

Rook Management Update and Recommendations

Victoria Park 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 2025.

Kerry Mackie 20/09/2024

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 of 20 nests in 2020. By removing previous years' nests and pruning out support branches, nest distribution has become more dispersed and reduced in numbers from 18 in 2020 to 8 in 2023 but increased in 2024 to 15 nests - although two were later abandoned. Using this less-invasive technique, although reaching the desired objective, takes longer and needs to be repeated annually.

Licensed activities undertaken 2024

The removal of rook nests and associated canopy pruning was undertaken on January 23rd 2024 under a Belfast City Council license by Glenburn Landscapes - professional arborists subcontracted directly by Belfast City Airport. Seven old rook nests were removed with any supporting branches/unions modified by the selective pruning with a further two removed from thick ivy previously unrecorded during the previous nesting season.

Results

Rooks in 2024, as in the previous year, nested in a loose colony either side of the water-way north-east of the Sam Thompson bridge but in reduced numbers and with the two nests on the main Island later abandoned. However, a new nest-cluster comprised of six nests was located along the southern perimeter of the park 300m away (Photograph 1 and Figure 1) and coincident to a tree carrying Birch Besom (*Taphrina betulina*), which with its similarity to a rook's nest, may have prompted nesting activity in this area. While the number of nests increased in 2024 for the first year since management prescriptions were introduced in 2020 (Figure 2) the number of nests and flock sizes observed (Figure 3) have reduced and the continuing removal of old nests therefore remains appropriate.



P1. Rook nests along southern periphery of Victoria Park in 2024 and coincident with Birch besom (*Taphrina betulina*)

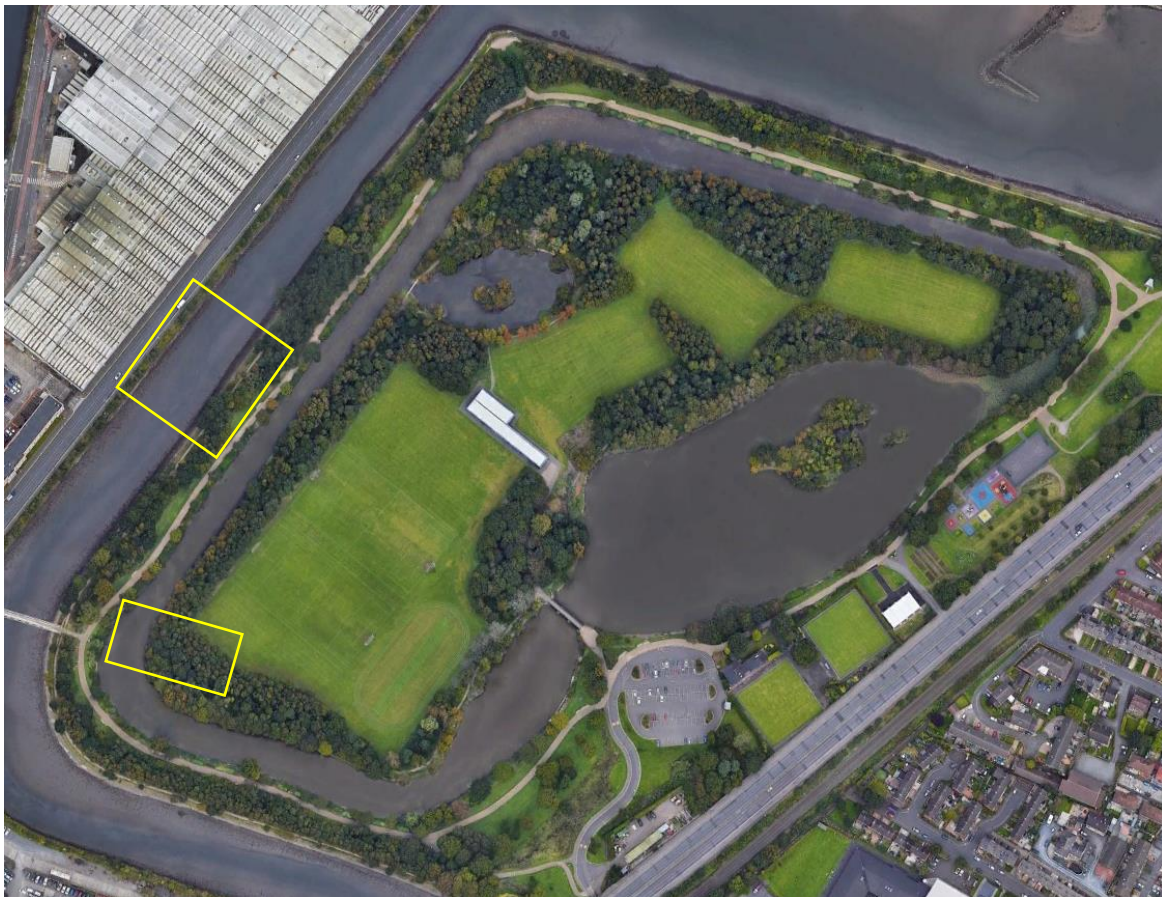


Figure 1. Victoria Park with outlined areas marking location of rook nests in 2024 (lower box outlining the new nesting area), and demarcation for nest removal prior to 2025 breeding season.



Figure 2. Nesting rooks at Victoria Park 2020-2024

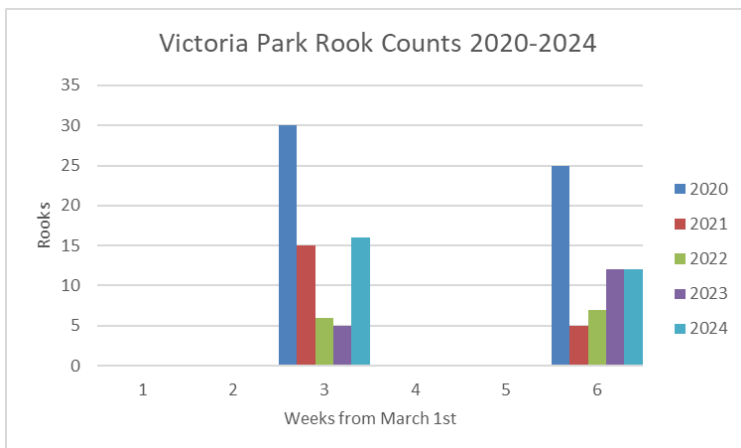


Figure 3. Rooks present during bird counts 2020-2024

To continue dispersing and reducing the number of rook nests at Victoria Park, the Airport needs to continue with current management prescriptions to 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 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. Clumps of Birch Besom will also be removed.

Window for management : December 2024 to mid-January 2025.

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/ Jan 2024) prior to the 2025 rook breeding season.
- Remove Birch Besom if present
- Continue to reduce shelter provided by ivy within nesting trees or those immediately adjacent, if required.