

National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme

Hodson Bay 2025



**Fáilte
Ireland**

Turasóireacht Náisiúnta
An tÚdara Eorbartha
National Tourism
Development Authority

National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme

Report for Hodson Bay 2025

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HODSON BAY– INTERESTING FINDS

Interesting Finds

Lough Ree was once the site of Viking encampments, and the location from which many attacks took place and were planned. Today, the lake is home to Ireland's largest inflatable water park, and one of the world's largest inflatable water slides, which is enjoyed by visitors of all ages.



Features of the Site

- Parking is available at several locations on the site.
- A recreational area including the Bay Sports inflatable water park, SuaNua sauna, and restaurants and cafes is present north of the hotel.
- Toilet and shower facilities are available to users of the Bay Sports recreational area. Toilets are also available within the Hodson Bay hotel.
- Benches, rubbish bins, and life buoys are available at the site.
- A telescope for bird watching present at the lakefront in front of the hotel.
- Yew Point is currently under construction to the north of the site as eco-friendly accommodation.

Habitats

- Mesotrophic lakes (FL4)
- Reed and large sedge swamps (FS1)
- Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)
- Wet pedunculate oak-ash woodland (WN4)
- Amenity grassland (improved) (GA2)
- Scattered trees and parkland (WD5)
- Wet willow-alder-ash woodland (WN6)
- Mixed broadleaved / conifer woodland (WD2)
- Sea walls, piers and jetties (CC1)
- Hedgerows (WL1)
- Treelines (WL2)

Key Recommendations

- Measures to prevent braiding and desire lines in the wet willow woodland should be considered. This could include the use of signage and / or way marking.
- Information contained in Fáilte Ireland's 'Good practice behaviours for water-based recreational users relating to waterbirds' (provided in Appendix B) should be provided to all operators, companies and organisations at Hodson Bay, and to members of the public through the use of signage, QR codes and web links.
- The implementation of signage with information on local biodiversity, particularly relating to Lough Ree SAC and SPA, should be considered.
- The removal of the fallen pole with metal wiring should be considered, as it presents a hazard to visitors.
- The creation of areas of meadows should be considered. This should be undertaken with reference to NBDC's guidance 'Councils: actions to help pollinators' (NBDC, 2016).
- The provision of additional categorised rubbish bins, including dog waste bins should

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Roughan & O'Donovan (ROD) was appointed by Fáilte Ireland to conduct Visitor and Environmental Surveys as part of the National Environmental Surveying & Monitoring Programme. Fáilte Ireland regularly engages with environmental research that is used to make informed management decisions and produce robust guidelines to facilitate the protection of the environment. From its inception in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Operational Monitoring Programme has been conducting research into the impacts of tourism on the receiving environment.

Building on the success of the WAW environmental monitoring programme which ran from 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland expanded the programme to a national level. From 2021 to 2022 the programme monitored 19 individual sites located in all of Fáilte Ireland's regional areas: The Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East, and Dublin. This 2025 National Monitoring report builds on environmental surveying and monitoring undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as far back as 2015 and to date (excluding the 2025 data), the surveys have monitored a total of 70 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 31,000 visitors at a range of popular sites, including inland, urban, coastal and WAW discovery points.

The environmental surveys and monitoring in 2023 followed the methodologies used in previous years. Following the completion of the 2023 surveys, a review of the methodology was undertaken. In developing the survey methodology used in 2024 and 2025, ROD considered the methodology for gathering the data, the presentation of the data, and the usefulness of the data gathered. The review also considered the time required to gather the data.

Eight sites were surveyed in 2025. Figure 1.1 below shows the locations of these sites. This report is for Hodson Bay, Co. Roscommon.



Figure 1.1 Environmental Monitoring Programme 2025 locations. Basemap provided by Google.

1.2 Aim of the Report

The purpose of the monitoring programme is as follows:

- To gain insight from an environmental perspective at amenity and recreation sites across Ireland;
- To obtain data on path and trail conditions etc. for each site;
- To obtain data relating to habitats, flora, and fauna for each site;
- To identify observable trends or variations among the sites;
- To make recommendations where appropriate for site management for the benefit of the site, the visitor, and the natural environment.

1.3 Site Description of Hodson Bay

Hodson Bay is located in the southeast of Roscommon on the shores of Lough Ree. It is 5km northwest of Athlone, and is accessible via the local road network connected to the N61. The area being surveyed for this report (“the site”) consists of a portion of the Hodson Bay Hotel car park, Hodson Bay harbour and associated parking areas, and the recreational facility northeast of the hotel (which includes Bay Sports water park and SuaNua sauna) and associated parking areas, and habitats immediately surrounding these areas. The site boundary for the purposes of this survey is outlined below in Figure 1.2. It was intended to include the woodland walkway at Yew Point to the north of the hotel and recreational areas, however the area is currently under construction for eco-friendly accommodation associated with Hodson Bay Hotel, and as such, was not accessible during surveying.

Hodson Bay is most well-known for its lakeside resort – the Hodson Bay Hotel. It also has one of the world’s tallest floating slides in the Bay Sports water park, which is Ireland’s largest inflatable waterpark. Hodson Bay is also adjacent to Yew Point woodland. The Roscommon County Development Plan (CDP, 2022) contains an area plan for Hodson Bay / Barrymore which recognises the settlement’s unique development due to its tourism and leisure facilities, and ensures the protection of the natural environment.

There are two European protected sites and one Nationally protected site within the site boundary. The site is located within Lough Ree Special Protected Areas (SPA) [Site Code: 004064], Lough Ree Special Area of Conservation (SAC) [Site Code: 000440], and Lough Ree Proposed National Heritage Area (pNHA) [Site Code: 000440].

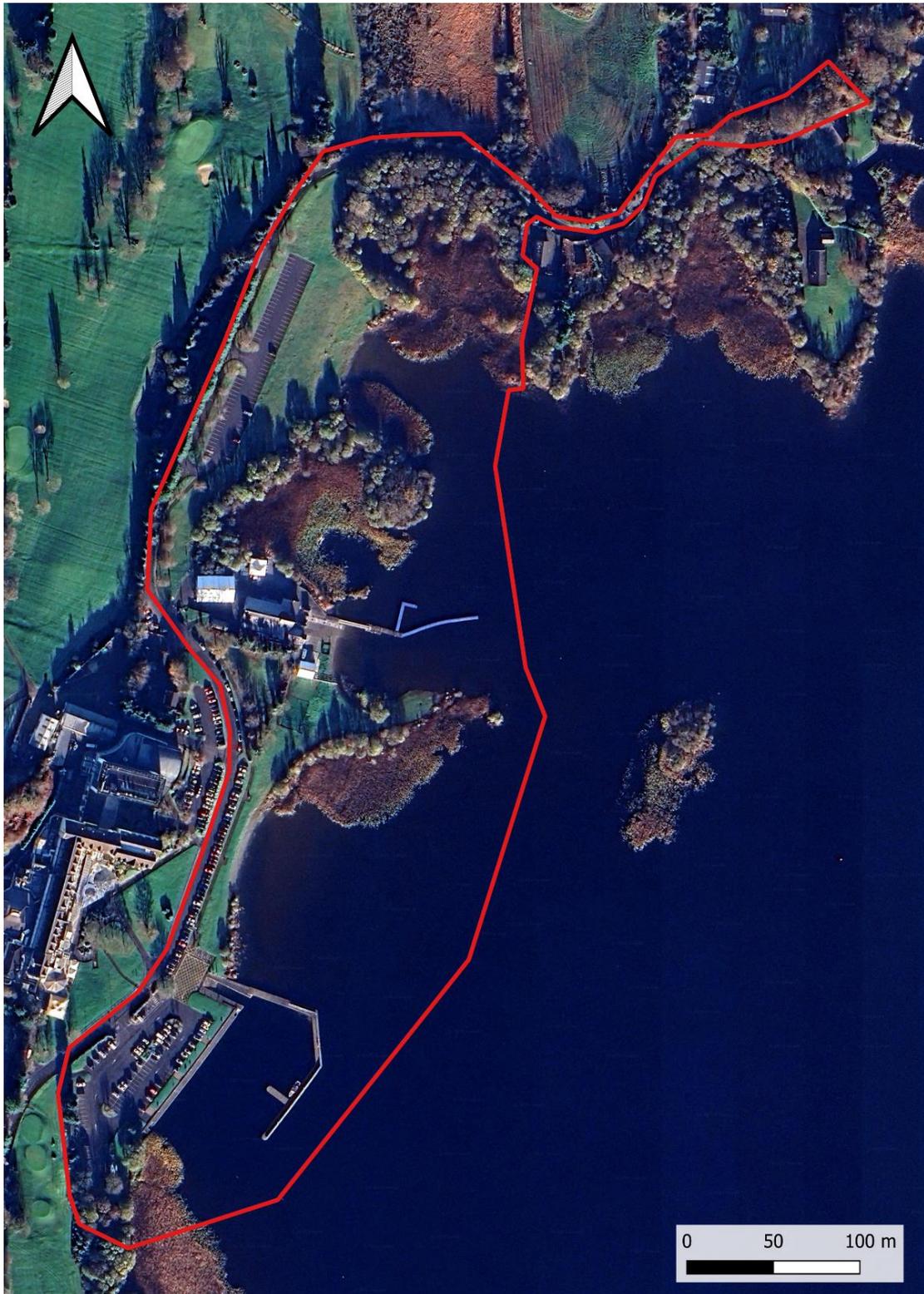


Figure 1.2 Location of the site. Basemap provided by Google

1.4 Critical Infrastructure

Table 1.1 - Table 1.3 below provide information on the infrastructure at Hodson Bay. Uisce Éireann's website was used to access information on the Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment Capacity Registers for County Roscommon (Uisce Éireann 2025a, b).

Table 1.1 Hodson Bay Wastewater Infrastructure

Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toilet facilities are available at the recreational area and within the hotel. Hodson Bay WWTP (D0377) is located immediately north of the Hodson Bay Hotel. 	There is spare capacity available at Hodson Bay WWTP and potential spare capacity available at Roscommon WWTP.

Table 1.2 Summary of Drinking Water Infrastructure at Hodson Bay

Drinking Water	Water Resource Name (WRZ)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
Nearest serviced settlement to the site is Athlone Monksland	South Roscommon (Lisbrock & Killeglan)	Capacity Available

Table 1.3 Summary of Transport Infrastructure at Hodson Bay

Nearest Settlement	Current Transport Infrastructure	Comment
Athlone	Hodson Bay is located on the L2020 local road, accessed via the N61. There are three car parks onsite.	The Roscommon Coaches AI02 Athlone to Roscommon Bus stops on the N61 at Barrymore (Roscommon) Hodson Bay, a 20-minute walk (or 1.5km) to the site boundary.

2. Methodology

The following surveys were undertaken:

- Habitat survey
- Pathway condition survey
- Survey of the features, signage and hazards

The survey at Hodson Bay was undertaken on the 5th of August 2025. The weather conditions were sunny with a light breeze. The sub-sections below present the methodologies used.

2.1 Habitat Conditions Assessment Methodology

The habitats within the site were classified and mapped in accordance with *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000) and *Best Practice Guidance for Habitat Surveying and Mapping* (Smith et al. 2011). Notes were taken on species composition and habitat condition. Fossitt habitats corresponding to Annex I habitats were noted using the *Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats* (EC, 2013). A desktop study was also undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of each site. Incidental sightings of birds, mammals, reptiles, etc. were also recorded during the site surveys.

The condition of the habitat in each polygon or line will be noted, including any damage and the likely cause of the damage. The areas along pathways are outlined by the pathway condition assessment in Section 2.2 below. The following criteria were used to assess habitat condition:

- Extent of habitat degradation;
- Impact of habitat degradation (localised or widespread);
- Potential for the habitat to recover; and
- Whether or not intervention is required.

2.2 Pathway Condition Assessment Methodology

The main pathways were defined during the site visit and a desk study which included a review of the Strava heat maps (www.strava.com/heatmap), and a review of the previous site monitoring reports, if available. Typically, the main paths are formalised waymarked trails or heavily trafficked pathways that are not formalised. These paths usually link the site entry points and car parks to a destination or feature of interest. The pathways were categorised into sections by type and composition. The different types of pathway are described in Table 2.1 below. **Visitor Characterisation Surveys were undertaken by Fáilte Ireland and are presented in Appendix A.** Each path section is described as 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory' based on the condition of the path and whether or not it could accommodate the current levels of use. Indicators that a path was not suitable for the current levels of use included the presence of wet areas, erosion, trip hazards, damaged pavement, braiding, path widening and habitat loss along the path. Paths that generally facilitated unobstructed movement between locations were deemed as 'satisfactory'. It should be noted that the methodology outlined here is independent of and not linked to the trail registration and management process run by Sport Ireland Outdoors.

Table 2.1 Pathway Types

Pathway Type	Description
Paved Car Park	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is paved, usually with tarmacadam.
Gravel Car Park	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is gravel or crushed stone.
Paved Road	A road that is paved with tarmacadam or similar hard material.
Gravel Road	A road consisting of gravel or crushed stone, with no grass in the middle.
Gravel Track	A single vehicle pathway used by small numbers of vehicles. Tracks are normally paved with gravel and can have grass in the middle
Grassy Track	A single vehicle pathway used by small numbers of vehicles. These tracks are not paved and are used primarily by tractors, quads or small numbers of private vehicles.
Paved Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic. Paved paths are found in more developed areas, to cater for higher levels of traffic.
Gravel Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic and can be a single track or a track wide enough for several people to walk abreast. Gravel paths are found in more developed areas, to cater for higher levels of traffic.
Grassy Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic and can be a single track or a track wide enough for several people to walk abreast. Grassy paths are found in less developed areas, often beyond feature of interest, and are used less frequently.
Bare Ground Path	These paths occur where the vegetation had been eroded by foot traffic and is bare ground, or damages vegetation. These paths are often widespread on sites where formal waymarked trails are not provided.

2.3 Features, Signage and Hazards

Signage, features of interest, and hazards were recorded, photographed and mapped. Features include built heritage, sculptures as well as the temporary toilets and bins. Hazards including unstable walls, broken fences or unprotected cliff tops.

3. Results

3.1 Habitat Condition Assessment

Habitats were surveyed during the optimum habitat survey season i.e., April to September (Smith et al., 2011). Habitats were classified according to *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000). Table 3.1 lists the habitats identified in Hodson Bay along with their corresponding Annex I habitats. Plate 3.1 to Plate 3.4 display examples of the habitats found at Hodson Bay. A habitat map is presented in Figure 3.1. It should be noted that having a corresponding Annex I habitat does not mean the Annex I habitat is automatically present.

Table 3.1 Fossitt (2000) habitats and links to Annex I habitats

Fossitt 2000 Habitat	Corresponding Annex I habitats (Natura 2000 code)
Mesotrophic lakes (FL4)	Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition-type vegetation' (3150) ¹
Reed and Large Sedge Swamps (FS1)	None
Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)	None
Wet pedunculate oak-ash woodland (WN4)	*Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>) (91E0)
Amenity Grassland (Improved) (GA2)	None
Scattered Trees and Parkland (WD5)	None
Wet willow-alder-ash woodland (WN6)	*Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>) (91E0)
Mixed Broadleaved / Conifer Woodland (WD2)	None
Sea walls, piers and jetties (CC1)	None
Hedgerows (WL1)	None
Treelines (WL2)	None

Mesotrophic lakes (FL4)

Hodson Bay is located on the southwestern shore of Lough Ree. The lake is classified as mesotrophic, but given the size of the system, a range of conditions prevail (i.e. various rock types), which gives rise to local variations in nutrient status and pH, and variations in the phytoplankton and macrophyte flora present. Therefore, species indicative of oligotrophic, mesotrophic, eutrophic and base-rich situations occur (NPWS, 2016). The Annex I habitat 'Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation' [3150] is a Qualifying Interest of Lough Ree SAC, and is associated with the habitat Eutrophic lakes (FL5). This habitat potentially occurs throughout the lake (NPWS, 2016).

¹ The Annex I habitat Natural eutrophic lakes (3150) is associated with Eutrophic lakes (FL5), which is potentially present throughout the lake. However, the lake itself has been classified as mesotrophic in quality, with species indicative of oligotrophic, mesotrophic, eutrophic and base-rich situations present (NPWS, 2016).

Lough Ree is a Special Protection Area (SPA) and is one of the most important sites in the midlands for wintering waterfowl, as well as a breeding site for some species, including black-headed gull (*Larus ridibundus*) and great-crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) (NPWS, 2015). A range of birds were observed on the lake. Coot (*Fulica atra*) and black-headed gull were observed in very large numbers on the lake. Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*), and cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) were also observed utilising the lake, and a pair of great crested grebe accompanied by a chick were observed feeding near reeds. Sand martin (*Riparia riparia*) and swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) were recorded feeding over the lake during the survey. The vegetation recorded on the edge of the lake is 'Reed and large sedge swamps (FS1)'. An inflatable water park is present on the lake in the northern part of the site. The lake is displayed in Plate 3.1 below. Some litter was recorded in the water, particularly at the harbour. This is displayed in Plate 3.5 below. It is unclear whether this originated on the site.

Reed and large sedge swamps (FS1)

This habitat type is present along the river throughout most of the study area. Reed grass (*Phalaris arundinaceae*) dominates in most areas, and willows (*Salix spp.*) at the terrestrial border. Other species recorded were rushes (*Juncus spp.*), water mint (*Mentha aquatica*), water clubrush (*Schoenoplectus subterminalis*), ribbon grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), spike rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), and mare's-tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*). Some trampling via informal pathways were recorded to this habitat – this is discussed further in Section 3.5.



Plate 3.1 The shore of Lough Ree (FL4) with reeds (FS1) and the inflatable waterpark in the background.

Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)

This habitat is found throughout the site in the form of roads, pathways, parking areas, and buildings. This habitat is not of biodiversity value.

Wet pedunculate oak-ash woodland (WN4)

On the road leading north from the hotel and water sports facility grounds towards Yew Point, a wet pedunculate oak-ash woodland is present between roadway and the reed habitats. The woodland is dominated by willows with alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) present. The understory consists of hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), mosses, willow saplings, and reed grass.

As much of the understory was waterlogged, there was limited access within the woodland to assess its condition. However, given this, it is unlikely that visitors are able to access the woodland and directly impact it.

Amenity Grassland (Improved) (GA2)

Amenity grassland was found throughout the site and was mown very short in most areas. The species recorded in the amenity grass areas were red (*Trifolium repens*) and white clover (*Trifolium pratense*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), bird's foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), black medic (*Medicago lupulina*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*), and ribwort plantain (*Plantago macrocarpa*). Minor littering which included rubbish and cigarette butts was recorded on the amenity lawns at the site, as well as small areas of trampling, including a desire line leading from the path to the water sports facility towards the northernmost car park. Trampling in this habitat is displayed in Plate 3.5. Trampling and informal pathways are discussed further in Section 3.2.

Scattered Trees and Parkland (WD5)

This habitat is present throughout the site. Tree species present are maples (*Acer spp.*), lime (*Tilia x europaea*), birch (*Betula sp.*), beech, and oak, with willows present along the water. Species observed in the amenity lawn areas are described under 'Amenity Grassland (Improved) (GA2)' above. At the southernmost area of the site, a small area of unmown grass was present. The species recorded here were maple saplings, ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*), narrow-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*), marsh woundwort (*Stachys palustris*), slender thistle (*Carduus tenuiflorus*), nettles (*Urtica dioica*), willowherbs (*Epilobium spp.*), cock's foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*), perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), and knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*). Minor littering has been recorded on the amenity lawns at the site. This habitat is presented in Plate 3.2 below.



Plate 3.2 **Scattered trees and parkland (WD5) with small unmown areas of lawn at Hodson Bay.**

Wet willow-alder-ash woodland (WN6)

North of the water sports facility centre is a wet woodland surrounded by reed habitat. The habitat is dominated by willow with some sycamores present. The understory consists of reed grass, nettles, bramble, cleavers (*Galium aparine*), ivy, sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), mare's-tail, yellow loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*), bindweed, mosses, and lichens. Pathways are present through this habitat, leading to an area of benches, some make-shift rope swings, and the lakeshore, where visitors access the water for water sports. Braiding and desire lines were recorded in this habitat, with one area of pathway traversing over and damaging a tree (displayed in Plate 3.9 below). This is discussed further in Section 3.2. This habitat is presented in Plate 3.3 below.

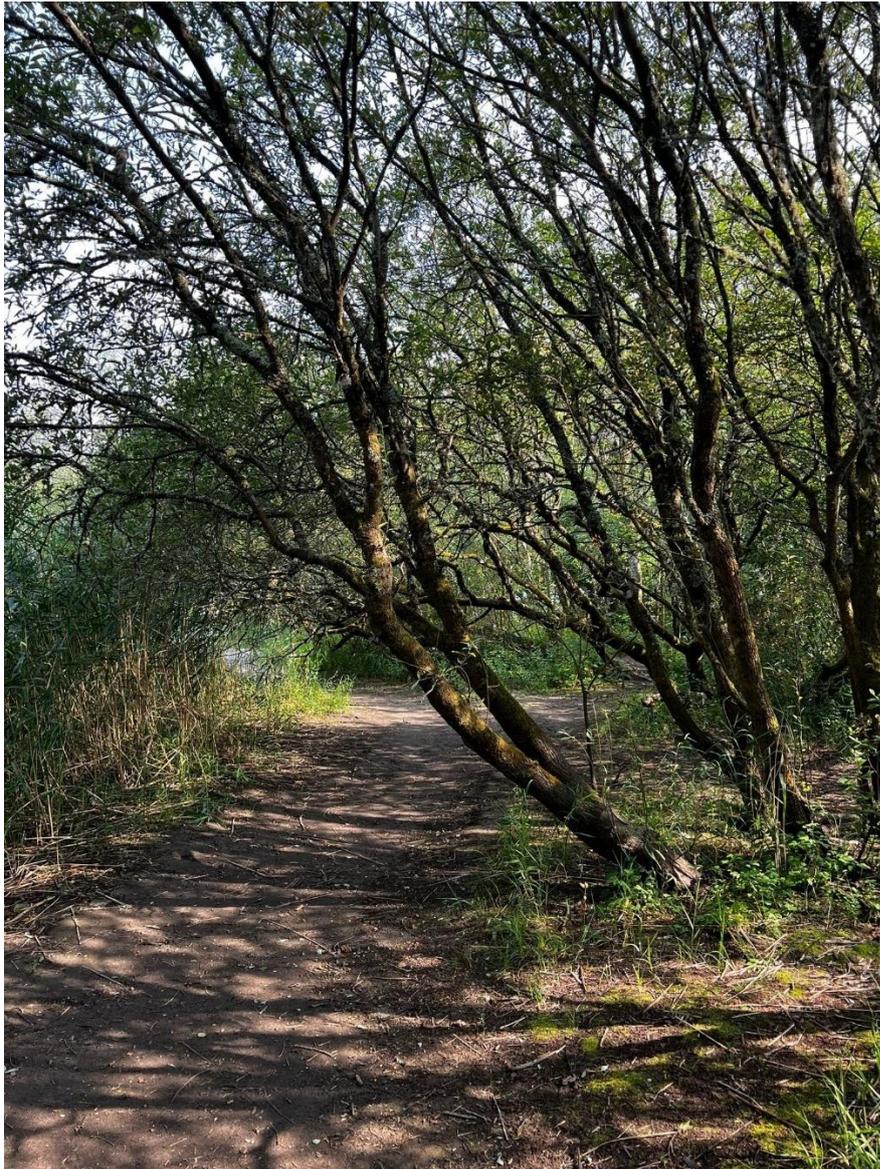


Plate 3.3 Wet willow-alder-ash woodland (WN6) at Hodson Bay.

Mixed Broadleaved / Conifer Woodland (WD2)

This woodland habitat is present at the northern edge of the site, approaching Yew Point. In the woodland the dominated by species is beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). Cypress (*Cupressus sp.*), sycamore, oak (*Quercus sp.*) are also present. The understory is dominated by ivy (*Hedera hibernica*) with hawthorn. This habitat is presented in Plate 3.4 below.



Plate 3.4 **Mixed broadleaved / conifer woodland (WD2 approaching Yew Point).**

Sea walls, piers and jetties (CC1)

This habitat was present throughout the site. It provides roosting areas for birds.

Hedgerows (WL1) and Treelines (WL2)

Separating the southern car park from the main road are two narrow stretches of hedgerows consisting of beech. The hedges were highly uniform. In the parking area near the water sports building were two small treelines, one consisting of sycamore, with hawthorn and ivy and the other of lime. No impacts were recorded to these habitats.



Plate 3.5 Litter in the lake (top) and trampling of an amenity area in the north of the site (bottom).

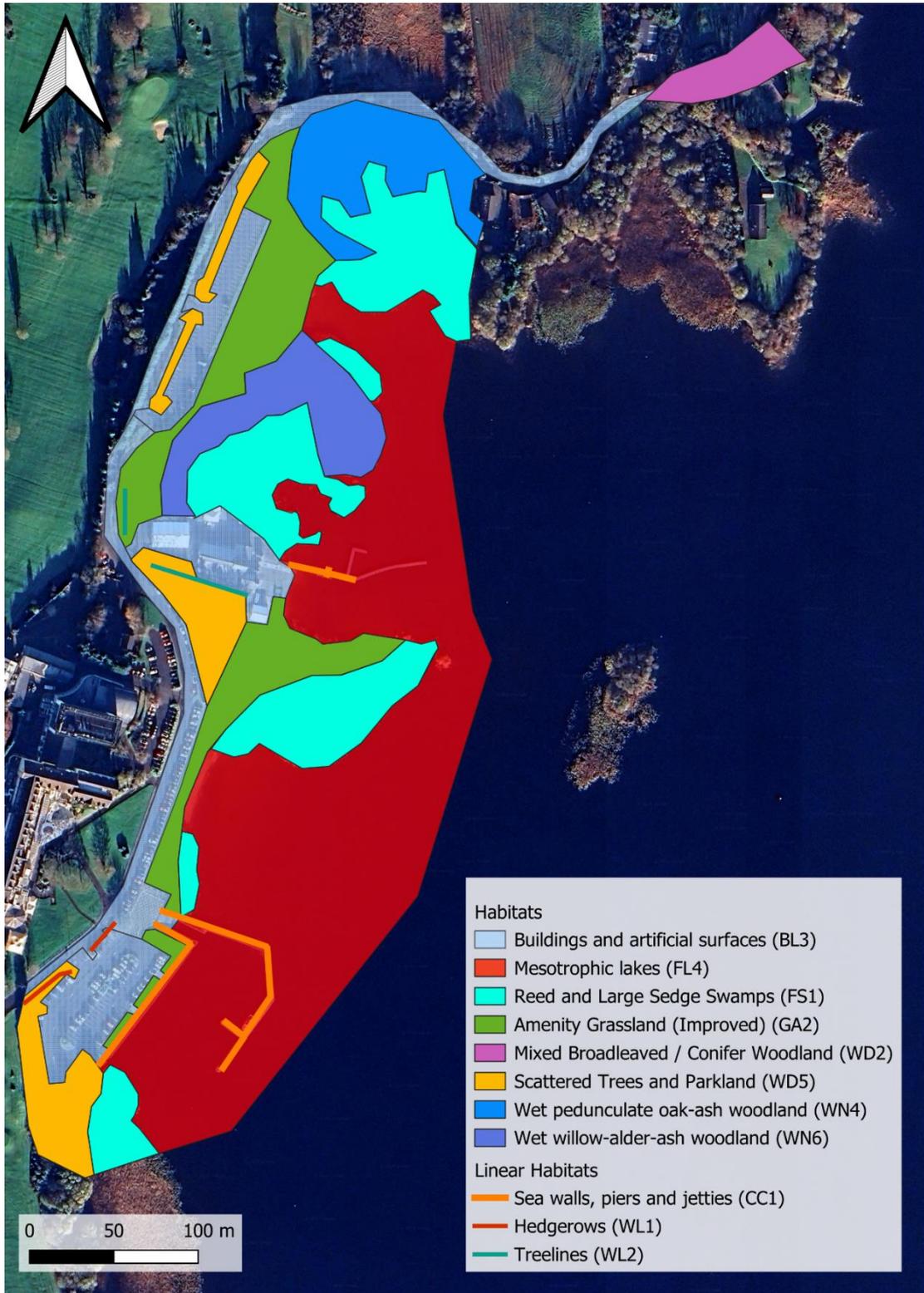


Figure 3.1 Habitat map of Hodson Bay. Basemap provided by Google.

3.2 Pathway Condition Assessment

Most of the pathways in Hodson Bay are paved, with paved roads, car parks, and footpaths present throughout the site connecting the hotel, parking areas, and recreational areas, including the harbour / jetty. A paved road leads from the hotel car park entrance north as far as the entrance to Yew Point. All of these pathways were in good condition, and appeared to be well-defined and well-maintained. Some of these pathways are displayed in Plate 3.6 below.



Plate 3.6 A satisfactory paved car park (top) and a satisfactory paved footpath (bottom) in Hodson Bay.

A few short grassy paths are present throughout the site. In front of the hotel and north of the harbour, a small grassy path is present near the shore. This appears to have resulted from visitor movements between areas of the lake shore. While this has resulted in some trampling of the reeds, the path is largely on amenity grassland, and given its short length and uniformity, it is considered to be satisfactory. Another grassy path leads north from the recreational area towards an area of amenity grass in front of the lakeshore, trailing off before reaching it. This was deemed unsatisfactory, as it showed signs of widening, and will likely continue to do so with continued use. At the amenity grass in front of the lakeshore, an additional grassy path leads from the amenity grass into a wooded area. Given that other, more well-defined pathways are present here, and that the pathway appears to have resulted in the loss of vegetation bordering the woodland, this path was deemed unsatisfactory. Examples of grassy paths on the site are presented in Plate 3.7 below.



Plate 3.7 An unsatisfactory grassy path between the recreational area and an amenity grassland (left), and an unsatisfactory grassy path leading from the amenity grass into a wooded area.

Within the wet willow woodland by the northern lakeshore, a network of bare ground paths are present. These paths lead through the woodland to a small area with benches by lakeshore. The main path of this network is generally quite uniform, and in satisfactory condition. However, there are some areas which exhibit widening, and branch off into the woodland and reed habitats, leading to habitat damage. Braiding and desire lines are evident in many areas here, which is discussed further in Section 3.1. Pathways within the woodland are presented in Plate 3.8 and Plate 3.9 below.



Plate 3.8 A satisfactory path (top) and pathway braiding (bottom) in the wet willow woodland.



Plate 3.9 An unsatisfactory path into reeds (left) and a desire line through a tree (right) in the wet willow woodland.

Figure 3.2 presents a Strava heat map for the site. Strava aggregates data from users on its app who opt-in to share their activities and locations. The pathway condition assessment map is presented in Figure 3.3.



Figure 3.2 Heat map of visitor movements in Hodson Bay (Strava, 2025)



Figure 3.3 Pathway Condition Assessment at Hodson Bay. Basemap provided by ESRI.

3.3 Features Signage and Hazards

The recreational area (displayed in Plate 3.10) houses Bay Sports – the largest inflatable water park in Ireland, which has one of the tallest water slides in the world, – and SuaNua, which has two outdoor saunas and a jacuzzi at the lakefront. Toilet and shower facilities are available at the Bay Sports recreational area. Toilets are also available within Hodson Bay hotel.



Plate 3.10 Bay Sports inflatable waterpark and recreational equipment (top) and SuaNua sauna and a café (bottom).

Bins, including categorised bins, were recorded throughout the site, and were mainly concentrated at the harbour, at the recreational area, and at the northern amenity area by the lakeshore. One dog waste bin was recorded at the lakeshore amenity area, although no waste bags were available. Benches were available throughout the site and a number of picnic benches, including roofed ones, were available at the lakefront near the restaurants and cafes. Lifebuoys were present at areas of the lakeshore, and were numerous at the harbour.

A variety of signage is present at the site. Informative signage regarding the local amenities and the local area are present. There was also signage regarding water safety, including the potential for the presence of toxic algae during certain times, as well as signage advising on wild trout conservation and the prevention of the spread of invasive species. Within the hotel reception area, a number of flyers were available for visitors, including those for local amenities and trails, eco-friendly guided tours, and information on the upcoming eco-friendly accommodation at Yew Point. A coin-operated telescope is present at the lakeshore in front of the hotel. Features on the site are displayed in Plate 3.11 below.



Plate 3.11 Rubbish bins and a lifebuoy (top) and informative / safety-related signage (middle and bottom) at Hodson Bay.

3.3.1 Hazards

Given the nature of the site, Lough Ree itself could be considered a hazard, particularly in the Harbour and recreational areas. However, life buoys are present throughout the site, and staff are present at the recreational area, and oversee many of the activities.

In one of the wooded areas where a number of bare ground paths and desire lines were present, a fallen pole with a metal wire sticking up is present on one of the informal paths. This creates a significant trip hazard. This is displayed in Plate 3.12 below, and its location is presented in Figure 3.4.



Plate 3.12 A fallen pole with a metal wire sticking up in the wet willow woodland at Hodson Bay.

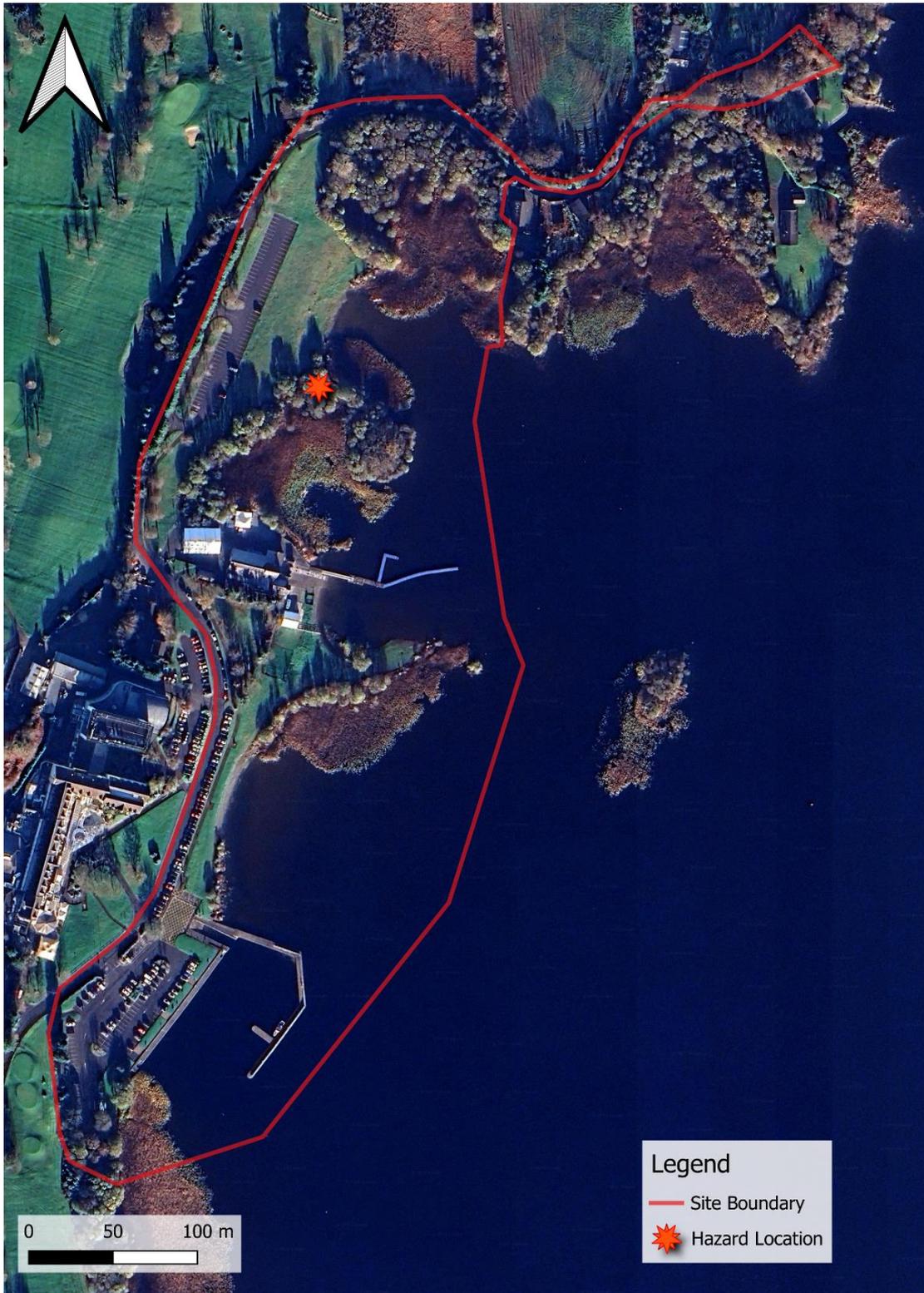


Figure 3.4 Location of the fallen pole. Basemap provided by Google

3.4 Ecological Constraints

3.4.1 Protected Sites

A desktop study was undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of the site. There are 2 European Designated Sites (SACs and SPAs) and 1 Nationally Designated Site within the site boundary.

Information on these sites was obtained from the NPWS website and their respective Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms. These sites are described in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Designated sites within 2 km of the Hodson Bay site

Site Name [Site Code]	Qualifying Interests	Distance (km) from Site	Pressures and Threats (those related to recreation are in bold)
European Designated Sites			
Lough Ree SPA [004064]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little Grebe (<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>) [A004] • Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) [A038] • Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) [A052] • Mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>) [A053] • Tufted Duck (<i>Aythya fuligula</i>) [A061] • Common Scoter (<i>Melanitta nigra</i>) [A065] • Goldeneye (<i>Bucephala clangula</i>) [A067] • Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) [A125] • Golden Plover (<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>) [A140] • Lapwing (<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>) [A142] • Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) [A193] • Wigeon (<i>Mareca penelope</i>) [A855] • Shoveler (<i>Spatula clypeata</i>) [A857] • Wetland and Waterbirds [A999] 	Within site boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hunting (M) • Grazing (M) • Sylviculture, forestry (L) • Leisure fishing (M) • Walking, Horse-riding, and non-motorised vehicles (M) • Nautical sports (H) • Invasive non-native species (M) • Fertilisation (M)
Lough Ree SAC [000440]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150] • Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (<i>Festuco-Brometalia</i>) (* important orchid sites) [6210] 	Within site boundary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diffuse pollution to surface waters due to household sewage/wastewater (M) • Diffuse groundwater pollution due to agricultural and forestry activities (M) • Siltation rate changes (H) • Antagonism arising from introduction of species (H)

Site Name [Site Code]	Qualifying Interests	Distance (km) from Site	Pressures and Threats (those related to recreation are in bold)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active raised bogs [7110] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] Alkaline fens [7230] Limestone pavements [8240] Bog woodland [91D0] Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i>, <i>Alnion incanae</i>, <i>Salicion albae</i>) [91E0] Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>) [1355] 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hunting (M) Grazing (M) Forest and Plantation Management and Use (M) Nautical sports (M) Walking, horse-riding and non-motorised vehicles (L) Flooding Modifications (L) Inundation natural processes (L) Abandonment/Lack of mowing (M) Piers/Tourist harbours or recreational piers (L) Thermal heating of water bodies (L) Dispersed human habitation (M) Leisure Fishing (M) Fertilisation (M) Invasive non-native species (H)
Nationally Designated Sites			
Lough Ree pNHA [000440]	No site description available. Refer to Lough Ree SAC and SPA	Within site boundary	No site description available. Refer to Lough Ree SAC and SPA

3.4.2 Incidental Species Recorded

Table 3.3 below presents the bird species recorded during the ecological surveys at Hodson Bay, along with their Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status (2020–2026) (Gilbert et al., 2021).

Table 3.3 Incidental Species & BoCCI Status

Scientific Name	Common Name
Red List	
<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull
Amber List	
<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Arctic Tern
<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Mute Swan
<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Lesser Black-backed Gull
<i>Fulica atra</i>	Coot
<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Great Crested Grebe
<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Sand Martin
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Swallow
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Cormorant

Scientific Name	Common Name
<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Robin
Green List	
<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	Pied Wagtail
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Woodpigeon
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw
<i>Pica pica</i>	Magpie
<i>Turdus merula</i>	Blackbird

3.4.3 Records of Rare, Protected and Invasive Species

Records of rare, protected, and invasive species from the past ten years within 2km² of the site were obtained the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) online database (Grid References: N0041). These records are presented in Table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4 Records of rare, protected, and invasive species from the past ten years within 2km² of the site (NBDC, 2025).

Scientific name	Common Name	Date of last Record	Status*
Terrestrial Mammals			
<i>Meles meles</i>	Eurasian Badger	31/12/2016	WA
Birds			
<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	19/01/2023	WA; Red List
<i>Fulica atra</i>	Common Coot	19/01/2023	Annex II, III BD; WA; Amber List
<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Little Grebe	02/02/2015	WA; Amber List
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	19/01/2023	Annex II, III BD; WA; Amber List
<i>Cygnus olor</i>	Mute Swan	19/01/2023	WA; Amber List
Invasive Species			
<i>Elodea canadensis</i>	Canadian Waterweed	24/05/2023	High Impact Invasive Species; S.I. 477/2011
<i>Elodea nuttallii</i>	Nuttall's Waterweed	23/05/2023	High Impact Invasive Species; S.I. 477/2011
<i>Dreissena (Dreissena)</i>	Zebra Mussel	25/05/2023	High Impact Invasive Species; S.I. 477/2011

* Abbreviations: Annex II/IV/V (non-avian species) = Habitats Directive (HD); Annex I, II, III = Birds Directive (BD); Red/Amber List = Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020-2026 (BOCCI) (Gilbert et al., 2021); Wildlife Act, 1976 (WA).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information collected during the field survey and desk study, the following recommendations are made:

- Informal pathways in the wet willow woodland provide access to the lakeshore, secluded benches, and a tire swing. However, pathway braiding and desire lines have resulted in the degradation of the woodland habitat. Measures to prevent this should be considered, which would allow for the woodland to recover. This could be achieved through the use of signage and / or way marking (such as with simple roping, rocks to outline the main pathway, etc.) to encourage visitors to use one designated path to access the lake shore. Where signage is being implemented, teleological signage (signage with instruction and justification for the instruction) should be used.
- While no evidence of disturbance to waterbirds was recorded, water-based sports has the potential to disturb birds, particularly during the breeding season. Fáilte Ireland has published a leaflet for people engaged in water sports in inland waterbodies titled 'Good practice behaviours for water-based recreational users relating to waterbirds'. This leaflet is in Appendix B. Providing this leaflet (or any subsequent iterations) to all operators, companies and organisations based at Hodson Bay whose participants use the facility should be considered to ensure minimal impacts to waterbirds using the area. Additionally, the information contained in the leaflet could be presented in the form of teleological signage, and / or made available to members of the public through the use of QR codes and web links.
- Informative signage is available at the harbour, however there is no signage pertaining to biodiversity. The implementation of signage with information on local biodiversity, particularly relating to Lough Ree SAC and SPA, should be considered. Any signage relating to birds would be best placed by the telescope, where visitors can reference the sign while watching birds from a distance.
- The removal of the fallen pole with metal wiring described in Section 3.3.1 should be considered, as it presents a hazard to visitors.
- The amenity grasslands on the site are maintained as a very short sward. The creation of areas of meadows to benefit pollinators and other species should be considered. This would require less frequent mowing. The meadows should be allowed to populate naturally with local species or by using locally sourced seed, rather than with the use of seed mixes, which may contain species not naturally present in the local area. The creation of areas of meadows should be undertaken with reference to NBDC's guidance 'Councils: actions to help pollinators' (NBDC, 2016), and should be accompanied by teleological signage.
- Litter was noted in the lake and in amenity areas. The provision of additional categorised rubbish bins, including dog waste should be considered.

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APPENDIX A

FÁILTE IRELAND VISITOR CHARACTERISATION SURVEYS



Hodson Bay, Roscommon Road, Athlone – Visitor Monitoring Assessment

July 2025

Contents

- **1.0 Introduction:**
- **2.0 Visitor Characterisation Survey Methodology:**
- **3.0 Results:**
 - **Prevalence of Group Type**
 - **Prevalence of Transport Type**
 - **Activity Levels**
- **4.0 Observations**

Appendix 1 – Activity & Impact Codes

1.0 Introduction:

Background

Fáilte Ireland regularly engages with environmental research that is used to make informed management decisions and produce robust guidelines to facilitate the protection of the environment. From its inception in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Operational Monitoring Programme has been conducting research into the impacts of tourism on the receiving environment. These surveys have been monitoring 57 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 26,000 visitors to WAW discovery points.

Building on the success of the WAW environmental monitoring programme which ran from 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland expanded the programme to a national level. From 2021 to 2022 the programme monitored 19 individual sites located in all of Fáilte Ireland's regional areas: The Wild Atlantic Way, Irelands Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East, and Dublin. The environmental monitoring builds on environmental surveying and monitoring undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as far back as 2015, and to date (excluding the 2025 data), the surveys have monitored a total of 70 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 31,000 visitors at a range of tourism sites (including inland, urban, coastal and WAW discovery points).

2.0 Visitor Characterisation Survey Methodology:

- Visitor Characterisation Surveys

The visitor characterisation survey was undertaken by the Fáilte Ireland Planning and Environmental team at Hodson Bay to supplement and be appended to the National Environmental Monitoring Programme 2025 Report undertaken by Roughan O'Donovan Consulting Engineers. The survey was undertaken on Tuesday the 24th June 2025 from 2.30-4.00pm on a dry, overcast afternoon. The survey was undertaken between the Marina, Baysports and extending northwards to the northern carpark.



Photo 1: Southern extent of survey area looking westwards towards Hodson Bay Hotel.

For the purposes of this assessment a 'visitor' refers to an individual, couple or group who arrive together. The following variables were recorded for each visitor:

- Activity Type
- Group Type
- Transport Type
- Activity Levels; and
- Impact Severity Levels.

3.0 Results:

3.1 Visitor Characterization Survey:

The visitor monitoring survey undertaken on Tuesday the 24th June 2025 from 2.30-4.00pm on a dry, overcast afternoon. A total of 17 No. visitor groups comprising 117 No. Individuals were recorded. This site during the survey period was most popular amongst the 'individual adult' group followed by the 'Mixed Large Group' and "Couple" groups. The following activities predominantly undertaken by groups during the survey comprised of 'Walking, running or cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces and 'Swimming, kayaking in the water'.

3.2 Prevalence of Group Type

Figure 1 presents the prevalence of group types observed visiting the site, the 'Individual Adult' Group made up the largest proportion of group type with 41% of visitor groups observed. The next largest group type observed was the "Mixed Large Groups" at 18%, however, it should be noted that while "Mixed Large Groups" only comprised 18% of the visitor group type observed, they contributed to approx. 77% of the overall number of visitors observed (this was due to large group school tours observed at Baysports).

The remaining group types observed in order of prevalence were 'Small Adult Group', 'Couple', "Elderly Couple", "Family" and 'Mixed Small Group'.

Dogs or dog walking were not observed to be very prevalent at the site during the survey with only 1 No. observed and on a lead.

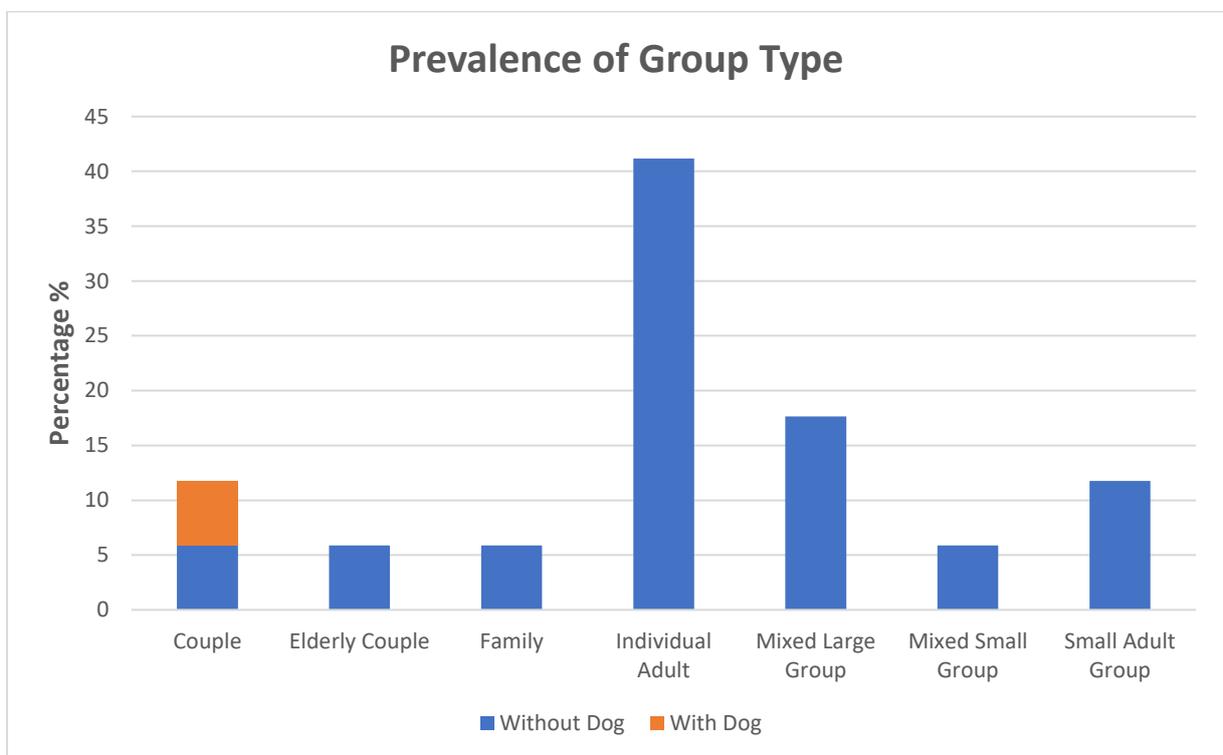


Figure 1: Prevalence of Group Type

3.3 Prevalence of Transport Type

Prevalence of transport type is detailed below in Figure 2, given the location of the survey and the number of carparking spaces observed in use, it is unsurprising that 'By Car' was the main mode of transport observed, accounting for 60% of visitor groups observed visiting the site. Large school tours visiting Baysports by coach and visitors observed mooring at the marina both comprised 18% of the visitor groups observed. The lowest % of transport type observed was by Motorhome (6%).

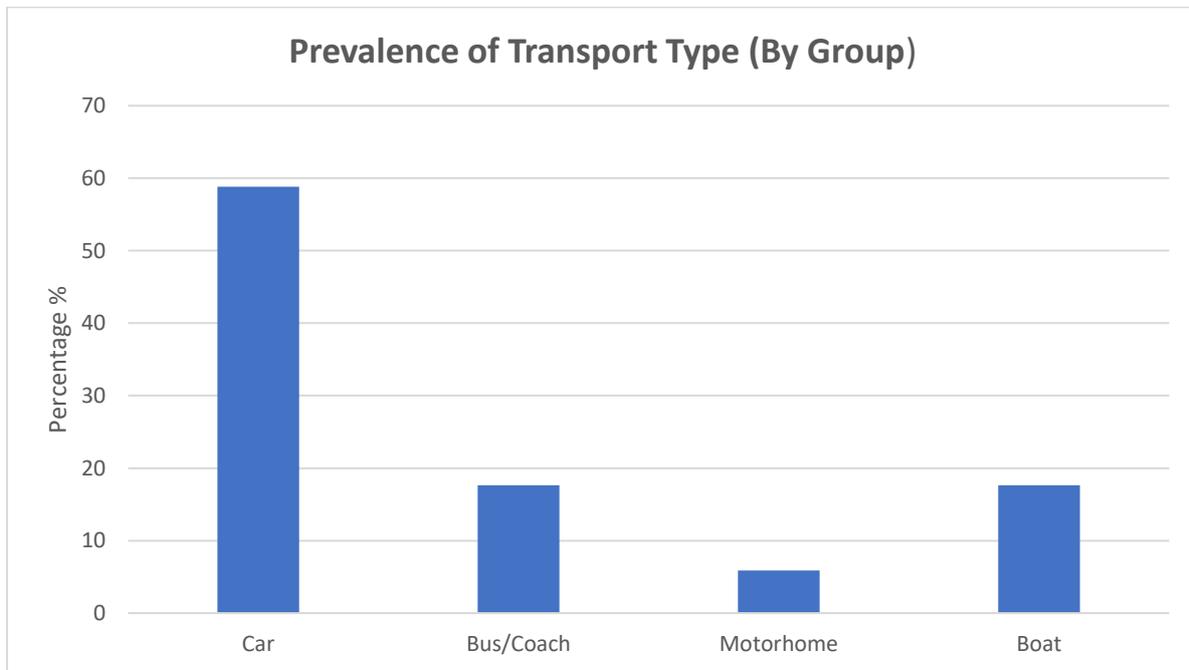


Figure 2: Prevalence of Transport Type (By Group)

3.4 Activity Levels

Figure 3 below presents the activity levels at Hodson Bay. A sample of 17 No. visitor groups' activities were observed. The results from this are shown below in Figure 3. Activity categories are detailed in Appendix I. Activities such as Walking, running or playing on level sands is a low-level activity, whereas disturbing wildlife and picking herbaceous vegetation are considered high level activities. 100% of the activities observed at Hodson Bay were considered low level activities.

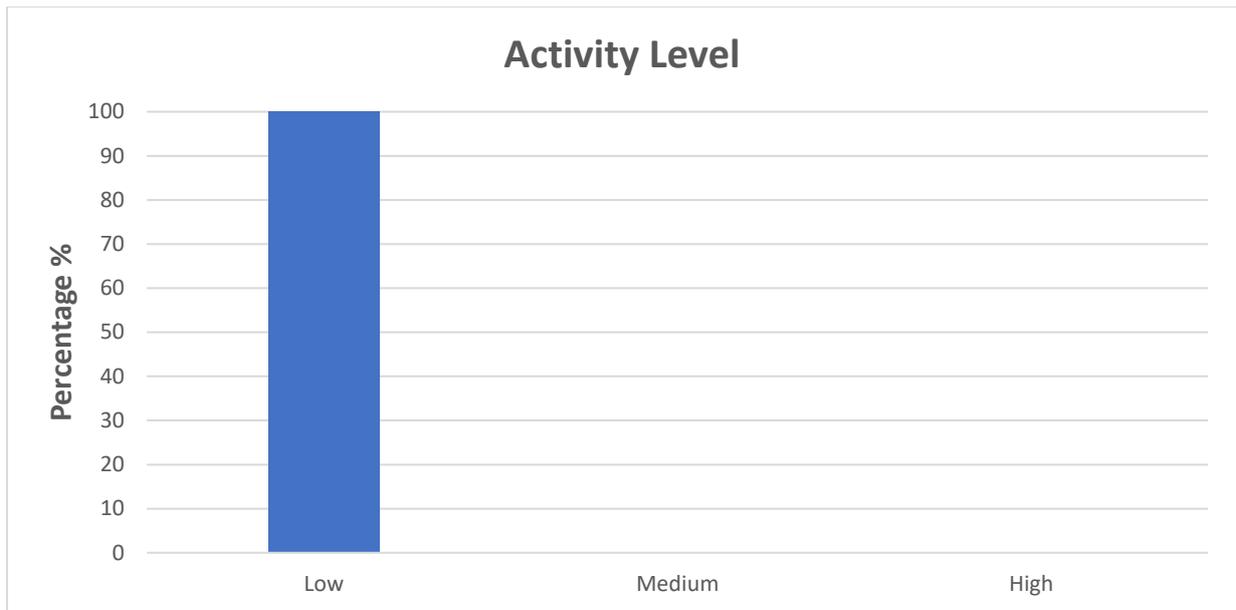


Figure 3: Activity Level

3.5 Impact Severity Levels

Figure 4 presents the impact severity level observed at the site. A sample of 17 visitor groups’ activities were observed. Impact severity level relates to the damage of an activity on the site. The levels of impact severity are detailed in Appendix I. Similar to the impact type above, the survey found that 100% of the activities observed had low level impact severity on the site.

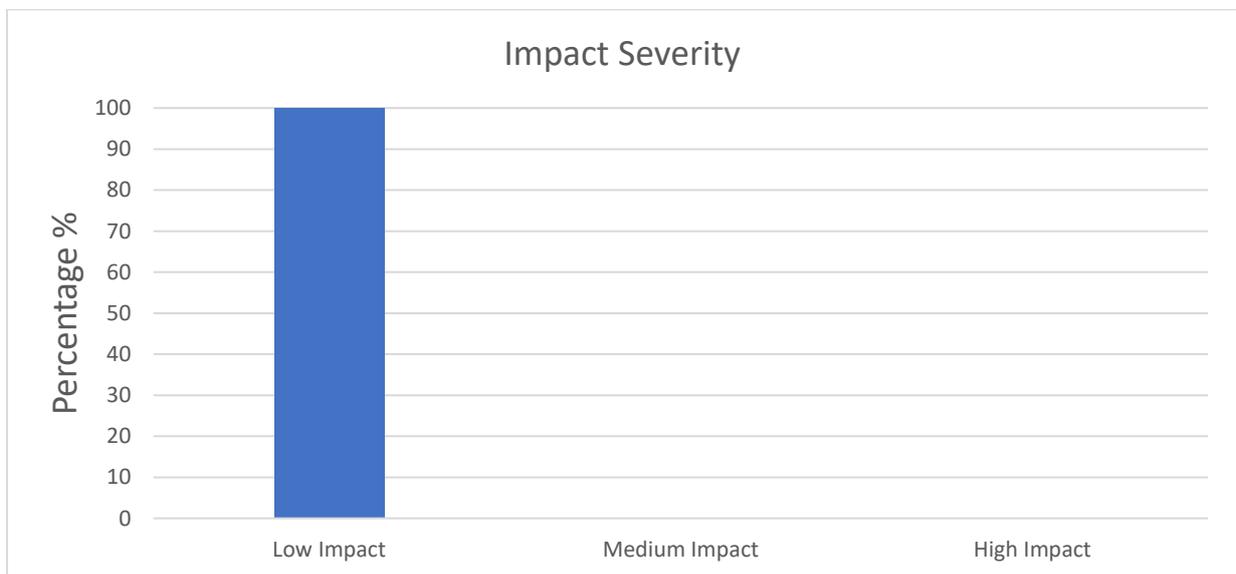


Figure 4: Impact Severity Levels

3.6 Activity Types

Figure 5 presents the activity types observed at the site. 47% of groups were observed undertaking activities comprising “Walking, running, cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces” with “Swimming, sailing, surfing, kayaking” in water comprising 24% (Note: Participation in Baysports Inflatable park is included in this figure). Other activities undertaken by groups comprised “Walking,

running playing or cycling in mown grass, managed grassland” (18%) and “Resting, reading, picnicking, sightseeing” (12%).

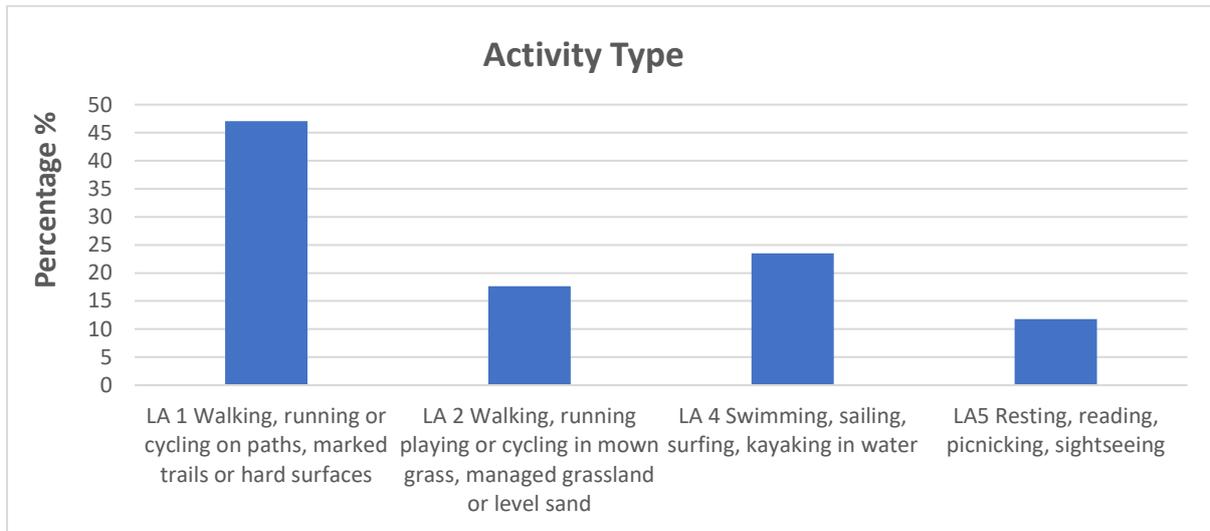


Figure 5: Activity Types

4.0 Observations

The northern carpark was busy with coaches awaiting completion of school tours to Baysports.

Some invasive species signage (Check-Clean-Dry) was observed just at the Marina (Photo 2 below) but could also be replicated at other water entry points.

Some evidence of fire damage to the meadow / waters edge was observed to the north of the site (Photo 3 below).



Photo 2: Check-Clean-Dry Invasives Signage



Photo 3: Evidence of fire damage

Appendix 1 – Activity & Impact Codes

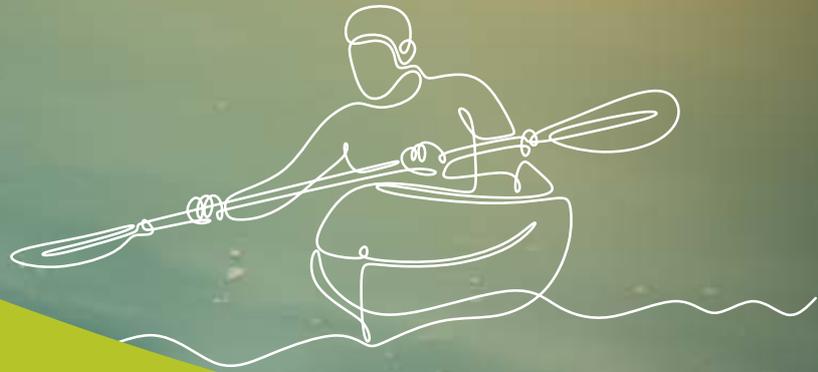
Activities		
Category 1 Low Level		
Walking, running or cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces		LA 1
Walking, running, cycling or playing in mown grass, managed grassland or level sand		LA 2
Sitting on benches, walls, mown grass, sand		LA 3
Swimming, sailing, surfing, kayaking in water		LA 4
Resting, reading, looking, picnicking, sightseeing, painting, photographing		LA 5
Vehicular movement on roads and parking areas		LA 6
Watching nature in hedges, woods, streams, pools and intertidal areas		LA 7
Category 2 Medium Level		
Powered movement through water		MA 1
Any movement leaving an existing trail or marked path		MA 2
Any movement leaving a trail through leafy vegetation		MA 3
Any movement leaving a trail through woody vegetation		MA 4
Climbing on walls, loose stones, sand, soil etc.		MA 5
Fishing		MA 6
Category 3 High Level		
Walking through wet/muddy soil		HA 1
Scrambling on steep or loose slopes		HA 2
Off road vehicular movement		HA 3
Disturbance of wildlife		HA 4
Deliberate building or moving or knocking site materials - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand etc.		HA 5
Picking herbaceous vegetation		HA 6

Impacts		
Category 1 Low Impact		
No identifiable effect		LIE 1
Desire lines or trails visible on grass and leafy vegetation		LIE 2
Temporary disturbance (including chasing and feeding) of insects, fish, amphibian, reptiles, insects, birds and mammals		LIE 3
Temporary change of character - due to the appearance or nature of activities (noise, crowds, etc.)		LIE 4
General/light littering		LIE 5
Category 2 Medium Impact		
Desire lines or tracks visible outside of existing trail or marked path		MIE 1
Trampling of herbaceous vegetation		MIE 2
Damage to woody vegetation		MIE 3
Incidentally moving or knocking site materials - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		MIE 4
Addition/alteration of site features, transient emissions, noise		MIE 5
Transient disturbance, emissions, noise		MIE 6
Disturbance of wildlife		MIE 7
Category 3 Severe Impact		
Direct interference with site material - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		SIE 1
Removal of material - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		SIE 2
Vandalism or graffiti		SIE 3
Destruction of structures, vegetation or fauna		SIE 4
Heavy littering or dumping quantities of waste		SIE 5
Burning materials or lighting a fire		SIE 6
Injuring, killing or taking wildlife		SIE 7

APPENDIX B

GOOD PRACTICE BEHAVIOURS FOR WATER-BASED RECREATIONAL USERS RELATING TO WATERBIRDS

GOOD PRACTICE BEHAVIOURS FOR
Water-based
Recreation Users
RELATING TO
Water Birds



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The wetlands and coastal areas of Ireland attract a wide variety of waterbirds each year. These are important sites for resident and migratory species which use these areas for nesting, roosting and feeding. Birds are vulnerable to disturbance throughout the year. In the spring and summertime, birds are nesting and rearing chicks.

In the Autumn, Winter and Spring, many migrant species are feeding before beginning their journey to the far north to breed.



INTRODUCTION

The wetlands and coastal areas of Ireland provide an important function for tourism and recreation which support rural economies and local jobs. It is important to strike a balance between allowing people to enjoy water-based activities while avoiding impacts on waterbirds. Providers of water-based activities, and those engaging in it have an important role to play in ensuring that the development of water-based recreation in Ireland is sustainable.

The term 'wetland' covers a range of habitats including "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres" (RAMSAR Convention, 2010).

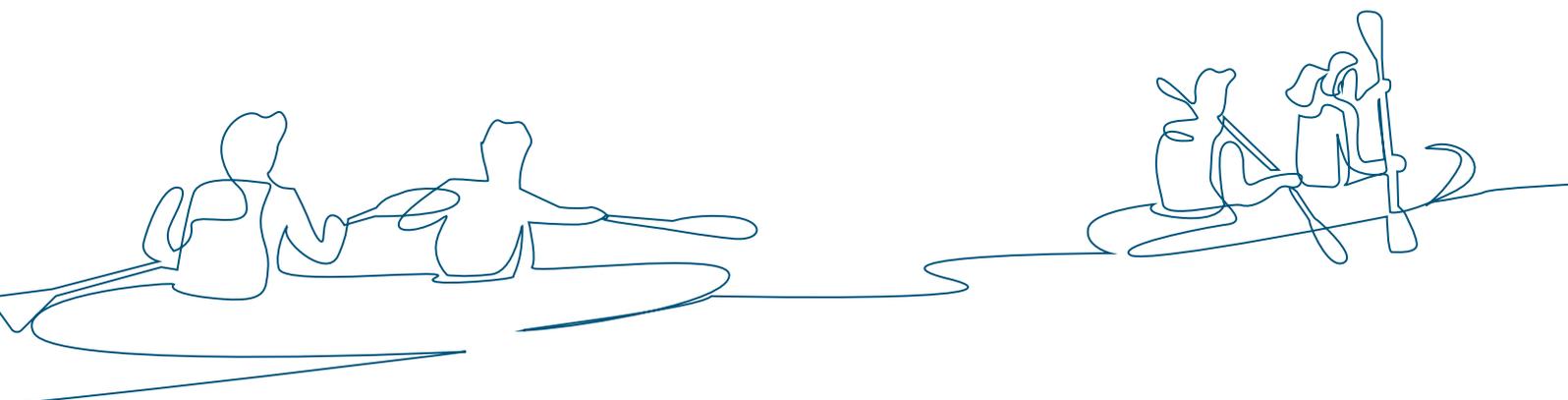


WATER-BASED RECREATION

Ireland's wetlands and coastal areas provide an important amenity area for locals domestic and international tourists. Water-based recreation including swimming, kayaking, rowing, surfing, kitesurfing, windsurfing, sailing, paddleboarding and boating are all key parts of the tourist offering in Ireland. As infrastructure is developed to cater for the existing and increasing demand for facilities to cater for water-sports enthusiasts, consideration must be given to the potential effects of increased footfall on wildlife and waterbirds in particular.

Inland lakes such as Lough Derg are home to numerous species of waterbirds that breed on the shores and islands. Access to the lake is provided from a number of points including Portumna, Dromineer and Mountshannon.

It is vital that people involved in water-based activities are aware of how to behave on the water, in particular, that small islands, rocks and reed beds should be avoided. These areas are likely to contain breeding birds in spring and summer that are sensitive to human disturbance.



WATERBIRDS

Ireland's abundance of waterways and coastlines are home to hundreds of thousands of waterbirds that make use of Irish wetlands throughout the year. Further details regarding Ireland's bird species are detailed on the BirdWatch Ireland [website](#).

Often, these areas are hot spots for recreational activity during the summer months, when the weather is warmer, and people spend more time outdoors engaging in water-based activities. To a lesser extent, waterways and coastal areas are used during the winter months for water-based activities and have the potential to impact wintering birds.

From spring to autumn, waterbirds nest on inland waterways and coastal areas. Depending on the location of the nests, some are more susceptible to disturbance than others. In general, bird nests are concealed in dense vegetation making it unlikely that a person would spot a nest by chance.

“ Unfortunately, though, by looking into that nest, or trying to get some photos to share with family, friends and social media, you could be putting the nesting attempt at risk of failure ”

birdwatchireland.ie/too-close-for-comfort-bird-nests/



For this reason, it is important that people stay away from nesting habitats. Some examples of nesting habitats are presented below:



SANDY BEACHES
e.g. Little Tern, Ringed Plover



RIVERBANKS/LAKE SHORE/REEDBED
e.g. Mute Swan, Ducks, Divers, Grebes



VERTICAL BANKS
e.g. Kingfisher, Sand Martin



FRESHWATER PLAINS, DAMP GRASSLAND
e.g. Lapwing



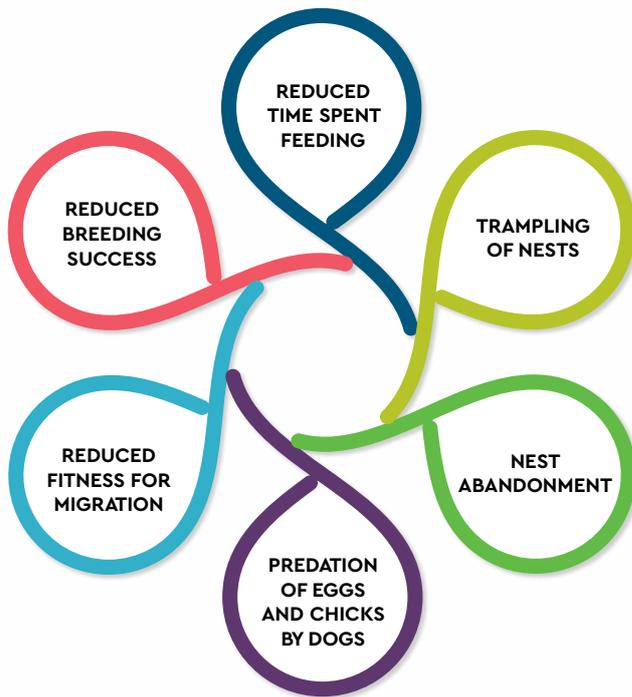
ROCKY CLIFFS/ ISLANDS
e.g. Terns, Gulls, Gannets, Puffins

MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS

In the autumn, Ireland receives an influx of migratory waterbirds from the far north. These include species of geese, ducks and waders. Overwintering species are typically found in coastal areas, particularly areas with vast intertidal areas, but also inland where they feed in fields, bogs and amenity grassland areas such as sports pitches.



EFFECTS OF DISTURBANCE DUE TO WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES ON BIRDS



SIGNS OF DISTURBANCE

- Head-bobbing, wing flapping and increased calling.
- Flushing or flying away.

If you notice these signs, you are too close and should move away. Some birds will stay on nests when approached by people. This does not mean that the bird is tolerant or not bothered by the presence of people.



Appendix A

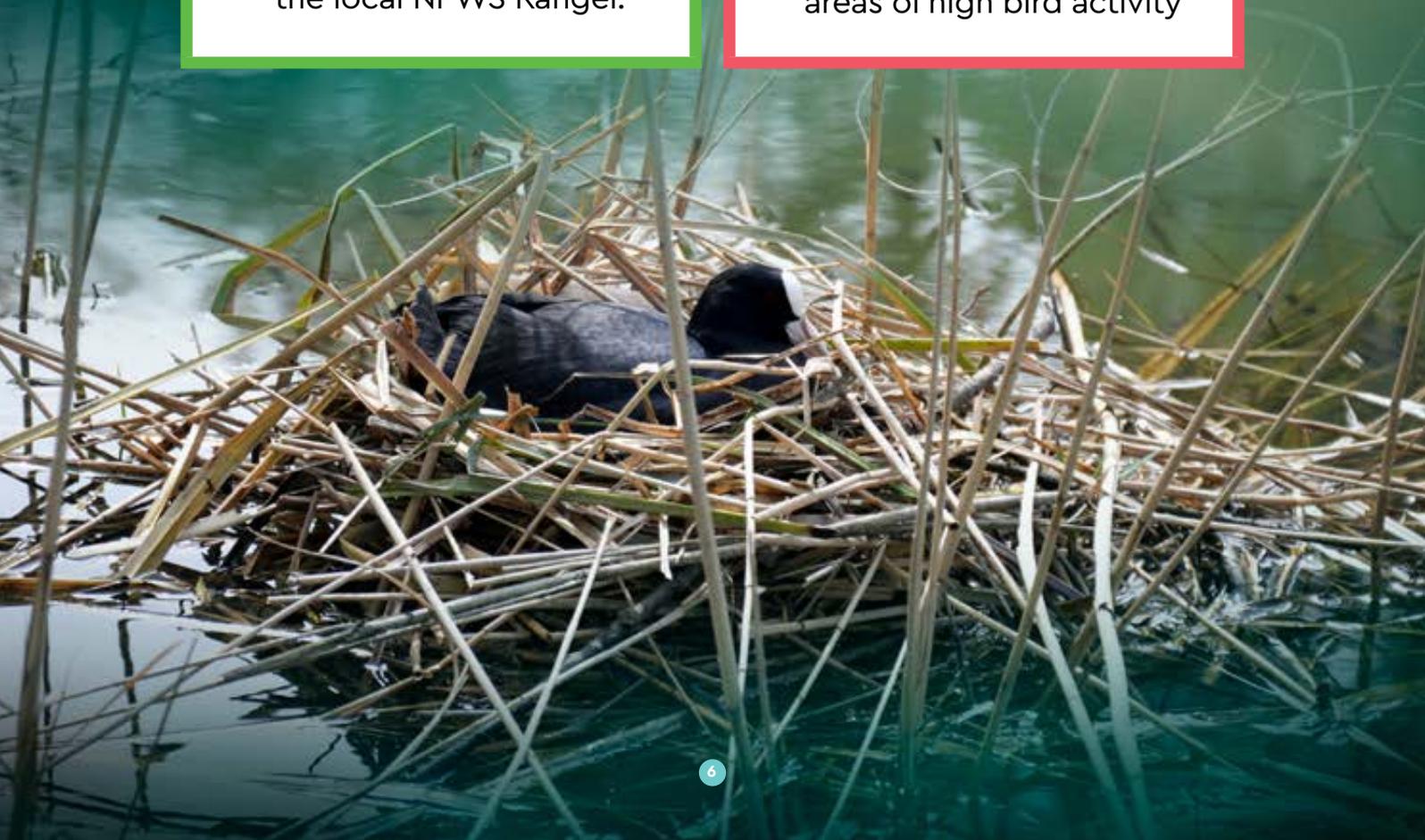
WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES – DO'S AND DON'TS RELATING TO WATER BIRDS

DO

- ✓ Stay away from sensitive areas (nesting, feeding, roosting habitat)
- ✓ Observe birds from a distance – 50m or more
- ✓ Use binoculars or a scope to view birds up-close
- ✓ Move away quietly if you accidentally encounter a birds nest
- ✓ Report any incidents to the local NPWS Ranger.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't approach reed beds, small islands or cliff nesting sites during spring and summer
- ✗ Don't approach birds, particularly birds on nests
- ✗ Don't make excessive noise in or near nests, roosts or feeding areas
- ✗ Don't make sudden movements or travel at excessive speeds near areas of high bird activity



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Turasóireacht Náisiúnta
An tÚdara Eorbartha
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