

Rook Management Update and Recommendations

Victoria Park 2023/2024

Report to Belfast City Council

Re: Licence to George Best City Airport

-Temporary Use of Lands at Victoria Park –for rook nest removal Jan 2024.

KerryMackie 30/11/23

Background

In the interests of air safety, Belfast City Airport under license of Belfast City Council, has been annually deterring rooks from nesting at Victoria park after this species first established a small breeding colony in 2020. By removing previous years' nests and pruning out support branches, nests have gradually been reduced from 18 in 2020 to 8 in 2023 (see Figure 2. Page 3.). Using this non-invasive technique, although reaching the desired objective, takes longer and needs to be repeated annually.

Licensed activities undertaken 2023

The removal of rook nests and associated canopy pruning was undertaken on January 24th 2023 under a Belfast City Council license and by Glenburn Landscapes - professional arborists subcontracted directly by Belfast City Airport. After old rook nests were removed any supporting branches/unions were modified by the selective pruning.

Results

Rooks, similar to 2022, nested in a loose colony either side of the water way, with the first 4 nests built by mid March in a single ivy clad birch tree 50m SW of the inner pond before continuing with an additional 4 built on the north side of the water, spread across different trees (P1 & P2 & Figure 1.). The total of 8 nests marks another marginal reduction in the colony (Figure2.).



	
<p>P1. Rook nests north side of water 2023</p>	<p>P2. Rook nests on Island using birch 2023</p>



Figure 1. Victoria Park with outlined areas marking location of rook nests in 2023.

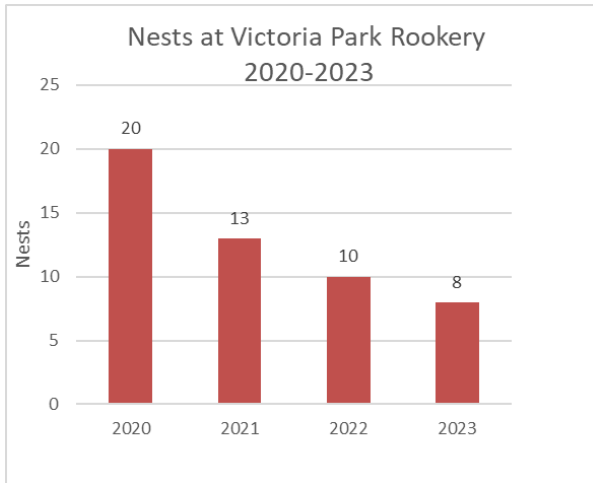


Figure 2. Bar chart illustrating trend in nesting rooks at Victoria Park.

To continue the success of reducing the number of rook nests at Victoria Park, the Airport needs to continue with current management prescriptions to reduce and discourage rooks from relaying in the areas used in the previous year.

The airport therefore needs to remove old nests and reduce the appeal of the most recently selected nesting trees (P1,P2 & Figure 1 above) by selective pruning of branch unions that supported last season's nests. Any additional shelter provided by ivy in the canopy of adjacent trees needs to be reduced by cutting ivy stems close to ground level.

Window for management : January 2024.

Time required : 1 day.

- Removal of old rook nests within trees located within the outline boxes in Figure 1 above with associated selective pruning of branching forks and other potential anchor points (as previously licenced Jan/Feb 2021/Jan 2022/Jan 2023) prior to the 2024 rook breeding season.
- Continue to reduce shelter provided by Ivy within nesting trees or those immediately adjacent, if required.