

Greylag Management at Victoria Park, Belfast

Summary Report for Management Agreement 2021-2023

Between Belfast City Airport & Belfast City Council

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Summary

- Aircraft strike by greylag remains at “medium risk”.
- Overall greylag observations on the airport runways and Victoria Park continues to fall but peaks remain during the breeding season and during autumn.
- Recently numbers of greylag at Victoria Park have increased.
- National numbers of naturalised (feral) greylag are increasing. (BTO Waterbirds in the UK 2021/22 WeBS Report online)
- Developments in other Belfast Parks are likely to increase unpredictability.
- Feeding by the public has been reduced (a key objective) however, grass pitches remain available as a food source.
- As greylag are a long-lived and mobile species, egg control - as a low-profile intervention - requires a long-term commitment.
- To ensure continuing efficacy and with agreement with BCC in 2023, the next licence to include June for late clutching.

George Best Belfast City Airport (BCA) Responsibilities

Aerodromes subject to the UK Civil Aviation Authority’s (CAA) national aerodrome licencing requirements use the guidance material presented in CAP772: Wildlife Hazard Management at Aerodromes (CAA 2017) to demonstrate a means of compliance to requirements stated in CAP 168: Licensing of Aerodromes (CAA 2019). The content of CAP772 is provided as information, specialist advice and supplementary guidance material in support of EC Regulation 139/2014 and associated (EASA) Acceptable Means of Compliance and Guidance Material.

All sites chosen for airfields have associated air safety risks due to local bird populations and their movements. The area occupied by the airfield will attract a range of bird species, depending on the habitat types present both on the airfield and nearby. On-airfield conditions will determine which species use the immediate areas around the runways and are carefully managed. Bird strike risks in the airspace above and the flightlines around the airfield are affected by the distribution of habitats on a broader scale. On-airfield, birds can be controlled by a range of methods including habitat management and disturbance. The measures employed at George Best Belfast City Airport (BCA) to control birds visiting the airfield are presented in the Wildlife Control Management Plan (WCMP). The plan is reviewed annually to include recommendations made in the annual Wildlife Hazard Assessment (WHA) and to incorporate new control methods as they become available.

Table 1. is extracted from BCA’s Wildlife Control Management Plan 2022/23 highlighting the continued “medium” risk status of greylag geese based on species probability x severity ratings. Table 2 and Figure 1. Illustrate recent annual and seasonal observations outlining a continuing decline in overall annual strike risk but with seasonal peaks in Spring and Autumn that may reduce if breeding reduces further.

Species	Total	5-year Frequency	Probability	Severity	Risk
Greylag goose	0	-	Very Low	Very High	Medium
Mallard	0	-	Very Low	High	Medium
Mute swan	0	-	Very Low	Very High	Medium
Shelduck	0	-	Very Low	High	Medium

Table 1. Wildfowl risk table extracted from BCA Wildlife Control Management Plan for 2022/23

Year	No. of individuals	No. of records
2014	2,426	179
2015	1,530	117
2016	5,786	234
2017	957	85
2018	318	49
2019	474	47
2020	503	34
2021	390	45
2022	209	50

Table 2 Annual airfield observations for greylag 2014-2022.

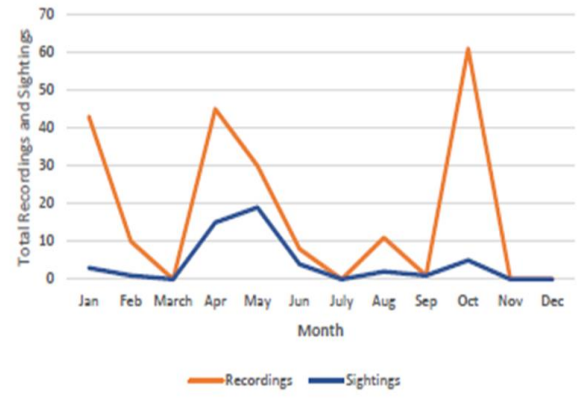


Figure 1. Monthly occurrence of airfield greylag sightings for 2022. (Extracted from BCA Wildlife Control Management Plan for 2022/23. Recordings = no. of individuals recorded; Sightings = no. of occasions encountered)

Greylag Management at Victoria Park

Egg control at Victoria park over the last licensed period averaged 68.3 eggs per year compared to 74.4 for the previous three-year period (2018-2020) with a corresponding drop in monthly average greylag count from 18.3 to 10.5. This continuing decline in numbers at the park is mirrored by a decline in runway observations (Table 2. & Figure 2.)



Figure 2 Greylag egg control and combined annual goose numbers using Victoria Park 2007-2023.

Future Greylag Management Victoria Park

Although there is an overall declining trend for greylag in the area, runway observations still record peaks during Spring and Autumn while at Victoria Park numbers have increased sharply over the last six months particularly when compared to the same period the previous year (Figure 3). With greylag relatively long-lived and a metapopulation reservoir within the Greater Belfast area from which to recruit, egg management remains necessary if lower numbers are to be sustained.

Wetland Bird Counts (WeBS) coordinated by the BTO record an increasing national trend for greylag in Northern Ireland, but don't necessarily cover all known goose haunts or count during months before the Icelandic breeders arrive to mix with the naturalised population. In 2024 BCA will repeat a greylag moult census between Bangor and Cave Hill to provide an update on current numbers, previously recorded at between 550-600 geese in 2019.

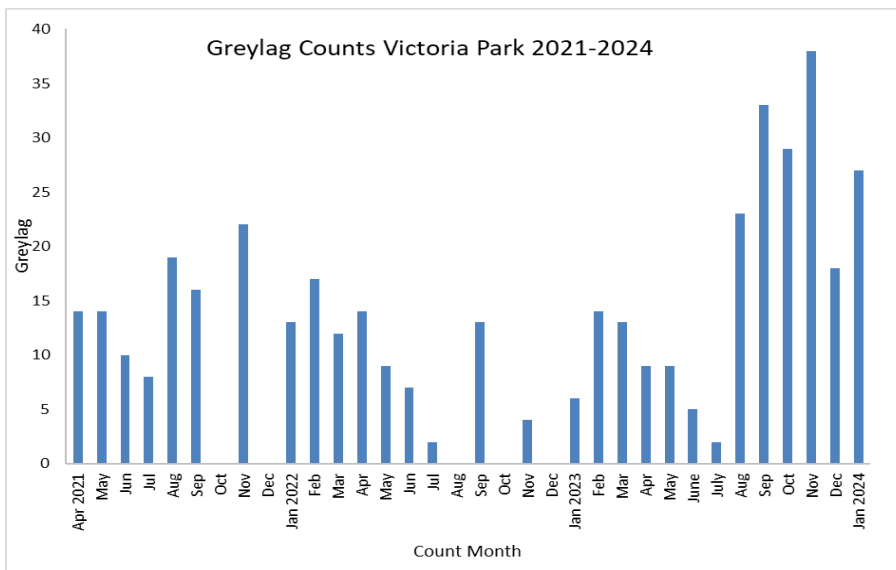


Figure 3. Recent increase in greylag numbers at Victoria Park

Conclusions

With greylag longevity c.20 years, seasonal peaks still evident from runway observations and a recent increase in greylag at Victoria Park, the recommendation to continue with egg control management is well-founded. The recent rise in numbers at Victoria Park however, introduces trend instability which along with a risk of displacement from other sites, would suggest any cessation of management effort in the short-term would be premature.