

## CHAPTER A10: ORNITHOLOGY

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## **A.10. ORNITHOLOGY**

### **A.10.1 Executive Summary**

- A.10.1.1 Chapter 10 of the EIA Report (January 2019) assessed the potential effects on birds from the Proposed Varied Development. This present Chapter updates the January 2019 assessment in light of changes to the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum). The EIA Report (January 2019) included a Confidential Annex which has also been up-dated for the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum).
- A.10.1.2 The up-dated assessment has concluded that the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) would not cause significant impacts on birds, either from habitat loss, disturbance outside the bird breeding season, displacement or collision. If construction is carried out during the bird breeding season, potential disturbance to nesting birds would be mitigated by appropriate deterrence and nest protection measures implemented by a suitably experienced ECoW. The requirement for an ECoW is secured through Condition of Consent 24. The Confidential Annex provides further specific details of mitigation.
- A.10.1.3 The up-dated assessment, provided in the Confidential Annex, also concluded that the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) would have no likely significant effect on the integrity or bird populations of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA). There would also be no negative effect on the bird populations of the Gordonbush Estate Habitat Management Plan area.
- A.10.1.4 Overall, the effects of the Proposed Varied Development and Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) on birds do not vary materially from those of the Consented Development.

## **A.10.2 Introduction**

- A.10.2.1 The aim of this Chapter is to assess the effects of the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) on birds from the wind farm's construction, operation and decommissioning. It compares these effects with the predicted impacts of the Proposed Varied Development Section 36C Application, which were assessed and reported in the EIA Report (January 2019).
- A.10.2.2 Where information does not require updating between this document and the EIA Report (January 2019), this is stated, and the original information is only reproduced where it provides context for the updated assessment. Where required, additional information is provided to reflect the changes introduced by the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum). Information on Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and RSPB Scotland's consultation responses to the Proposed Varied Development Section 36C Application is also provided.
- A.10.2.3 The Chapter is also accompanied by a Confidential Annex A10.1: Golden Eagle, which provides updated baseline and assessment information on this species.
- A.10.2.4 This assessment has been completed by professional ornithologists with relevant experience from RPS, with inputs from SLR on the Confidential Annex.

## **A.10.3 Consented Development**

### ***Summary of Effects***

- A.10.3.1 The potential negative effects of wind farms on birds were summarised in Section 10.3.1 to 10.3.2 of the EIA Report (January 2019), based on the findings of the ES (2015) and FEI Report (2016). The potential effects of the Gordonbush Extension on breeding, wintering and migratory birds were considered, covering the effects of habitat loss, disturbance, nest destruction, displacement and collision risk.
- A.10.3.2 With the adoption of proposed mitigation measures (as retained within Appendix 4.2: Schedule of Mitigation of the EIA Report (January 2019) (i.e. the deployment of an ECoW), the assessment concluded that the Consented Development would have no significant effects on ornithological interests.

### ***Consultation Responses***

- A.10.3.3 Consultation responses to the Consented Development have been provided in the EIA Report (January 2019) (Sections 10.3.3 to 10.3.4).

### ***Relevant Mitigation Measures and Conditions of Consent***

- A.10.3.4 The 2015 ES and FEI Report (2016) concluded that since all the potential effects of the development on birds, apart from risks to nests, were assessed as being of low or very low magnitude and not significant, no mitigation was required beyond the deployment of an ECoW to protect nesting birds during construction.
- A.10.3.5 The Schedule of Mitigation for the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) incorporates the same measures committed to for the Consented Development and the Proposed Varied Development application (see Appendix 4.2 of the EIA Report (January 2019)), with additional specific details in the Confidential Annex A10.1.

## **A.10.4 Scope of Assessment**

### ***Study Area***

- A.10.4.1 The majority of this Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) will be encompassed by the study area covered in the Gordonbush ES (2015) and FEI Report (2016), as summarised in the

EIA Report (January 2019) (see Section 10.4, Paragraph 10.4.1 to 10.4.2), with the addition of a small area to the south-west (see Figure A4.1 of this Addendum).

A.10.4.2 Other than this small addition to the application boundary for the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum), the changes to the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) are:

- Relocation of T4 by 113m to grid reference NC285796 913484, and renaming to T4b;
- Construction of an extra c.300m of access track from the proposed Lidar station to T12;
- Removal of a borrow pit from beside T4;
- Creation of new a new borrow pit in the Bullburn plantation west of the Allt a Mhuilinn;
- Water crossing on the Allt a Mhuilinn to access the Bullburn borrow pit; and
- Relocation of the concrete batching plant.

### **Consultation**

A.10.4.3 Pre-application consultation with relevant stakeholders was undertaken in August and September 2018 for the Proposed Varied Development. Feedback was reported in Table 10.1 in Chapter 10 of the EIA Report (January 2019).

A.10.4.4 Since submission of the Section 36C Application in January 2019, further consultation responses have been received from SNH and RSPB.

A.10.4.5 In its response to the Proposed Varied Development (dated 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019) SNH raised no concerns in relation to birds, confirming that ‘golden eagle flights recorded in proximity of the development are not considered to be linked to this (Caithness and Sutherlands Peatlands) SPA. Other SPA interests are unlikely to be significantly affected’. Furthermore, SNH stated ‘The interest features of Coir an Eoin Site of Special Scientific Interest (blanket bog and golden plover) have already been assessed above as part of the ... SPA interests. No significant impacts have been predicted. Greylag geese were recorded flying through the proposal at collision risk height, resulting in 0.37 collisions per year (assuming avoidance). However, the geese that generated this collision risk assessment were almost exclusively recorded during the spring and autumn migration periods, along with pink footed geese. Therefore, we consider that these greylags are associated with the Icelandic migrating wintering population, rather than being resident greylags associated with this Ramsar Site. Therefore, we consider that this proposal is unlikely to have significant impacts on Ramsar greylag geese’.

A.10.4.6 SNH’s response continued (in relation to the Gordonbush Extension Habitat Management Plan (GEHMP)), ‘The developer’s data confirms that the current open ground habitats within the GEHMP are valuable for foraging golden eagles. It also goes on to indicate that the sustained HMP effort by SSE, ecologists and estate land managers to enhance the HMP area is working, with probable expansion of eagle territories. In this regard, we welcome the additional commitment for golden eagle monitoring within the EIA Report’.

A.10.4.7 For birds, no aspect of the Proposed Varied Development Section 36C Application wind farm is therefore anticipated to cause concern to SNH, in light of its response.

A.10.4.8 The RSPB response (dated 27<sup>th</sup> March 2019) noted that originally it did not have serious concerns about impacts on designated sites or priority birds from the Gordonbush Extension. However, in light of golden eagle flight activity recorded during the Gordonbush Wind Farm post construction monitoring, it does ‘welcome the intention of the applicant to commit to monitoring both the existing and possible new pair of golden eagles’, and recommends that if the application be approved ‘additional pre and post construction monitoring of golden eagle activity over the extension site, should be required to aid in resolving uncertainties regarding the assessment undertaken and to verify the conclusions of the EIA Report’.

A.10.4.9 In relation to the GEHMP, RSPB’s response further states that the HMP should ‘detail measures to mitigate potential impacts on golden eagles including any *unforeseen* impacts in terms of collision risk, as well as the “significant environmental impacts identified in the EIA Report” (as referred to in the suggested varied Condition 25, in paragraph 10.3.10 of the EIA Report (January 2019))’. Information on mitigation and consent conditions is provided in A10.10 below.

A.10.4.10 The response to feedback from SNH and RSPB is summarised in Table A10.1.

**Table A10.1: Consultation Summary Relevant to Birds**

Consultee	Summary Response	Comment/Action Taken
SNH	<p>It is unlikely that the proposal will have a significant effect on any qualifying interests either directly or indirectly of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA. An appropriate assessment is therefore not required.</p> <p>Only four golden plover were recorded flying through the development site at collision risk height on one day. This is not enough to carry out collision risk modelling. In addition, golden plover were not found to be breeding within the development site.</p> <p>Golden eagle flights recorded in proximity of the development are not considered to be linked to this SPA. Other SPA interests are unlikely to be significantly affected.</p>	Noted and no action required.
SNH	The interest features of Coir an Eoin SSSI (blanket bog and golden plover) have already been assessed above as part of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and SPA interests. No significant impacts have been predicted.	Noted and no action required.
SNH	Greylag geese were recorded flying through the proposal at collision risk height, resulting in 0.37 collisions per year (assuming avoidance). However, the geese that generated this collision risk assessment were almost exclusively recorded during the spring and autumn migration periods, along with pink footed geese. Therefore, we consider that these greylags are associated with the Icelandic migrating wintering population, rather than being resident greylags associated with this Ramsar Site. Therefore, we consider that this proposal is unlikely to have significant impacts on Ramsar greylag geese.	Noted and no action required.
SNH	<p>We note that SSE wishes to investigate the opportunity to align and consolidate the original Gordonbush Estate Habitat Management Plan (GEHMP) with the HMP for this development. We advise that it will be important for the GEHMP objectives to be maintained for the life time of the original wind farm to make good the environment impacts on important bird interests (i.e. merlin and golden eagle).</p> <p>The developer’s data confirms that the current open ground habitats within the GEHMP are valuable for foraging golden eagles. It also goes on to indicate that the sustained HMP effort by SSE, ecologists and estate land managers to enhance the HMP area is working, with probable expansion of eagle territories. In this regard, we welcome the additional commitment for golden eagle monitoring within the EIA Report.</p>	<p>Noted, and accepted.</p> <p>Noted and no action required.</p>
RSPB	RSPB Scotland does not believe that the impacts of the Proposed Varied Development on golden eagle have been sufficiently	The applicant has responded directly to RSPB Scotland, setting out the reasoning why it’s

Consultee	Summary Response	Comment/Action Taken
	assessed to allow a reasonable conclusion that the scheme would have negligible impacts.	<p>concerns over collision risk assessment are invalid, and emphasizing that the detailed and thoroughly evidenced conclusion of the EIA Report (January 2019) is robust. As noted from the above details of SNH’s response, in its role as statutory advisor on natural heritage, SNH fully accepts the thoroughness of the assessment, the methods used (including use of the Golden Eagle Terrain (GET) model) and the conclusions reached.</p> <p>The additional evidence collected in the intervening period between this current submission and the EIA Report (January 2019) has enabled additional baseline data to be collected, and the up-dated assessment presented in the Confidential Annex to this current Chapter fully validates the assessment and conclusions presented in the EIA Report (January 2019). No further action is required.</p>
RSPB	We welcome the intention of the applicant to commit to monitoring both the existing and possible new pair of golden eagles, but should the application be approved we recommend that additional pre and post construction monitoring of golden eagle activity over the extension site, should be required to aid in resolving uncertainties regarding the assessment undertaken and to verify the conclusions of the EIA Report.	The proposed approach to monitoring is set out in Chapter 10 Section 10.11 of the EIA Report (January 2019) and will be adhered to.

**A.10.5 Policy, Legislation and Guidance**

A.10.5.1 As relevant policy, legislation and guidance remain unchanged, please refer to Section 10.5 of the EIA Report (January 2019) for details.

**A.10.6 Methodology**

A.10.6.1 As the methodology for the assessment remains unchanged, please refer to Section 10.6 of the EIA Report (January 2019) for the relevant details.

**Desk Study**

A.10.6.2 The desk study completed for the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report, summarised in the EIA Report (January 2019) (see Section 10.6.1), remains the basis for this Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) revised assessment, supplemented by additional desk study information in the Confidential Annex A10.1.

**Field Survey**

A.10.6.3 As noted in Section 10.6.2 of the EIA Report (January 2019), SNH confirmed in its pre-application consultation response that no further bird survey work was required. The fieldwork results reported in the 2015 ES and summarised in the EIA Report (January 2019) (see Sections 10.6.2 – 10.6.4) therefore remain the principle source of baseline information for this current assessment.

A.10.6.4 However, as on-going post-construction monitoring for Gordonbush Wind Farm has continued to record golden eagle activity in the wider area (albeit the survey area does not fully extend over the Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm site), the results since the EIA Report (January 2019) have been considered, supplemented by targeted golden eagle observations over the March to April period. The resulting information is presented in Appendix A10.1 (Confidential Annex) of this Chapter.

- A.10.6.5 Since April, in compliance with Condition 24 of the Consented Development, an Ecological Clerk of Works has been on site during ground investigation (GI) works. This has provided the opportunity to carry out further targeted golden eagle observations. The results of these observations are also presented in the Appendix A10.1 (Confidential Annex) of this Chapter).

### ***Assessment of Effects***

- A.10.6.6 The method of assessment for this Chapter is unchanged from the EIA Report (January 2019). Please therefore refer to its Sections 10.6.5 – 10.6.17 for details.

## **A.10.7 Baseline Conditions**

### ***Designations***

- A.10.7.1 For designations associated with the Proposed Varied Development see Section 10.7.1 – 10.7.2 of the EIA Report (January 2019).

### ***Desk Study***

- A.10.7.2 The desk study completed for the 2015 ES and 2016 FEI Report, summarised in the EIA Report (January 2019) (see Section 10.7.3 to 10.7.4), remains the basis for this Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) revised assessment, supplemented by additional desk study information in the Confidential Annex A10.1.

### ***Field Survey***

- A.10.7.3 Baseline bird data for Gordonbush Extension were originally presented in the Gordonbush Extension ES (2015) and FEI Report (2016). Following SNH's confirmation that no further surveys were necessary (during pre-application consultation for the Gordonbush Extension S36 Variation application), these data were used as the basis of the assessment (see Sections 10.7.5 – 10.7.29 of the EIA Report (January 2019)).
- A.10.7.4 Post-construction monitoring of birds for the Gordonbush Wind Farm did reveal golden eagle flight activity in the wider area (Northern Ecological Services (NES) 2016, 2017, 2018a and 2018b), as noted in the EIA Report (January 2019). The EIA Report (January 2019) therefore also included detailed assessment of potential effects of the Proposed Varied Development on golden eagles (as described in the Confidential Appendix 10.4 of the EIA Report (January 2019)).
- A.10.7.5 The subsequent post-construction monitoring results (to April 2019) have been considered in this assessment (NES 2019a, 2019b, NES unpublished April 2019 data), and further targeted survey effort has been carried out for March to April 2019. The results are reported in the Confidential Annex to this Addendum (as Confidential Annex A10.1). The deployment of an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) to oversee GI works has also provided the opportunity to collect additional field data on golden eagle activity. The results from both sets of monitoring suggest distribution of flight activity remains comparable with that reported in the Confidential Appendix 10.4 of the EIA Report (January 2019).

## **A.10.8 Review of Conservation Value of the Resident Bird Species**

- A.10.8.1 The conservation values assigned to target species remains the same as detailed in Section 10.8, Paragraph 10.8.1 of the EIA Report (January 2019)).

## **A.10.9 Potential Effects**

- A.10.9.1 The specific details of potential effects are set out below, updated for each phase of the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) (construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning). This is supplemented by additional detail in the Confidential Annex A10.1.

### **Construction Phase**

#### *Habitat Loss*

- A.10.9.2 The adjusted location of T4 to T4b and the track from T12 to the Lidar involves the loss of a very small percentage of the available habitat (see Chapter A8) similar in extent to that of the Proposed Varied Development (see Section 10.6, Paragraph 10.9.2 of the EIA Report (January 2019)). There are no critical bird habitat features, such as lochs (used for nesting by divers) or cliffs (used for nesting by raptors, such as peregrine), on or near the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) site. Due to only a slight adjustment in the location and extent of infrastructure the effect of this habitat loss is assessed as being **minor and not significant**.
- A.10.9.3 Due to limited value of the habitat present within both borrow pit areas and their small extent, the use of these areas is assessed as being of low magnitude and **not significant**.

#### *Disturbance*

- A.10.9.4 Outside the breeding bird season (April to July), disturbance due to construction activities is assessed for the resident bird species as being a short-term effect of very low magnitude and **not significant**.
- A.10.9.5 If construction is carried out during the bird breeding season, between April and July, there is a risk of disturbance to nesting birds. Given there is only minor adjustment being made to the layout of the Proposed Varied Development, as assessed in the EIA Report (January 2019), and deploying the additional mitigation measures set out in the Confidential Annex, the impact of disturbance is considered the same as the assessment made at that time (see Section 10.8, Paragraph, 10.9.4 of the EIA Report (January 2019)).

#### *Nest Destruction*

- A.10.9.6 There is a risk that birds' nests might be destroyed by trampling or the operation of machinery. The deliberate or careless destruction of birds' nests is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended). Such risks are therefore still considered to be short-term and of medium magnitude. In the absence of mitigation, the effect is considered **moderate and significant**.

### **Operational Phase**

#### *Disturbance*

- A.10.9.7 Considering the activities of personnel during the operational phase of the wind farm being limited to wind farm tracks and turbine bases, and deploying the additional mitigation measures set out in the Confidential Annex, disturbance to birds is assessed as having an effect of low magnitude and **not significant**.

#### *Collision Risk*

- A.10.9.8 The adjusted location of T4 to T4b will have negligible effect on the outputs from collision risk modelling. Collision risk impacts are not therefore considered to be significantly different from the figures provided in the EIA Report (January 2019).

#### *Displacement*

- A.10.9.9 Displacement caused by disturbance during the operation phase remains the same as detailed in Section 10.9.6 of the EIA Report (January 2019).

### **Decommissioning Phase**

- A.10.9.10 Impacts during decommissioning remain the same as those detailed in Section 10.9.14 of the EIA Report (January 2019).



**A.10.10 Mitigation**

***Disturbance and Destruction Risk to Nests During Construction***

A.10.10.1 Risk of nest disturbance or destruction during construction remains the same as assessed in the EIA Report (January 2019)). Therefore, measures proposed in Sections 10.10.1 to 10.10.3 of the EIA Report (January 2019)) to mitigate this risk remain the same.

***Additional Mitigation Measures Relevant to Proposed Varied Development (Addendum)***

A.10.10.2 Additional detail on mitigation measures is in the Confidential Annex A10.1.

**A.10.11 Monitoring**

A.10.11.1 The monitoring proposed remains the same as set out in Section 10.11.1 to 10.11.2 of the EIA Report (January 2019)).

**A.10.12 Assessment of Residual Effects**

A.10.12.1 Residual effects (including residual effects detailed in the Confidential Annex) remain the same as those detailed in Section 10.12.1 of the EIA Report (January 2019)).

**A.10.13 Cumulative Effects**

A.10.13.1 Cumulative effects remain the same as those detailed in Section 10.13.1 of the EIA Report (January 2019)).

**A.10.14 Effect on the Existing Gordonbush HMP Objectives**

A.10.14.1 The effect on the Proposed Varied Development on the Gordonbush HMP objectives remains the same as detailed in Sections 10.14.1-10.14.3 of the EIA Report (January 2019)).

**A.10.15 Comparison of Effects**

A.10.15.1 Table A10.2 compares the impacts of the Consented and Proposed Varied Developments. It shows the Proposed Varied Development will not have significant residual effects on birds.

**Table A10.2: Comparison of Residual Effects (see also Confidential Annex 10.1)**

Effect	Feature	Consented Development Potential Significance	Consented Development Mitigation	Consented Development Residual Significance	Proposed Varied Development Residual Significance	Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) Residual Significance
Habitat loss	Breeding birds	Not significant	None required	Not significant	No Change	No Change
Disturbance (winter)	Wintering birds	Not significant	None required	Not significant	No Change	No Change
Disturbance (spring)	Breeding birds	Moderate	Nest protection	Not significant	No Change	No Change
Nest destruction	Breeding birds	Moderate	Nest protection	Not significant	No Change	No Change
Collision risk	Overflying geese	Not significant	None required	Not significant	No Change	No Change

**A.10.16 Conclusions**

A.10.16.1 It is concluded there would be no significant effect of the Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) on birds, either through habitat loss, disturbance outside the bird breeding season, displacement or collision risk. This also takes account of the up-dated baseline and assessment in the Confidential Annex (Appendix A10.1).

- A.10.16.2 If construction is carried out during the bird breeding season, potential disturbance to nesting birds would be mitigated by appropriate deterrence and nest protection measures implemented by a suitably experienced ECoW (in accordance with Condition of Consent 24). Prevention of disturbance is further detailed in the Confidential Annex.
- A.10.16.3 There would be no likely significant effect on the integrity or bird populations of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA. There would also be no negative effect on the bird populations of the Gordonbush Estate Habitat Management Plan area.
- A.10.16.4 Overall, the effects of the Proposed Varied Development and Proposed Varied Development (Addendum) on birds do not vary materially from those of the Consented Development.

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