	28/02/19	14/03/19	21/03/19
Blackbird	4	5	2	3	4	2	2	4	3	5	4	3
Bullfinch			2			1						
Carrion crow	16	3	12	17	18	2	15	6	14	3	12	7
Curlew											1	
Dunnock	6	5	6	6	3		4	7	5	6	3	4
Fieldfare	12	18	24	48	16	24	4	12	27	11	15	
Golden plover					2							
Goldfinch			18		12	10	7	11	12		6	
Great tit	7	8	8	9	7	6	10	12	14	5	9	6
Greenfinch	4	6	5	12	11	18	10	14	12	6	5	14
Jackdaw	12	26	18	4	21	15	7	31	15	11	15	9
Kestrel	1		1	1				1				
Linnet	4	6	21	27	5	17						
Long tailed tit	5	2		7	5	5	3		4	5	6	
Magpie	4	2	3	3	5	4	1		3	2	6	
Meadow pipit	14	16	6	12	21	12	12	14	18	6	11	7
Mistle thrush	2	2		4	2	1	2	2		1	2	
Red kite	2		1	1		1	2	3	1	1	2	
Red- legged partridge				2	2	2	2	2	4		2	
Redpoll	4	16		12	11		7	11	16	2		
Redwing	24	31	45	60	49	55	85	71	63	48	18	12
Robin	4	5	5	7	4	4	7	5	4	6	3	4
Sisken		12		16		15	11	21	17	14		
Skylark	6	8	7	12	16	12	14	8	11	14	12	8
Song thrush	4	6	5	5	7	4	5	6	4	1	5	4
Starling	42	68	84	27	31	63	71	54	20	37	16	22
Wren	8	12	6	11	7	11	15	12	7	7	8	15
Yellowhammer		16		17	15	12	14	19	21	7	5	

4.1.2 None of the qualifying species of the SPA was encountered throughout the survey. Golden plover and curlew are included when considering the overall winter assemblage of a SPA. However, given that only two and one individual birds were encountered during the survey respectively, and both were flying over, the airfield appears to make a negligible contribution to the overall winter assemblage of the SPA.

4.1.3 Overall, the wintering bird assemblage within the Ste showed moderate species richness, with moderate to good number of some species. Species associated with open grassland areas, such as skylark and meadow pipit, were recorded in good numbers, with maximum counts of 16 and 21 respectively.



- 4.1.4 The majority of the other species were more often encountered within, or in close proximity, to the hedgerow and scrub areas around the periphery of the airfield.
- 4.1.5 Very few of the individual birds encountered were associated with the Golf Course. This is likely to be due to the more intensely managed nature of the grassland areas, and the higher use of pesticides which is typical of golf courses, in conjunction with the increased level of human activity.
- 4.1.6 Skylark, fieldfare, redwing, song thrush, mistle thrush, linnet and yellowhammer are included on the Birds of Conservation Concern (Eaton *et al* 2015) Red List, although their inclusion is due to decline in breeding populations, not necessarily winter populations. Similarly, dunnoek, bullfinch, meadow pipit and kestrel are included on the Amber list.



## **5 DISCUSSION**

- 5.1.1 Although there are extensive grassland areas, principally within the airfield, their current management does not appear highly suitable for grazing ducks. This, combined with alternative areas of grassland much closer to Rutland Water, may explain why there is an absence of SPA species within the airfield.
- 5.1.2 Although the airfield is no longer operational, and has not been for some time, there is a relatively high level of irregular, but frequent, disturbance. The site is used, for example, for military training exercises and military dog exercising as well as by a paragliding club and model airplane club. This level of disturbance reduces the suitability of the site as feeding ground for winter ducks.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1.1 From the data obtained, it would appear that none of the qualifying species for the SPA designation utilise the St George's site. Hence the re-development of the Barracks, Golf Course or Airfield would not lead to a likely negative significant effect upon the SPA or its qualifying features through this pathway.



## REFERENCES

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