Ireland's Eye Seabird Monitoring and - Wardening Report 2025

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Council

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Front Cover Image: Cormorant pair on Ireland's Eye; Brian Burke.

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NPWS
An tSeirbhís Páirceanna
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We would like to thank Lorraine Bull and colleagues in Fingal County Council for driving this important project forward and for engagement and help throughout the summer; BirdWatch Ireland colleagues Alex Fink, Sam Preston, Emma Roberts, Rochelle Streker, Anita Donaghy, Louise Barry and Steve Newton; Eoin Quinlan and all at Howth Castle; Mark Doyle and the entire team at Howth Cliff Cruises; the National Parks and Wildlife Service, including Mairead Stack and staff in the wildlife licensing unit; Derek for his parallel efforts on Ireland's Eye to improve conditions for seabirds; Astrid Dedieu, Katherine Booth-Jones and the UCC/UCD gull tagging team; Jan Rod, Graham Prole and the Irish Midlands Ringing Group; and the many visitors to the island and members of the public who adhered to the restrictions in place. We greatly appreciated those who took an interest in the project and expressed their good wishes.

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Executive Summary

Ireland's Eye is an important nesting location for gulls and cliff-nesting seabirds and is subject to significant visitor pressure each summer. The behaviour of visitors often causes disturbance of these nesting birds, as has been documented by BirdWatch Ireland in 2017 and 2016. In 2025, two BirdWatch Ireland wardens were employed to monitor census and monitor productivity of the seabirds present.

As part of the management plan for the island and to better balance the needs of wildlife and people on the island, Fingal County Council mowed paths for visitors to follow, installed signage to direct people away from sensitive areas and encourage understanding for the need to keep a distance from nesting birds, and erected fencing to deter people from walking through key seabird nesting areas previously noted for high disturbance.

In 2025 the breeding seabird community on Ireland's Eye consisted of 20 Fulmar (See Table 1 for latin names) AOS's, 641 Gannet AONs, 314 Cormorant AONs, 53 Shag AONs, 1 Lesser Black-backed Gull AOT, 697 Herring Gull AOTs, 126 Great Black-backed Gull AOTs, 394 Kittiwake AONs, 5,051 Guillemot INDs, 1,706 Razorbill INDs and an informal count of 8 Puffin individuals thought to be indicative of the number of occupied nests present. Compared to the census in 2024, each of Fulmar, Shag and Lesser Black-backed Gull showed declines of >10% while Gannet, Herring Gull and Kittiwake showed increases of >10%.

Five species had productivity (average number of fledged young per breeding pair) of ≥1.0, namely Cormorant (1.38), Shag (1.64), Kittiwake (1.03), Herring Gull (1.19) and Great Black-backed Gull (1.00). These compared favourably to productivity at other colonies in Dublin and Wicklow in 2025, and an improvement from figures from Ireland's Eye in 2024. Guillemot (0.26), Razorbill (0.40) and Gannet (0.44) showed low productivity however compared to 2024, though largely similar to other sites in 2025.

Designated paths were mown and fencing, signage and an information lectern were installed between 27 May and 06 June. Wardens monitored footfall throughout the summer and saw a clear and immediate decline in the number of visitors to the hill, summit, back of cliffs and stacks areas, all of which border the cliffs on the north side of the island which hold the vast majority of the cliff-nesting seabird population. Areas with the highest footfall were the landing and the main beach. Disturbance increased at the Martello

Tower as the summer progressed, due to larger numbers of visitors and the fact that the tower itself is an attraction that people gravitate towards.

The wardens gave a briefing about the island, restrictions and bird disturbance to visitors landing via licensed boat operators, and these were well received and aided in the high level of cooperation from visitors. On weekends and particularly on bank holidays there was a high level of unlicensed boats landing people on the island, many of whom camped for the weekend. These visitors tended to disobey restrictions, including bringing dogs to the island, lighting fires, walking off paths and creating new tracks as a result, and generally being disrespectful to wardens. They were observed to disturb gulls and Oystercatchers on the Beaches, and their actions and movements in evenings and morning when wardens were not present are not known. The large number of barbeques and campfires lit by campers also presents a very serious risk of fires on the island which would be devastating to the birds.

New rules implemented in 2025 were largely successful. The ban on dogs was largely adhered to, though with a few incidents, many involving unlicensed boats. Some wildlife photographers did not adhere to new restrictions and entered areas where access was restricted, and in some cases walking through key nesting areas. Some also spent a significant amount of time in one place, potentially causing prolonged disturbance.

The issue of boat-based disturbance to birds on the cliffs, nesting in and around caves and gullies, and birds sitting on the water (particularly on the northern side of the island) warrants further attention ahead of the 2026 season and approaches should be made to key stakeholders (boat owners, tour operators, kayakers etc.) in Howth and Malahide in particular to ensure they maintain an appropriate distance to avoid disturbance.

This report contains a number of specific recommendations to build on the successful management efforts ahead of the next breeding season, for the benefit of the nesting seabirds on Ireland's Eye.

1. Introduction

Ireland's Eye is both an important seabird colony and a popular visitor destination in north County Dublin. It supports large numbers of cliff-nesting seabird species (Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*, Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, Guillemot *Uria aalge*, Razorbill *Alca torda*), a spectacular Gannet *Morus bassanus* colony and good numbers of large *Larus* gulls and Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* on the less steep areas (Merne & Madden, 2000). It can be reached by a 15-minute boat trip from Howth Harbour and attracts a diverse mix of people during the summer, including birdwatchers and naturalists, adventurous types, tourists, families and beach goers in varying proportions. The breeding Puffins *Fratercula arctica* are a significant attraction, even though only a very small number are present on the island.

Ireland's Eye has been designated a Special Protection Area (SPA; site code 004117) under the EU Birds Directive for the nesting Cormorants, Herring Gulls, Kittiwakes, Guillemots and Razorbills present. Among the conservation objectives for the site are to "…restore the favourable conservation condition…" of these species, as measured through breeding population size, productivity, distribution and nest site availability and suitable foraging area. Management of disturbance to levels that do not significantly impact on the birds is also specified separately as a key objective.

Previous work by BirdWatch Ireland has examined visitor presence and disturbance on the island (Newton *et al.*, 2016). In 2025, Fingal County Council began significant efforts to limit disturbance to nesting seabirds, including hiring two BirdWatch Ireland wardens to engage with and monitor visitors, redefining mowed paths to help ensure people kept away from areas they are likely to cause disturbance, and installing new signage and fencing to ensure same. This report summarises the summer of 2025 on Ireland's Eye, with reference to seabird nesting numbers, seabird breeding productivity, visitor presence and disturbance levels, the impact of new management efforts and recommendations to further improve people management and minimise disturbance to nesting seabirds in the future.

Figure 1: Map of Ireland's Eye showing the primary visitor path established by Fingal County Council, with all major points of the island and path segments labelled.

2. Breeding Seabird Census

The breeding seabirds on Ireland's Eye have been monitored at irregular intervals over the years (e.g. Newton *et al.*, 2024; 2016; Trewby *et al.*, 2007; Merne & Madden, 2000). In 2025 all seabirds, except for Puffin, were censused according to the methodologies outlined in 'The Seabird Monitoring Handbook for Britain and Ireland' (Walsh *et al.*, 1995). Counts were undertaken through a combination of land- and boat-based observations and drone photography. Puffins were not included in the census as work began after the ideal survey window for this species (early to mid- May). In addition, the preferred method for counting Puffins is AOB (Apparently Occupied Burrows) but these can be difficult to access and detect on the steep slopes of Ireland's Eye north cliffs. The number of individuals on land or sea close to the cliff base is thought to equate to the approximate number of breeding pairs, however.

Two observers conducted land-based observations on May 26. The results were nearly identical, so only one was used for the final count. Drone-based photos were taken on 5 June and reviewed by one warden, while boat-based photos from the same day were reviewed by both wardens.

The results of the seabird census on Ireland's Eye in 2025 are outlined in Table 1 and further context is provided on a species group basis below. It should be noted that 2025 is the first summer since the late 1990's where comprehensive surveying of seabirds on Ireland's Eye has been carried out in successive years. This allows for a better understanding of interannual fluctuations in breeding numbers, which may reflect feeding conditions, weather, disturbance, historic productivity, survival or the proportion of birds in suitable breeding condition following the non-breeding season.

While not included in the study, at least four Oystercatcher pairs and one Ringed Plover were observed along the island's beaches. The number may be higher, but additional sightings could not be confirmed as new pairs rather than repeat observations of the same ones.

Table 1: Results of seabird census on Ireland's Eye in 2025, with % change since 2024 (Newton *et al.*, 2024) and previous totals.

Species	Count Unit	Seabird 2000	2007	2016	2024	2025	Change
Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*	AOS	70	55	34	40	**20**	-50%
Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*	AON	188	365	547*	515	**641**	24.5%
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*	AON	306	651	398	310	**314**	1.3%
European Shag *Gulosus aristotelis*	AON	32	64	72	70	**53**	-23.3%
Lesser Black-Backed Gull Larus fuscus	AOT	1	4	3	2	**1**	-50%
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*	AOT	c250	217	398	555	**697**	+25.6%
Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*	AOT	c100	185	132	120	**126**	+5.0%
Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*	AON	941	633	401	282	**394**	39.7%
Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*	IND	2,191	2,341	4,274	5,186	**5,051**	-2.6%
Razorbill *Alca torda*	IND	522	546	1,335	1,652	**1,706**	3.3%
Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*	IND	2	10				-
Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*	IND	4	25-35	No Data	35	**8**	-77.1%

*2015 data

Shag & Cormorant

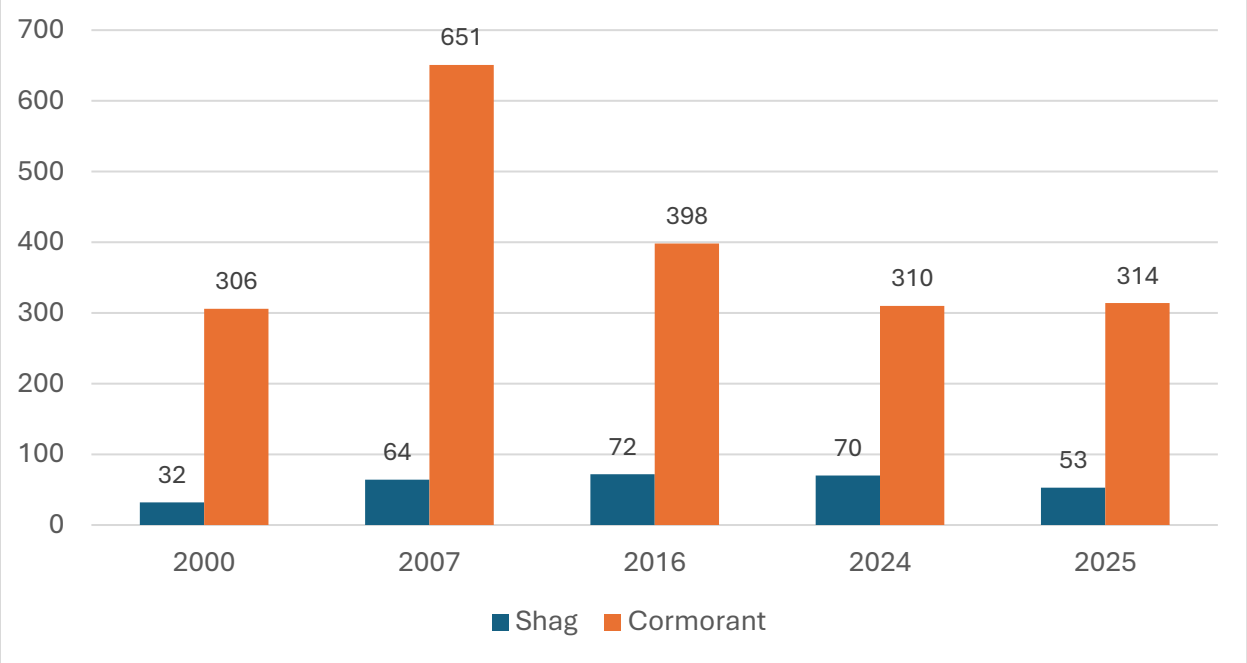

Figure 2: European Shag and Great Cormorant breeding numbers on Ireland's Eye, from 2000 to 2025.

The most recent national census (2015-21; Burnell *et al.*, 2023) found Cormorant numbers were largely stable in ROI but that Shag numbers had increased since Seabird 2000.

At Ireland's Eye, Cormorant numbers have remained largely stable over the last 25 years, including little change since last year. This longer-term trend hides some decreases over the medium-term however, with current numbers down 21% over the last 9 years and less than half of what they were during 2007, though that count may have been an exceptional one.

Shag numbers have also increased since Seabird 2000, in line with the national trend, though a loss of 17 pairs since last year translates to a significant 24% decline. This contrasts with the relative stability across counts from 2007 to 2024.

Guillemot & Razorbill

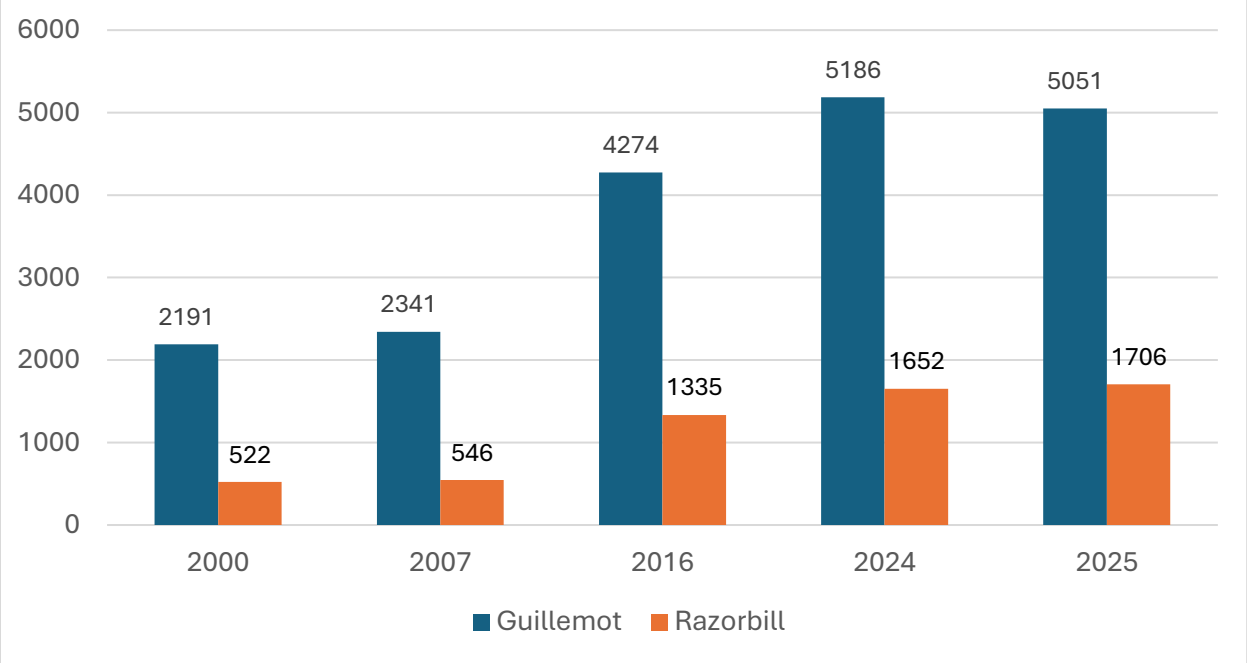

Figure 3: Guillemot and Razorbill breeding numbers on Ireland's Eye, from 2000 to 2025.

At national level both Guillemot and Razorbill breeding numbers have increased in recent decades (Burnell *et al.*, 2023). The Guillemot population on Ireland's Eye more than doubled since 2000, with near-continuous increases over the years though a minor drop form 2024's numbers.

Similarly, Razorbill numbers on Ireland's Eye have more than tripled over the last 25 years, with the most rapid growth occurring between 2007 and 2016. Numbers slightly higher in 2025 than in 2024.

Herring Gull & Great Black-backed Gull

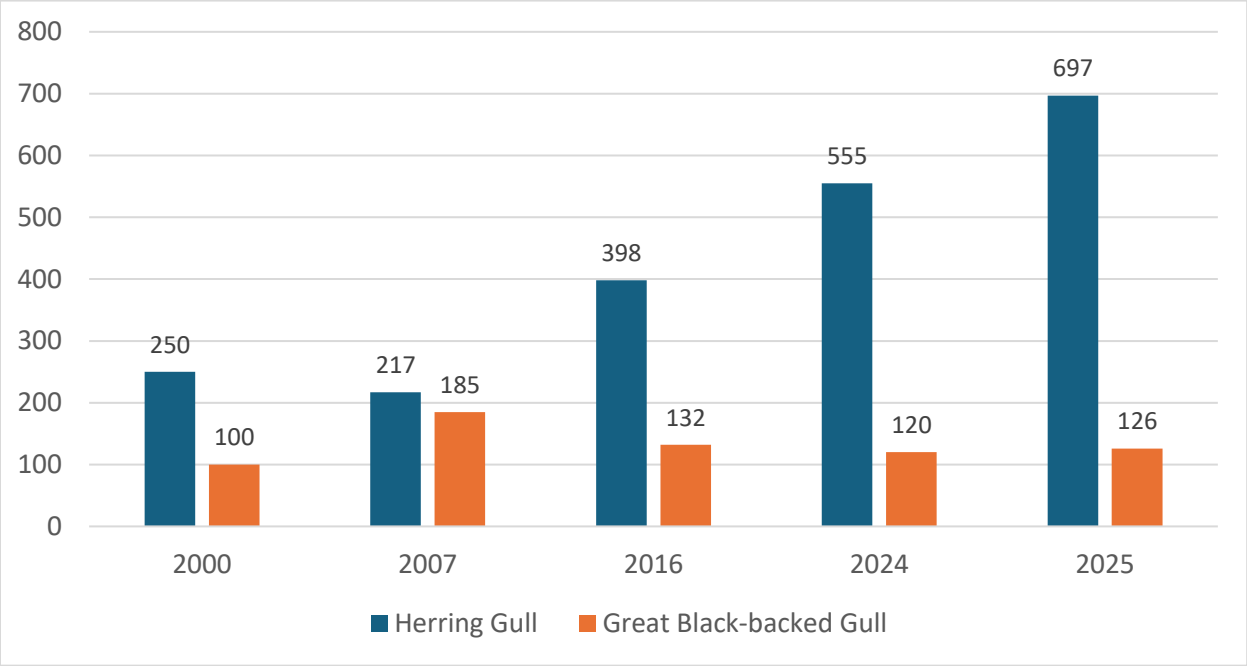

Figure 4: Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull breeding numbers on Ireland's Eye, from 2000 to 2025.

Nesting numbers of both Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls showed increases since last year. Both species have increased nationally since the late 1990's and early 2000's (Burnell *et al.*, 2023). This was certainly reflected in Herring Gulls on Ireland's Eye, with current numbers more than double what they were in Seabird 2000.

The increase in Great Black-backed Gulls has been much more modest over the long-term however, with some fluctuation over the years.

Gannet

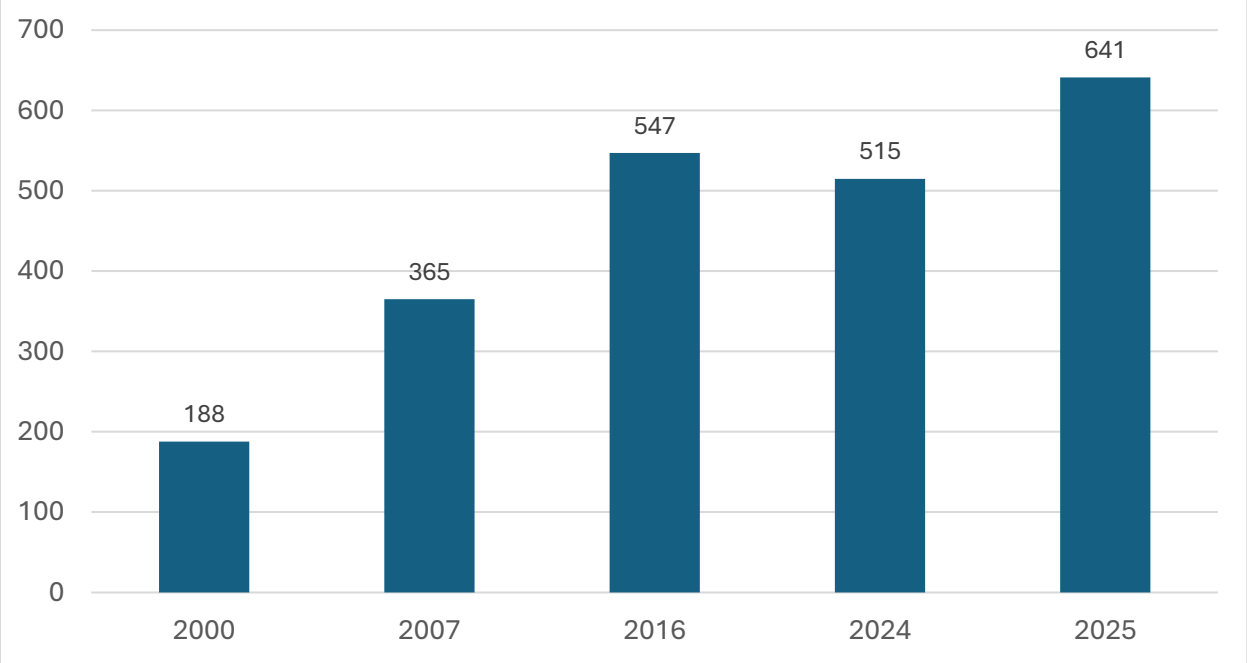

Figure 5: Gannet breeding numbers on Ireland's Eye, from 2000 to 2025.

The national population of Gannets has increased over recent decades (Burnell *et al.*, 2023) and the species continues to fare well on Ireland's Eye. Numbers between 2016 and 2024 were relatively stable, but this year's census showed a 25% increase in the last year.

Kittiwake

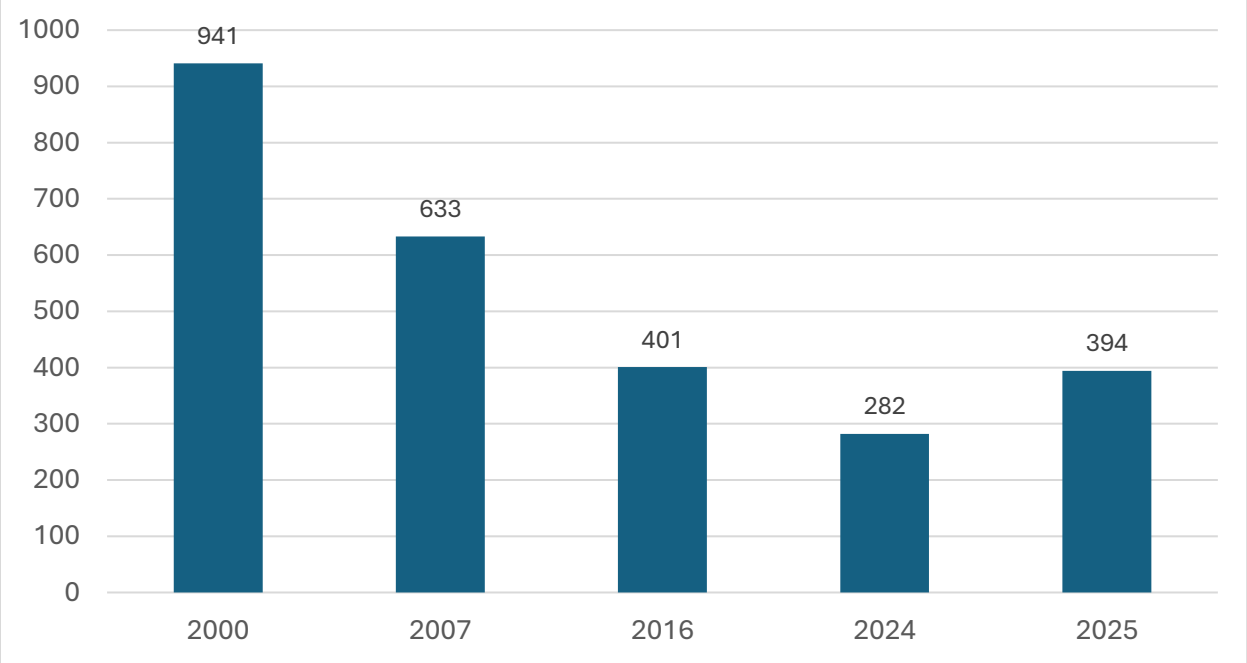

Figure 6: Kittiwake breeding numbers on Ireland's Eye, from 2000 to 2025.

Kittiwake numbers in ROI declined by 36% between Seabird 2000 (1998-2002) and Seabirds Count (2015-2021; Burnell *et al.*, 2023). Across the four Dublin colonies, nesting numbers fell by 24% over the same period but by 56% at Ireland's Eye. Census results in 2024 showed a further decline, but the total this year was up by 40% since 2024. This puts the Ireland's Eye Kittiwakes at a similar level to 2016.

3. Productivity Monitoring

Monitoring of breeding success (productivity) is key to understanding population dynamics, the success of conservation interventions, and the impact of various pressures. In the case of seabirds, many are long-lived and site faithful, and breeding numbers can remain relatively stable over a few years before the effects of poor breeding success are seen. It is rarely possible, or desirable, to monitor the breeding success of entire colonies but rather a representative sample should be visited on a regular basis to determine likely success. There can be considerable inter-annual variability due to a range of factors including disturbance, predation, weather and varying food availability between years and so multi-annual monitoring of productivity is important to properly inform on the status of a colony.

Productivity estimates were made for each of the cliff nesting seabirds on Ireland's Eye in 2025, as well as Herring and Great Black-backed Gull. The summary results are provided in Table 2 alongside a comparison with Ireland's Eye in 2024, and other Dublin colonies this year. Full details of productivity monitoring in each productivity plot are listed in the Appendix.

Table 2: Breeding productivity of seabird species on Ireland's Eye in 2025, and comparisons with other nearby seabird colonies in 2025 (Preston et al., 2025) and Ireland's Eye in 2024.

	Ireland's Eye	Bray Head	Howth Head	Lambay	Ireland's Eye 2024
Cormorant	**1.38**	1.46		1.17	1.00
Shag	**1.64**	1.14	1.14	1.76	0.93
Guillemot	**0.26**	0.22	0.29	0.10	0.59
Razorbill	**0.4**	0.16	0.20	0.08	0.49
Gannet	**0.44**	-	-	-	0.55
Kittiwake	**1.03**	0.20	0.55	1.07	0.86
Herring Gull	**1.19**	-	-	0.80	0.45-1.27
Great Black-backed Gull	**1**	-	-	0.00	0.64-1.44

European Shag

Shag productivity was monitored for 22 nests (41.5% of island total) in the NW Cove plot. Nests were monitored about every week from June to the first week of August.

Breeding success was high this year at 1.64 fledglings per nest, representing an improvement from 2024 (0.95) and better than productivity at Bray Head (1.14) and Howth Head (1.15) this year. Similarly high productivity was observed at Lambay in 2025 (1.76; Table 2)). Cook & Robinson (2010) suggest an average figure of greater than 1.21 should be enough for the UK population to sustain itself.

Great Cormorant

The only location suitable for a vantage-point survey to monitor Cormorant productivity on Ireland's Eye is on the north side of the island as this was the only location that avoided disturbance problems associated with this method (Walsh *et al.*, 1995). Twenty-six nests (8.3%) were monitored, approximately once a week from June to July.

Cormorant productivity was relatively high, with a mean of 1.38 fledglings per nest. This represents an improvement on last year's estimate (1.0), though still below the 2.35 fledglings per pair recorded in 2007. Productivity was slightly higher at Bray Head (1.54) this year. Productivity at Ireland's Eye in recent years should be enough to maintain the population, assuming 'normal' survival rates as per Cook & Robinson (2010).

Guillemot & Razorbill

Auk productivity was monitored on three different plots on Ireland's Eye. In these there were 276 Guillemots and 29 Razorbills AONs which is 5.5% and 1.7% of their respective populations on the island. They were monitored from June through the first week of August. Monitoring initially occurred once per week and, once the breeding season was fully underway, increased to twice per week when possible. Data were collected on chick sizes and estimated hatch dates to track

individual birds throughout the monitoring period. Study areas and individual nests were documented on photographs of the plots to ensure accurate spatial records.

Guillemots showed poor productivity, averaging just 0.26 fledglings per nest (range 0.18-0.28). This is less than half of productivity at Ireland's Eye in 2024 but is similar to the low breeding success for Guillemots at Bray Head and Howth Head this year.

Razorbill productivity was 0.40 fledglings per nest (range 0.3-0.5). Previous productivity estimates at this site were slightly higher (0.45 in 2017; 0.49 in 2024), but both Bray Head and Howth Head showed even lower productivity this year.

Gannet

Gannets were monitored in two study plots, the North Stack and NE Sub-Gannets, totalling 71 nests (11.1%). Nests were checked approximately once a week from June and July. There was a slight delay for the NE Sub-Gannets so it wasn't first studied until 27 June.

Productivity was low and almost identical to last year, at 0.44 fledged per AON (0.45 in 2024).

Kittiwake

Kittiwakes were monitored at the NW Cove and the western face of the Stack. A total of 39 nests (9.9% of the population in 2025) were monitored weekly from June to the first week of August.

Breeding productivity was good, at 1.03 fledglings per nest (0.93-1.12). This is higher than recorded here in 2024 (0.86), similar to what was observed at Lambay (1.07) and much higher than the poor breeding success observed at Howth Head (0.55) Bray Head this year (0.20)(Table 2).Cook & Robinson (2010) suggested that Kittiwake productivity would need to be closer to around 1.5 to avoid declines observed across the UK from 1986 to 2010 and Burnell *et al.* (2023) shows that the Irish population has been declining recently. Coulson (2017) estimated that Kittiwakes needed an average productivity of 0.8 to maintain numbers.

Herring Gull & Great Black-backed Gull

Productivity of Larus gulls was difficult to monitor given the degree of vegetation cover in which chicks could hide, the mobility of large chicks and the lack of any discrete area where an enclosure could be set up to keep chicks from monitored nests in a given area. As a result, productivity monitoring covered 18 Herring Gull nests in one area and 6 Herring Gull and 3 Greater Black-Backed Gull nests in another. This means 3.4% of the Herring Gulls and 2.4% of the Greater Black-Backed Gulls were monitored. They were monitored approximately every week from June to July.

Herring Gulls productivity was good at 1.19 fledglings per pair (0.83-1.56). If this level was maintained, it would likely be sufficient to maintain the population. This is similar to the upper estimate of productivity in 2024 (1.27).

Of the three Great Black-backed Gull nests, one chick is thought to have fledged from each nest monitored (productivity 1.00), which is a good level of productivity and higher than the estimate from last year (0.64). The small sample size here though means the results are likely not applicable to the whole island population.

4. Wardening

In summer 2025, Fingal County Council carried out a series of actions to both protect the nesting seabirds and improve the visitor experience on Ireland's Eye, as part of the Ireland's Eye Management Plan. These included:

1. Installing fencing at key locations to protect eggs, reduce disturbance, and improve the chances of chicks to fledge (Image 1 and Appendix D).

2. New visitor-friendly signage using images of the birds asking visitors to stay to the path with the motto '*Please enjoy the island respectfully, this is their home – we are just visiting'* (Image 2 and Appendix D).

3. A new information lectern and way markers which outline the designated walking paths around the island along with restricted areas.

Designated paths were mown and fencing and signage was installed between 27 May and 06 June. Furthermore, BirdWatch Ireland were commissioned to carry out a seabird census and productivity monitoring and run a pilot wardening programme to communicate with visitors about the nesting seabirds and how to navigate the island without disturbing them. Wardens also monitored visitor activity and noted disturbance events, with the aim of reducing disturbance and evaluating the impact of the new infrastructure and restrictions. The data and observations gathered would inform management in 2026 and beyond.

Two wardens were employed on Ireland's Eye, initially on a part-time basis for May, and then full time through June and July. The aim was to have both wardens on the island on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and any Bank Holidays, which were anticipated to be the days with the greatest visitor pressure. The wardens generally divided the remaining days Mon-Thu between them, though this was dependent on factors such as weather which impacted access to the island and visitor numbers. Wardens were also present on the island on a small number of days in early August but given that most breeding seabirds had departed at this stage, warden presence was deemed less critical at this stage.

Image 1: Fencing and signage installed on Ireland's Eye in 2025.

Image 2: Example of signage installed on Ireland's Eye in 2025.

Establishing a Routine

2025 was the first official year of wardening on Ireland's Eye, with no established guidelines beyond the data collection requirements. Developing an effective routine for welcoming visitors to the island was therefore necessary, and a standard approach was in place by the beginning of June. From that point, wardens delivered a short briefing to each arriving boat, outlining the visitor strategy underway. To make this easier, wardens would disembark first and gather visitors in a suitable spot where the talk could be clearly heard: either on the green near the tower for groups landing to the north, or before the fence line for groups arriving at the south landing. Briefing topics typically included:

- Informing visitors of the island's designation as a Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive.
- Following the main path throughout their visit.
- Noting and adhering to signage.
- Using the lectern up from the landing area to view a map of the island, take a reference photo, and understand where they were and were not permitted to go.
- The average time required to walk the full route of the island.
- Avoiding venturing into unfamiliar areas, particularly during nesting season, to prevent disturbance to breeding birds, and returning to the main path if off it.
- Recognising signs of agitation in gulls, maintaining a safe distance and adjusting behaviour to avoid or cease causing disturbance.
- Not to follow wardens when/if they venture off path, as wardens enter areas off limits to the public, for monitoring purposes.
- Ferry times to ensure timely return.

At the end of each briefing, visitors were invited to ask questions, and a count of the number of new arrivals was taken.

Visitor Numbers

Visitor counts were conducted to monitor footfall and track the general distribution of visitors across the island. Wardens carried out counts approximately every 15 minutes, either independently or from a pre-

agreed schedule, typically beginning on the hour and repeating at quarter-hour intervals. These counts provided data on overall visitor numbers and movement across the island. Observation sessions generally lasted between 1 and 3 hours, but at times extended to as long as 5 hours, depending on visitor numbers, ferry schedules, and other monitoring requirements. To facilitate monitoring, wardens were stationed at two key locations. One was positioned at the landing area to record arrivals and departures, monitor nearby visitors, and walk sections of the main path as far as the main beach cliffs. The second station was at the top of the hill along the north path, providing visibility over much of the island. To help break up the day, wardens would often rotate between the two positions midway through their shift. Total visitor numbers, based on numbers counted as they landed, for particular dates where counts were made, are provided in Appendix B.

In May (Figure 7), the highest visitor counts were recorded at the Landing, with large numbers by the Main Beach, Main Path and East Path. Off-path activity was more widespread in May than in later months, with visitors recorded at the Back of the Cliffs (180), Martello Tower (62), Stacks (84), Summit (60), South Beach (42), Hill (8), and Meadow (3).

For June (Figure 8), the pattern of visitor distribution was largely similar, with the highest visitors counts coming from the Landing, and high numbers at each of the with still-high numbers at the Main Beach, Main Path and East Path (402), and lesser numbers along the South Path and the north path. Off path activity noticeably decreased in June, with no footfall recorded on the Stacks, Hill or in the Meadow. Only 15 and 9 visitors were recorded at the Back of the Cliffs and Summit respectively. This is a key seabird nesting area and one of the priority areas to reduce disturbance for almost all of Ireland's Eye's nesting seabird species. Visitor numbers were higher In July than in either May or June. The Landing and Main Beach continued to be the areas with highest footfall in July (Figure 9), including the single largest individual count of 139 visitors at the Main Beach. Counts at the East Path, South Path were broadly consistent with May and June. Proportionately, footfall for the Back of the Cliffs and Summit remained relatively consistent with June, though the increased number of visitors in July put additional pressures on these areas.

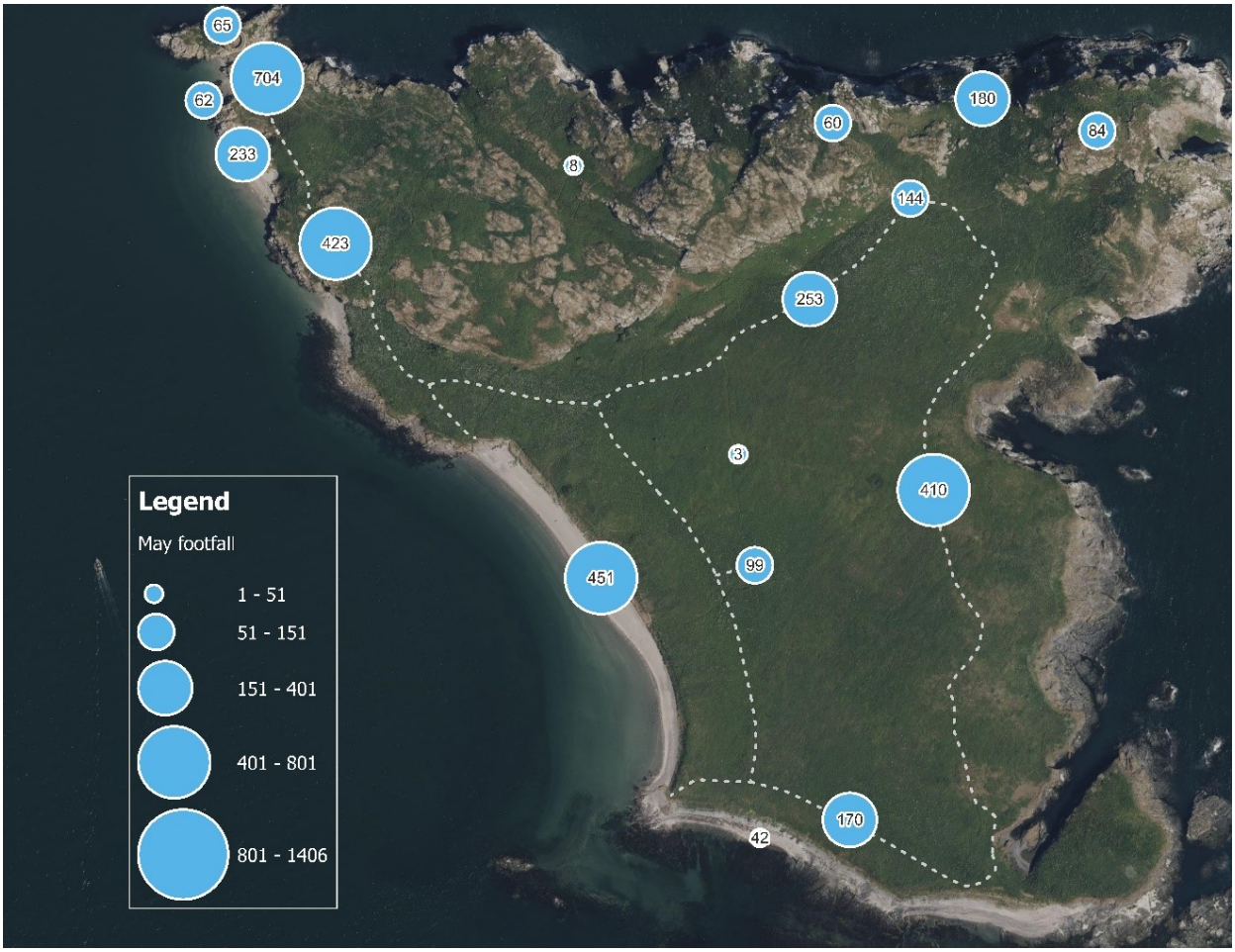

Figure 7: Map indicating visitor footfall from 10-31 May. Points are sized and numbered according to the number of individuals observed in each location during all 15-minute count intervals, summed for the month of May. The primary path is indicated by the dotted line.

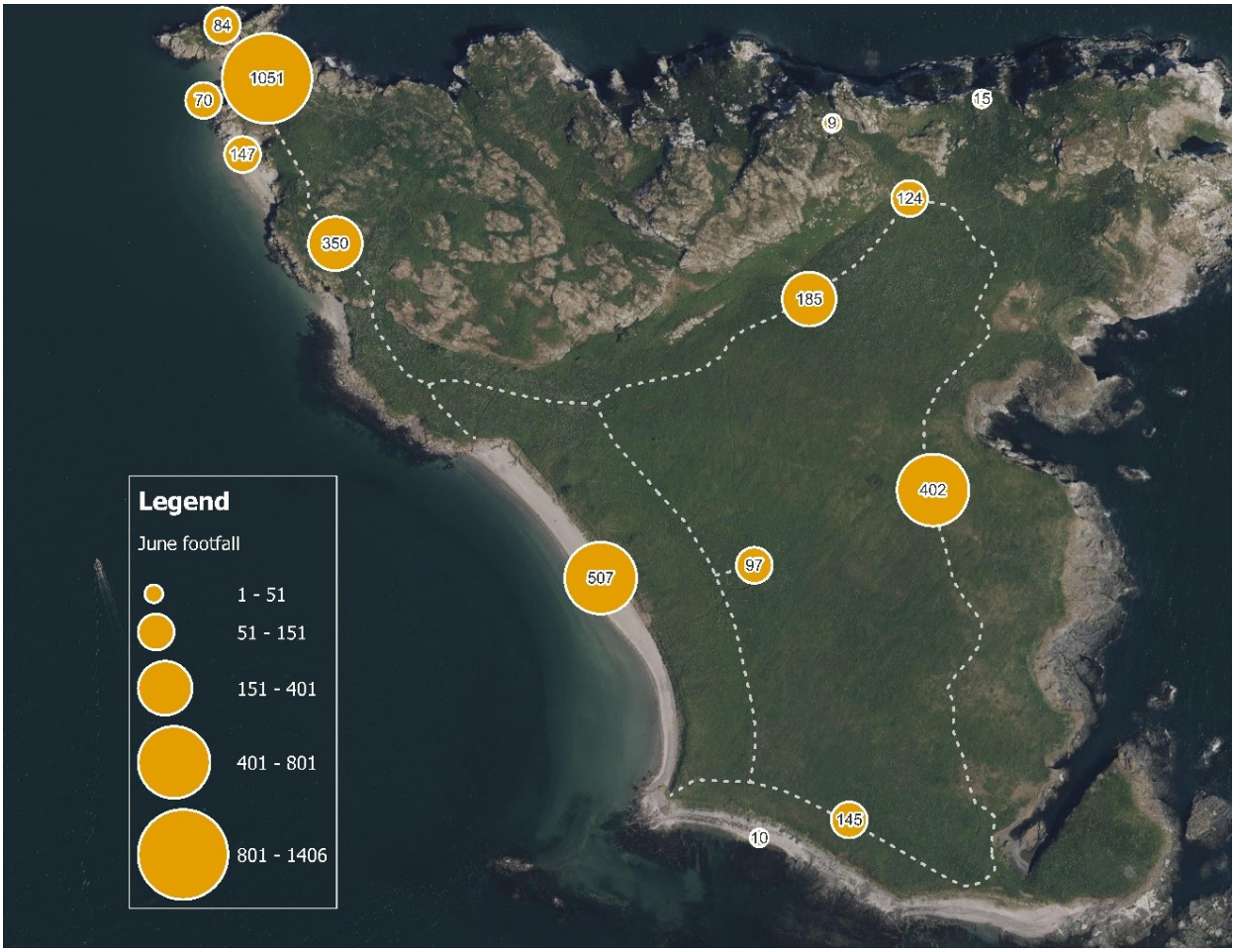

Figure 8: Map indicating visitor footfall from throughout the month of June. Points are sized and numbered according to the number of individuals observed in each location *during all 15-minute count intervals, summed for the month of June.*. The primary path is indicated by the dotted lines.

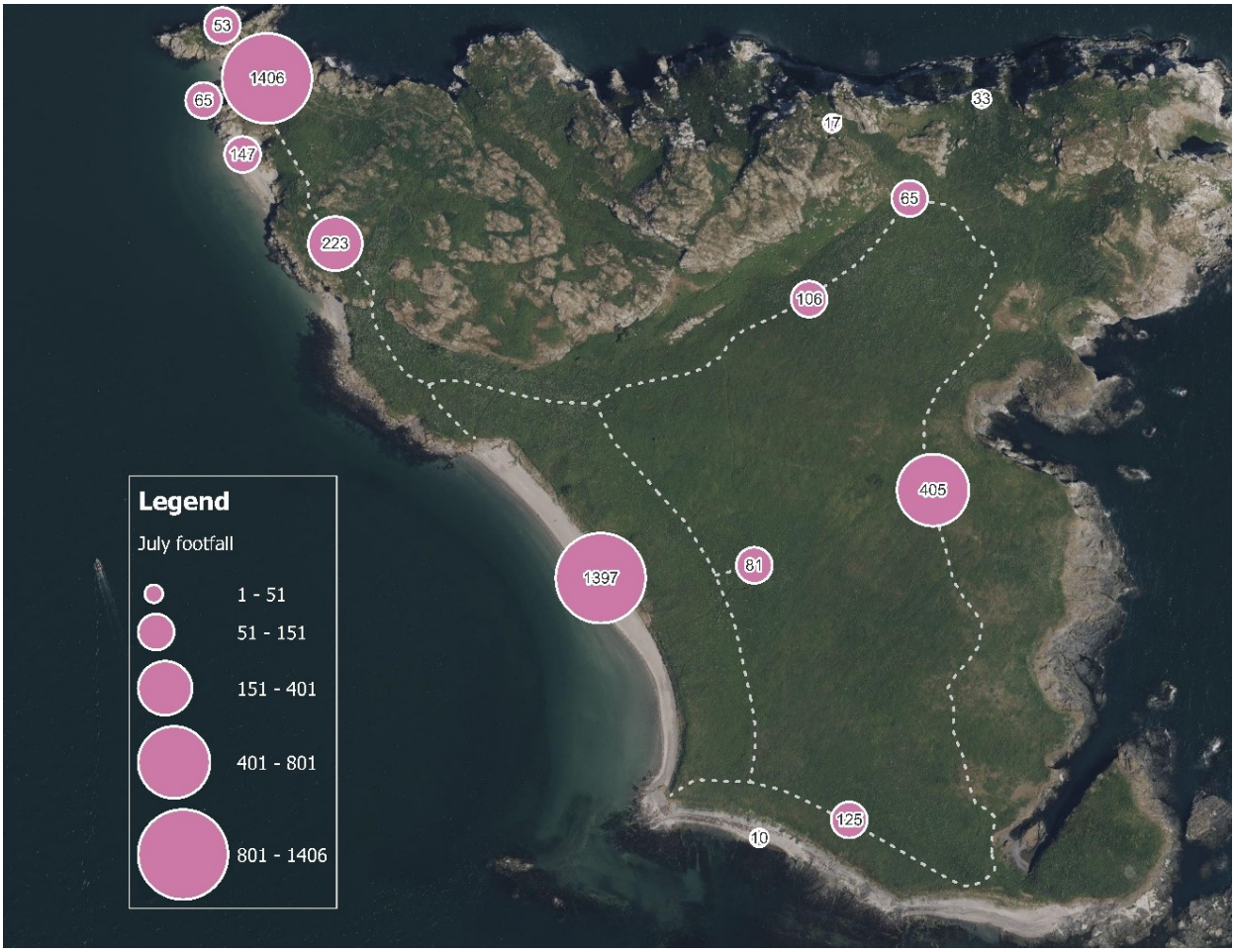

Figure 9: Map indicating visitor footfall throughout the month of July. Points are sized according to the number of individuals observed in each location during all 15-minute count intervals, summed for the month of July.. The primary path is indicated by the dotted line.

Throughout the summer most visitors were present in the area around the landing area (Figures 7-9), which is to be expected as each visitor will have had to visit this area at the start and end of their trips. By necessity this is also where people wait for varying lengths of time in anticipation of a return boat. The bulk of footfall thereafter was on the paths, particularly the main path that led to the main beach, which was a very popular destination for visitors (very high numbers each month, second only to the landing). The east path, which afforded panoramic views of the mainland and some of the island's cliffs, also proved to be a popular picnic spot away from the main beach. The north path and top of the cliffs received fewer visitors, particularly after the fencing, signage and general restrictions were put in place (Figure 7 versus Figure 8 and 9), and similarly there was a very significant reduction in the number of people visiting the Summit, Back of Cliffs and Stack. These are key areas for many of the islands cliff-nesting birds and so a reduction in the number of people in these areas where they are highly likely to cause disturbance, was a key goal of the visitor management plan.

Previous studies of footfall and disturbance on the island (Newton *et al.*, 2016; Adcock & Newton, 2017) found a much greater number of people moving between the landing and summit by traversing the hill in various ways, though anecdotal evidence suggests this was mostly early and late in the breeding season as gull aggression deterred many visitors late in the incubation period and early in the chick-rearing period. This route and area were used to a very minor extent in May and not in June or July this year, indicating the established fencing at the landing as well as the directions and presence of the wardens have been highly effective in stopping people using this area.

Visitor numbers were high throughout the summer (Appendix B), aided by prolonged periods of calm and sunny weather, and by increased awareness by people of the island and how easily accessible it is. There was undoubtedly an increase in visitor numbers in July however (peak count 206 on 26 July), likely fuelled by increased tourist numbers, schools being off and parents taking annual leave etc (Appendix B). From the point of view of the seabirds on Ireland's Eye, April and May is when most territories are established and eggs laid, with incubation for most species carrying on until mid-June, after which follows a month or so when most chick-rearing occurs, with grown-chicks fledging throughout July. The main exception to this is for Gannets, whose breeding season carries on into September and even October.

Disturbance Monitoring

Disturbance monitoring was inherently opportunistic, relying on wardens being in the right location at the time a disturbance(s) occurred. The alternative would have been to station wardens at key locations, but this in turn would have directly altered the behaviour of visitors and not provided a true account of disturbance. When disturbance to seabirds was observed, wardens recorded the location, time of day, duration, species affected, number of species affected and visitor numbers/demographics. Wardens intervened when necessary to stop or prevent further disturbance from occurring (See examples in Appendix C).

Disturbances recorded peaked on May 10 (with 28 incidents; Appendix C), which coincided with the first day of monitoring and high visitor numbers (Figure 10). Disturbance levels after this first day were broadly consistent, with 2–12 incidents per day before signage and fencing were installed, and 1–8 incidents per day thereafter. Fluctuations within these periods generally reflect varying levels of people on the island (i.e. higher on weekends etc). The fact that incidents did not noticeably increase in July, given the higher number of visitors to the island is a positive sign and expected disturbances were likely avoided through the infrastructure and established wardens briefings. To some extent these observations reflect disturbance in the more open areas in the lower parts of the island as birds flushing from cliffs etc. would be harder to notice unless a warden was already in place at that location. This information on disturbance levels, in combination with the visitor avoidance of key cliff-nesting areas at the north and north-east parts of the island, suggest that disturbance in these areas will likely have been minimal.

Weekly disturbance incidents at the Martello Tower, Summit/Hill, East Path and Main Beach are illustrated in Figure 11. To account for variation in monitoring effort, disturbance was expressed as incidents per observation hour rather than raw counts. This standardisation removes the bias whereby weeks with more observation time would otherwise appear to have higher disturbance simply due to greater coverage. By controlling for both the total number of observation hours and the imbalance between weekday and weekend effort, the resulting graphs reflect the underlying patterns of disturbance pressure at each site, rather than artefacts of uneven sampling

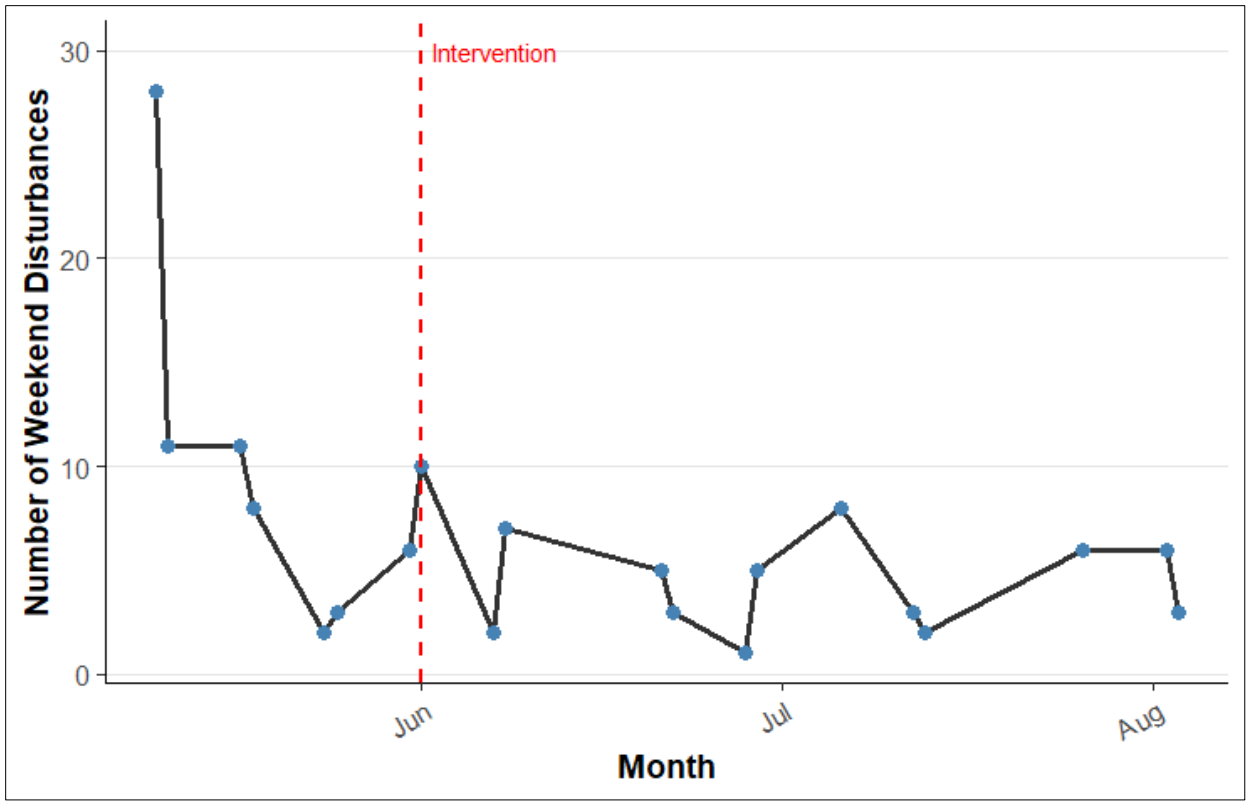

Figure 1: Time series indicating number of weekend bird disturbances. The red dashed line indicates the week in which signage and fencing were installed.

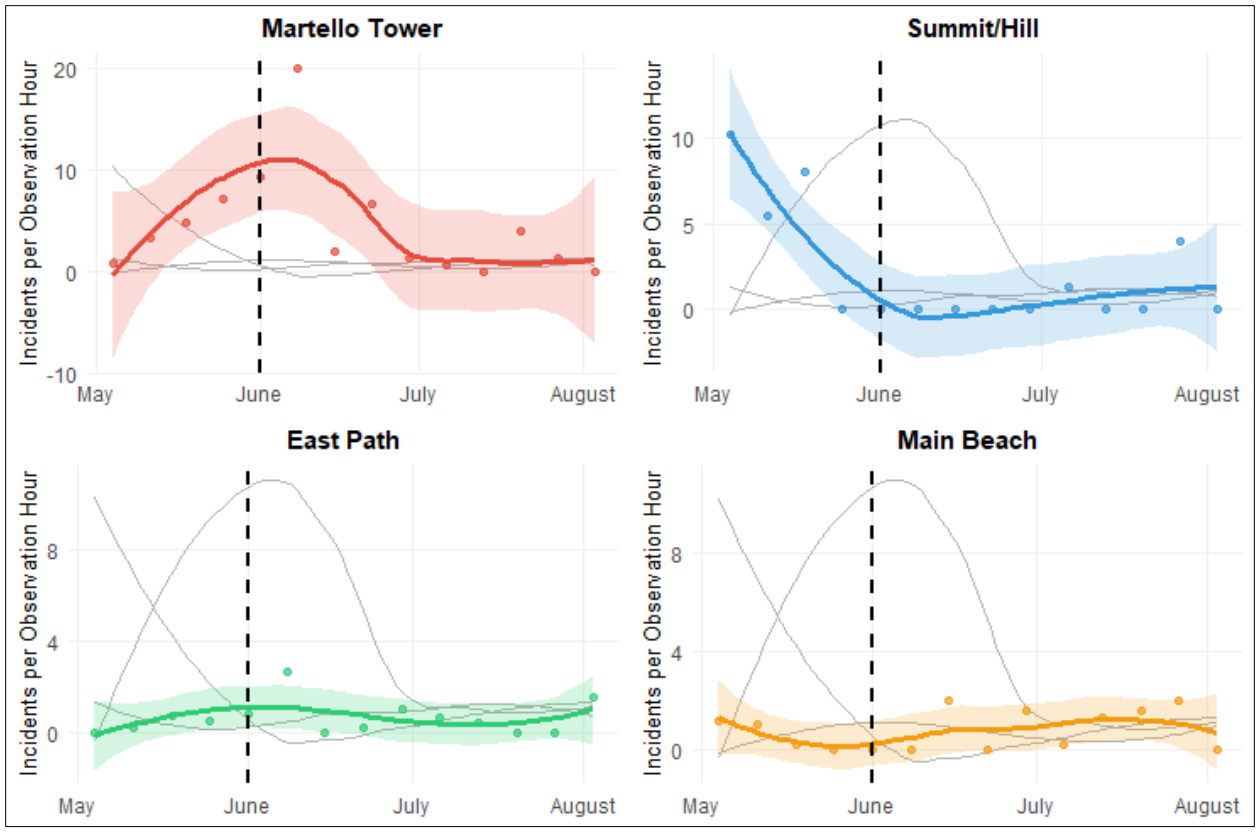

Figure 2: Weekly incidents per observation hour at the four locations with the highest disturbance counts. Each panel shows the focal location with observed weekly counts (points), LOESS-smoothed trends with 95% confidence intervals (shaded), and trends for the other three locations for comparison (grey lines). The vertical dashed line indicates the week of the intervention start date, when signage and fencing were installed and a routine visitor briefing was implemented.

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Martello Tower

The Martello Tower is an important area for nesting Herring Gulls on the island, as well as hosting a small number of Great Black-backed Gull nests in 2025. Disturbance rates were initially low in May but rose sharply through June, peaking shortly after the intervention was introduced (Figure11). Rates then declined steadily through July into August. This reduction is likely to reflect a combination of biological and management factors. Adult gulls will be most defensive of their nest at the end of the incubation period and first few weeks after chicks hatch, which would mostly coincide with the month of June. Also as chicks became more mobile, they spent less time in the immediate vicinity of the tower, reducing the chance of disturbance being recorded; at the same time, the very presence of wardens may already have influenced visitor behaviour, while the later introduction of briefings appears to have reinforced this effect.

Qualitative observations reveal that many early-season disturbances stemmed from visitors attempting to approach or circle around the tower itself. People were often drawn to the structure to see the gulls nesting nearby, explore the back of the tower, or attempt to climb into it using the rope. These behaviours regularly caused distress among nesting gulls, with Herring Gulls giving persistent alarm calls and Great Black-backed Gulls dive-bombing visitors. In one instance, a kayak landing led to a Great Black-backed Gull abandoning its nest for over ten minutes. More minor disturbances, such as gulls flushing briefly when people passed close by, were also recorded, but the peak period in June was dominated by repeated attempts to access sensitive areas around the tower. This likely contributed to chick mortality, as well as two cases of nest abandonment — one in a Great Black-backed Gull at the base of the rocks immediately in front of the tower, and another in a Herring Gull on the lefthand side of the tower. Concentrated heavy footfall to and from the landing therefore contributed to frequent cases of disturbance and also distressed gulls on rocky cliffs adjacent to the northern landing. The sharp mid-season rise therefore reflects a convergence of high visitor activity and the concentration of adult birds and chicks around the tower, when birds were at their most defensive. The subsequent decline suggests that both natural changes in bird behaviour and increased visitor awareness reduced disturbance pressure as the season progressed. The Martello Tower itself will almost certainly continue to be a focal point for visitors and further consideration is needed for this area to minimise the impacts of people approaching it. While roping the area off entirely would appear to be the best solution for the birds, the tower itself will continue to be a point of attraction regardless and so potential management actions here will need to be considered further.

Summit, Back of Cliffs & Stacks

The area at the north-east of the island including the Summit, Back of Cliffs and Stacks (see Figure 1) is one of the most important areas for all of the nesting seabirds on Ireland's Eye, with important numbers of Herring Gulls nesting on the ground here as well as on the cliffs, Shags nesting under boulders, and the adjacent cliffs hosting Cormorants, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills, Fulmars and Gannets. Disturbance rates at the summit were relatively high in May but dropped steeply before and around the intervention date, stabilising at low levels across July and August (Figure 11). This represents the clearest reduction of any site, with a strong contrast between pre- and post-intervention periods. The decline appears to reflect both improved visitor management and the visible presence of wardens, who were frequently on hand to redirect visitors and provide explanations. Improved signage at the summit entrance likely reinforced this shift, but one sign placed further beyond the main trail caused confusion, particularly for non-English speakers. The sign was consistently misinterpreted, as it made the restricted route behind appear to be a walkable one. If this sign was replaced with a 'Do Not Enter' type sign it would make it clearer to visitors. Most visitors were simply aiming to enjoy the view from the top, suggesting that better signposting combined with direct engagement was sufficient to redirect this interest without major conflict. Overall, the sharp reduction in recorded disturbance suggests that targeted communication and consistent warden presence were highly effective in altering visitor behaviour in this area. Most disturbance in this area involved disturbing Herring Gulls, though a minority of visitors ventured far enough beyond the summit to disturb Razorbills and Cormorants.

Disturbance at the Back of Cliffs was mainly linked to experienced visitors, particularly photographers who knew it as a good seabird viewing spot and often drew others to follow. Disturbance was minimal when people stayed in the central section but attempts to climb the Stacks caused significant disruption to Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls, and Cormorants were occasionally flushed from the cliff edge. A local kayaker reported to the wardens that in late July a photographer was observed climbing down the cliffs and walked through the Gannet colony on the northeast section, which caused extensive disturbance.

The Stacks area was not typically problematic while wardens were present, but disturbances often occurred once they left. Almost all disturbances logged occurred at the very beginning of the season. Visitors frequently ascended the Stacks in search of seating areas or views, which regularly disturbed Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. Experienced, or at least well-equipped, photographers occasionally ventured further, disturbing Gannets and Shags.Management interventions worked well in this part of the island, greatly reducing visitor activity and disturbance as a result. Given that the high point at summit is

a very popular viewing area, and that the Back of Cliffs and Stacks areas are some of the best places to view a diversity of the islands seabirds, it may be possible to allow limited and well-defined access to particular viewing points in these areas in 2026. These should be carefully considered in April/May and signage should clearly and definitively say where entry is not allowed.

East Path

The East Path (marked in blue in Figure 1) runs parallel to cliffs and coves and contains large numbers of nesting Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls, some of which are at the very tops of the cliffs. Along the East Path, disturbance rates were relatively stable throughout the monitoring period, with only a modest rise toward late summer (Figure 11). However, while the path did not experience major fluctuations in visitor pressure, it remained consistently a problematic area for disturbance events. The path, which had been unintentionally strimmed too close to the cliff edge, drew people nearer to the nesting gulls. By late summer, numerous additional informal trails had also been created by visitors that had deviated toward the cliff's edge or into the gull colonies. There was also confusion regarding the signage in this area as many visitors were confused between the strimmed path and designated route. Most disturbances in this area involved brief incursions that flushed Herring or Great Black-backed Gulls temporarily before they resettled once visitors moved away. There were more defensive responses such as dive-bombing. However, these events were generally short-lived and of limited impact compared with pressures at sites like the Tower, but they illustrate how path placement, signage, and visitor movement can directly influence nesting birds. Correcting the route of the East Path by bringing it further away from the cliff areas and cove and installing 'No Entry' type signage should be a priority for 2026 and as well as continued monitoring to see if visitors continue to stray onto unofficial and old paths where gaps in ground vegetation persist.

Main Beach

The Main Beach is home to small numbers of Herring and Great Black-backed Gull nests and occasional nesting Oystercatcher. This is arguably the main attraction of the island, both for visitors arriving via Howth Cliff Cruises but also unlicensed people landing on the island by their own means (such as via jet skis, yachts, and other small boats). The high level of disturbance on the beach is likely the reason that there are not more nesting birds on the beach or in the areas adjacent to it. The area was second only to the

landing area in terms of consistently high footfall throughout the summer (Figures 7-9). Visitor pressure was persistent across the season, with little evidence of change before or after the intervention (Figure 11). While weekly variation is visible, overall patterns of change remained flat, which suggests that this site was not improved by the new management measures. Particularly on weekends and Bank Holidays, increased landings of visitors from Howth Cliff Cruises and unlicensed landings by private boats, kayaks, paddleboards and jet skis contributed to disturbance overall. Incidents logged here often involved visitors leaving the designated path or climbing onto rocks at the far end of the beach where it connects to the south path, which disturbed nearby Oystercatchers, gulls, and occasionally terns along the shoreline. These events tended to be brief and localised but recurred enough to maintain a baseline level of disturbance throughout the summer period. Some unlicensed visitors landing on the Main Beach ventured further inland, creating informal paths in the process, often to camp, explore and leave litter and domestic waste behind. In contrast, day visitors through Howth Cliff Cruises generally demonstrated a better awareness of the importance of leaving the island undisturbed. There were some visitors, though, that ignored signage even after receiving direct explanations from wardens.

Overall, Main Beach represents a site of regular but relatively minor pressures, where visitor behaviour interacts most directly with coastal bird activity along the rocky margins. The heavy visitor pressure means few birds nest here in the first place, resulting in few incidents of actual disturbance within-season, effectively as this nesting habitat is 'lost'. The predominant issues here relate to camping and fires (bonfires and foil barbeques) as well as unlicensed visitors either avoiding or disregarding the wardens and signage. Some visitors who arrived via their own craft also brought dogs (discussed below), which is against the island's management plan rules. These issues are discussed in more depth in the next section ('Issues and Recommendations').

The Hill

The Hill is very important for nesting gulls and is also adjacent to important cliff-nesting sites. Early in the season several disturbances were recorded: small groups passed too close to nesting gulls, causing agitation; others scrambled up unofficial paths, prompting gulls to flush and shallow-dive; whilst some individuals approached the crest of the hill and disturbed nesting Herring Gulls for several minutes. Great Black-backed Gulls also reacted with brief dive-bombing, while lesser incidents near the base caused short-term displacement of a few birds. Disturbance levels at the Hill (n=18, 10-17 May; Appendix C) declined

substantially after new fencing and signage were installed in May, with no disturbances noted in June or most of July until incidents on 25 July (2) and 26 July (1). The area saw very few incidents thereafter, with only one case of a wildlife photographer climbing over the fence without permission.

South Path

The South Path (Figure 1) was generally less problematic, though disturbances occurred near the junction with the East Path, where it came too close to both the South Beach and the "watering hole." Disturbance at the South Beach was made worse by inadequate signage along the path at this location and visitors entering the area by continuing around the headland from the Main Beach. This results in visitors not seeing any of the waymarkers or other signage up by the "watering hole". As the South Beach can have nesting Oystercatchers and Ringed Plovers, Improved signage or prohibiting access is recommended in this area to keep visitors out. T

Other Areas

The Meadow posed disturbance issues early in the season, before bracken growth obscured informal routes. At that stage, visitors often walked directly from the East Path to the Church, disturbing small passerines nesting in dense vegetation. Once vegetation thickened and the designated path became clearer, these incursions ceased.

Disturbances along the **North FCC Path** occurred primarily early in the season, when vegetation cover was low. Visitors occasionally climbed partway up the rocks, disturbing gulls and passerines, and in some cases stepping directly over nests. Once signage was installed and vegetation grew denser, disturbances were greatly reduced..

While less problematic than the Main Beach, **the Small and Middle Beaches** still presented challenges. Visitors arriving in landing craft occasionally camped and left waste, and children in particular climbed on accessible rock inclines, disturbing nesting gulls and Oystercatchers along the rocky edges. A new Oystercatcher nest was discovered below the grassy incline of the small beach on 23 June and contained 2 eggs, however by 01 July, one of the eggs had been predated and the other is assumed to have been trodden.

Some youths enquired about access to **Thulla** and a couple made an attempt to get out to it at low tide, but in general there were no disturbance concerns at Thulla in 2025.

4. Issues & Recommendations

Dogs

The ban on dogs on the island has been largely effective and a welcome addition to the protective measures afforded to the nesting seabirds (gulls in particular). There were still five incidents of dogs on the island, as recorded by the wardens, however. In two of those cases, owners put their dog on a leash when requested by the wardens. In an incident involving a Jack Russel Terrier, the owners lost the dog and struggled to find it. A minimum of three of the dogs seen on the island were brought over as part of unlicensed landings (boats, kayaks, jet skis) and these were mostly on the main beach or smaller beaches. In one such case, a family camped overnight on the island and had their dog with them. In general, there were very few cases of dogs coming onto the island, and the key to reducing this further will be either reducing or educating those people landing via their own craft.

Overnight Camping & Unauthorised Landings

Camping is not permitted on the island but still occurs. Most incidences of camping occurred on bank holiday weekends or on mid-summer weekends with particularly warm weather. While mooring is permitted, landing on the island is prohibited unless via licensed operators such as Howth Cliff Cruises. Despite this, many visitors access the island privately (e.g. 9 and 10 boats moored near main beach on Sun 18 May and Sat 12 July respectively, with passenger numbers ranging from 2 to 10). Attempts to engage with campers have often been met with hostility, including verbal abuse. Wardens observed 12–13 tents on some weekends (max 18 on August Bank Holiday weekend), including very large 10-person tents. with campers arriving via private boats, inflatable craft, jet skis and other unlicensed means. They were largely confined to the main beach, though some groups did venture further up onto the island and their movements after wardens had departed are not known. Their movements often resulted in new pathways being created, often where campers had gone to use the toilet, leaving an unsanitary mess in areas surrounding the main beach. The trampling of vegetation may present problems for the plant life and habitats on the island, as well as for the birds. Many show little awareness or interest in the seabird colonies and obtaining views from the summit is one of the main attractions away from the main beach. Some tents were also erected in areas that blocked established paths. Associated issues with camping

include significant amounts of litter left behind, fires being lit and new paths being established where campers find areas to go to the toilet. In general, all campers disregarded signs and requests from wardens to moderate their behaviour. In some instances this elevated to abuse and intimidating behaviour towards wardens. The impact on birds in 2025 was minor, but there have been incidents in the past (2015 and 1987) where campfires on Ireland's Eye have gotten out of control and caused significant damage to the island, it's habitats and breeding birds and wildlife. Numerous disposable barbeques and fire sites were observed after weekends where camping occurred. The fact that campers land through unauthorized craft in the first place, and their general disregard for the rules put in place by the island owners, Fingal County Council and the wardens, will make it difficult to reduce these sorts of activities in the future. This is an issue that warrants further discussion amongst stakeholders.

Given that all unlicensed boats landing people on the island are likely based at Malahide and Howth yacht Clubs, targeted communications to berth-holders at these locations regarding the rules governing the island should be considered ahead of summer 2026.

Wildlife Photographers

The easy access to Ireland's Eye, in comparison to other cliff-nesting seabird sites, and its proximity to Dublin make it a very attractive location for wildlife photographers. Many such individuals are unable to identify the signs of disturbance in nesting seabirds or disregard them if they are able to identify them. That being said, most photographers were respectful of the new rules on the island. Some landed on the island early in the morning before wardens arrived, and some went off-path when they thought that they weren't being observed by the wardens. Sometimes the impact of photographers' presence is increased by the fact that they remain in the same areas for prolonged periods of time. Towards the end of the season one photographer (who had been there earlier in the season too), walked through some important nesting areas to take photos, causing significant disturbance. They later showed some of their photos to the wardens, including a Gannet on a nest showing very clear signs of disturbance and aggression.

The impact of wildlife photographers is somewhat heightened by the fact that they seek out the areas with the most nesting seabirds, and some of the more sensitive species. Despite discussions with wardens and new signage, fencing and guidance that is all very clear, a few photographers took opportunities to skirt these rules. Enforcement of the rules with regards photographers is difficult but would be greatly assisted with help from NPWS, who issue photography licenses for breeding seabird colonies. It might be

possible to include specific stipulations on these licenses in the future, that photographers can only take photos when wardens are present and must identify themselves to wardens upon landing. Further discussions with NPWS staff to tease out what might be practical in terms of enforcement and further limiting the impact of wildlife photographers on Ireland's Eye.

Warden Briefings

Most visitors appreciated the briefings received from the wardens upon landing, covering topics such as what routes to stick to, areas to avoid, lack of toilet facilities, ways to identify and avoid disturbance of nesting gulls in particular, and other information about the island and the birds. Many people asked questions about Puffins and where they could see them, to which the answer was generally that they were best viewed from the boat. Other stray questions included whether people could swim or fish on the island, if Thulla could be accessed etc. It was often noticeable to the wardens if a particular group had landed without receiving a briefing as they tended to be more confused about how the island worked and where they could go. Many people were visiting the island for the first time and therefore weren't aware that the fencing and signage were new, but once the reasoning was explained to them most visitors were satisfied that measures were being taken to protect the vulnerable seabirds on the island. Some people who had visited in the past stated such measures were long overdue. In a relatively minor number of cases, visitors were visibly frustrated at being told where they could and couldn't go and subsequently annoyed later when asked to return to the main paths.

We recommend that the briefings upon landing should continue to be a key part of visitor management on the island. These could be further enhanced if visitors had some of this information prior to landing and we suggest that a simple web page is established so that visitors can easily find out details of the island when they are planning their visit. This should include all details related to visitors such as the birds present, the best places to see Puffins and other species, the time it takes to walk around the island and the paths to use, the terrain, the best places to stop for picnics, the lack of any toilet facilities or bins on the island, the potential for attacks by gulls and what to do, the need for an NPWS licence to photograph the breeding birds, and any other relevant details. This should be advertised and linked to with posters in Howth before people get on boats.

Avian Flu

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) was circulating amongst Irish seabirds in summer 2025. The colonies with the most severe impacts appear to be ones on the west coast but despite birds not being formally tested, we are confident that there were a small number of cases in the large Gulls on Ireland's Eye this year. These involved gulls in the Stacks area, near the Martello Tower, and others washing up on the beach. The most obvious cases were logged on the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine's AvianCheck website. One of the dead Herring Gulls was ringed as a chick on Ireland's Eye in 2007 and this was reported to the relevant ringer.

The outbreak and its impact appeared to be fairly minor but a basic plan should be put in place for future years. This may involve leaving PPE in a discrete location for wardens to be able to dispose of dead birds, along with a shovel so that carcasses can be buried.

Jet-skis, Kayaks and other small watercraft

Though jet-skis were not a major problem there were definitely instances of them being very active in close proximity to the island that would have disturbed birds on the water, if not birds on the cliffs. By comparison, kayakers were generally much more respectful. Most of the kayakers that landed on the beaches did so away from nesting birds. There were some groups on weekends that did venture close to the cliffs and coves causing birds to flush. Regular reminders to kayakers and kayak tour operators each summer to avoid disturbing birds and identifying agreed landing spaces should be sufficient to minimise any problems with them.

Jet-skiers may be more difficult to target and probably have more in common with the other craft that land without permission on the island on bank holidays and weekends. Opportunities to convey messages to these groups, whether through the local harbour master or other means, warrant further discussion ahead of summer 2026.

Other boat-based disturbance

In addition to those smaller individual water craft, the larger boats run by tour operators should also be mindful of disturbance. Many boats cannot get very close to the cliffs due to the shallow depth around the island, and so are forced to maintain a distance that the birds have largely become habituated to.

Habituation can depend on a number of factors though, including speed, direction and stage of breeding, as well as distance. There is a dearth of literature with recommendations for setback distances to prevent boats from disturbing birds nesting on cliffs, but tour operators should be reminded of their obligations in this regard. At the lower end of the tide it is possible to enter a small cave on the north side of the island, but this often causes birds to flush from the adjacent cliffs and should not be allowed in future. In addition to those birds on the cliffs, large rafts of auks (feeding, resting) are a consistent presence along the north side of the island and all boats should avoid moving through these or travelling at speed near them, as this results in flushing and unnecessary increased energy expenditure.

Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover

A small number of Oystercatcher nests (<5) were observed on the island in 2025. They are generally discouraged from nesting in many parts of the island due to either gulls nesting in many of the areas of short grass, or human activity on the beaches and paths. Current breeding success is severely impacted by early-season human disturbance and predation by Great Black-backed Gulls. On 30 May, a chick on the middle beach was observed being swallowed whole by a Great Black-backed Gull. A later nest established 23 June on the small beach lasted only a week: one egg was predated, and the other likely trampled (30 June).

Improved signage and fencing

Much of the new fencing and signage has been very effective in reducing disturbance to seabirds at key locations and restricting visitors to particular paths and areas. There are several locations outside the main path established by Fingal County Council that could serve as designated viewing points in the future (see Figure 12). Providing such areas may help discourage visitors from leaving the marked trail in search of suitable vantage points for photographs or observation. The first is the site referred to as the “picnic spot” (Figure 12). Throughout the 2025 season, this area was frequently used by visitors, and aside from occasional disturbances in the early weeks, it functioned effectively as a designated place for picnicking, photography, and wildlife viewing. Importantly, this reduced the need for visitors to access more sensitive areas such as the summit or the stack. A second suitable location is a section of the summit (Figure 12)

that offers views of the secondary Gannet colony along the island's northern cliffs. The third potential site is the area labelled "back of cliffs" (Figure 12). With appropriate safety measures in place to manage proximity to the cliff edge, this could provide an excellent vantage point for observing species such as Gannets, Razorbills, Guillemots and Puffins. As with the other locations, clear roping or signage would be essential to guide visitor use and minimise disturbance to sensitive nesting seabirds.

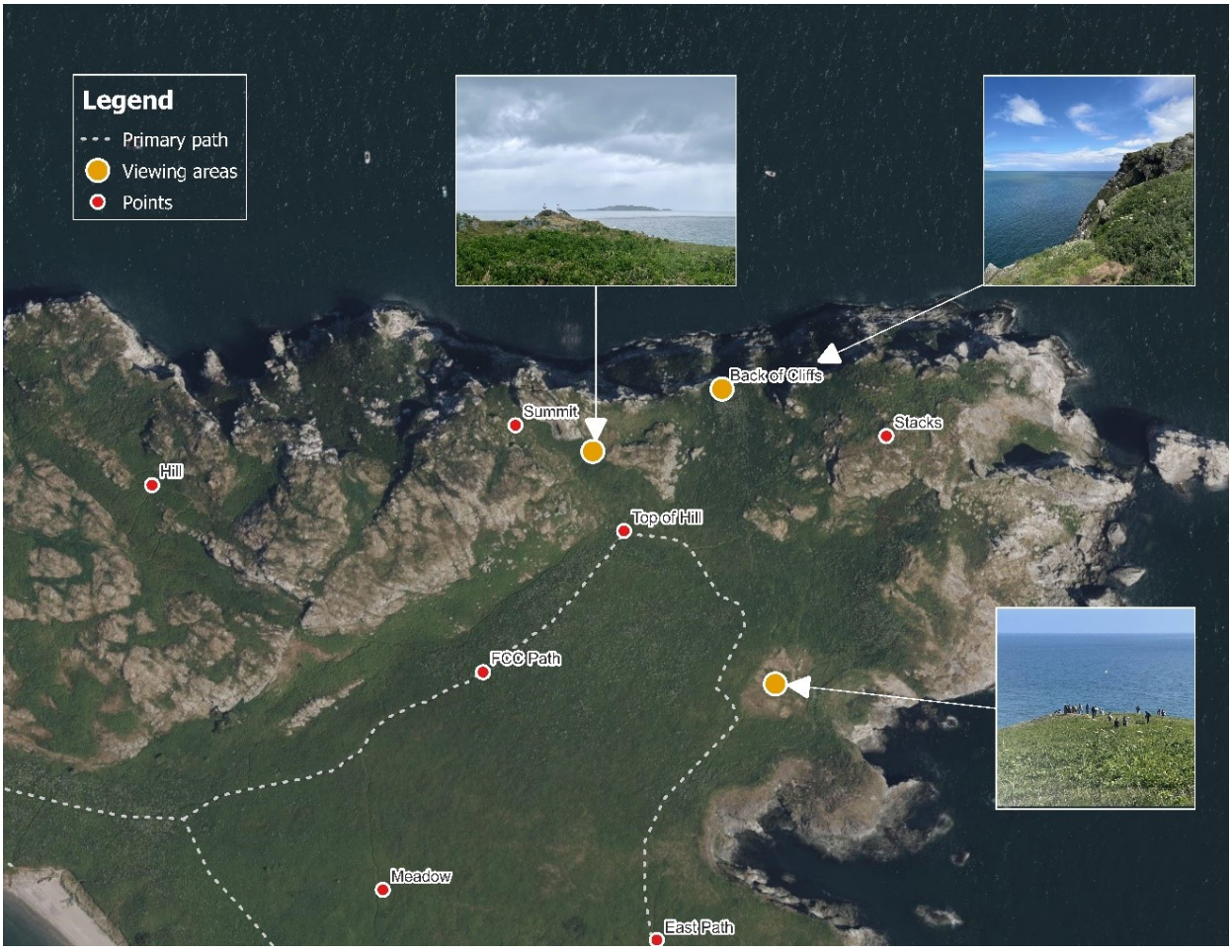

Figure 3: Map showcasing potential new viewing areas that people used for the 2025 season, featuring the "picnic spot" adjacent to the East Path, Summit section, as well as Back of Cliffs. Potential new viewing areas are indicated by the orange points.

The East Path remains one of the more problematic areas for disturbance, particularly where informal tracks draw people closer to nesting gulls. To address this, the lower East Path could be moved farther

from the cliff by approximately 10m. This would, additionally, shorten the South Path to keep visitors away from the access points to the bottom of the cliffs (i.e. the Watering Hole) and the South Beach, as there were a few visitor-made paths in both those areas as well. Alternatively, the permitted route could be reinforced with rope and low posts set back from the cliff edge, ensuring visitors are guided along a safe line of travel. Explicit “NO ENTRY – NESTING BIRDS” signage could be placed at the start of the path, at all decision points, and wherever desire lines split from the main trail. Directional arrows could also help to guide movement along the permitted route, but placement must be carefully considered. During the 2025 season, confusion arose where the East Path and the mown path met at the bottom: arrows had been installed pointing in one direction only, and because some could only be seen when approached from a particular angle, visitors were left uncertain about which way to proceed. In this location, arrows should either be installed so they are visible from both approaches or replaced with simple “Permitted Path” markers to avoid reinforcing the wrong track. The issue of the sections of path mown in error and subsequently trampled, also warrants attention. Regrowth on the East Path is relatively slow, but bracken in other areas has grown relatively quickly.

As previously stated, access to the watering hole and South Beach could be restricted with a move to the lower East Path subsequently moving the South Path. It could also be restricted using rope perimeters that establish a buffer around sensitive zones. Where informal tracks have already been worn in, future mowing or strimming work could also be used to block these desire lines by laying cut vegetation directly across them. At the southern end of the Main Beach, a single lectern/sea-facing panel could be installed to serve both as a visitor orientation point (complimenting the already existing one), and as a warning against unauthorised landings. The panel could include a clear map of the island showing permitted routes, closed areas and key viewpoints, while also carrying a sea-facing message visible from offshore. This combined approach would ensure visitors are fully briefed before moving south toward the restricted beaches and could also deter landings directly onto the Main Beach from the water. By integrating both functions into one durable installation, the risk of clutter and sign fatigue is reduced, while still addressing two critical pressure points. Clear mapping of Oystercatcher nesting zones, along with simple text and pictograms would help explain why access is restricted in these areas. By linking the closure directly to the presence of vulnerable ground-nesting birds, the panel could make compliance more likely and support public understanding of the conservation measures in place.

In areas where repeated disturbance has been recorded, interpretive or informational signs should be replaced with high-salience prohibition panels. Interpretation can be moved to designated viewpoints

where it does not compete with the need to prevent incursions. The “NO ENTRY” signs should be consistent across the island in design and layout: large prohibition pictograms, concise multilingual text and directional arrows guiding visitors back to the permitted route. This consistency will ensure visitors recognise the meaning of the signs and understand that certain areas are strictly off-limits.

5. Conclusion

The measures taken to protect nesting seabirds and manage visitors to Ireland’s Eye in 2025 have been largely successful and represent a very positive step forward to balancing the needs of wildlife and people on the island during the summer months. The observations and experiences of the wardens on the island this summer, as outlined here, can help inform future adjustments and improvements to further enhance conditions for both nesting seabirds and visitors in the future. The census and breeding productivity monitoring, as carried out in both 2024 and 2025, are an important step towards developing a more robust knowledge base of the birds on the island, smoothing out results from particularly good or poor years to develop a better picture of average productivity and population trends over multiple years. Ireland is very much underrepresented in terms of census counts and productivity monitoring in the UK and Irish ‘Seabird Monitoring Programme’ (SMP) database and data collected from Ireland’s Eye this year will be fed into the SMP for future use by researchers, policymakers and conservationists.

It is strongly recommended that this work on Ireland’s Eye continue at a similar scale in 2026, to enhance management of the island, it’s seabirds and visitors, further adapt and improve management efforts into the future, and to build up a robust knowledge base on the status of the island’s breeding birds.

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Appendix A

Table A1: Full details of seabird productivity monitoring on Ireland's Eye in 2025.

Species	Sample Plot	Nests/Pairs	Chicks Fledged	Chicks Fledged per nest	Fledged Mean and Standard Error
Cormorant	IE1	26	36	1.38	**1.38**
Gannet	IE3	21	10	.48	**0.44±0.04**
	IE4B	50	20	.40	
Great Black-Backed Gull	IE0	3	1	1	**1**
Common Guillemot	IE3	46	13	.28	**0.23±0.05**
	IE6	11	2	.18	
Herring Gull	IE0	6	5	.83	**1.19±0.36**
	IEGull	18	28	1.56	
Kittiwake	IE6	24	27	1.12	**1.03±0.1**
	IE4B	15	14	.93	
Razorbill	IE4A	23	7	.30	**0.4±0.1**
	IE6	6	3	.50	
Shag	IE6	22	36	1.64	**1.64**

Appendix B – Total Visitor Numbers by Month

Figures B1-B4 below illustrate total visitor numbers per day, on days where counts were conducted of visitors as they landed. Note that 'blank' dates represent days where no counts were carried out, rather than a lack of visitors on those dates. Also note that counts presented are minima and in some cases landings from some boat trips were not counted, though the numbers here provide a good indication of traffic levels on particular days, weeks and months. In general, higher visitor numbers were recorded on weekends, particularly Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays, but weather was also an important determining factor. These figures do not account for people landing via unlicensed means.

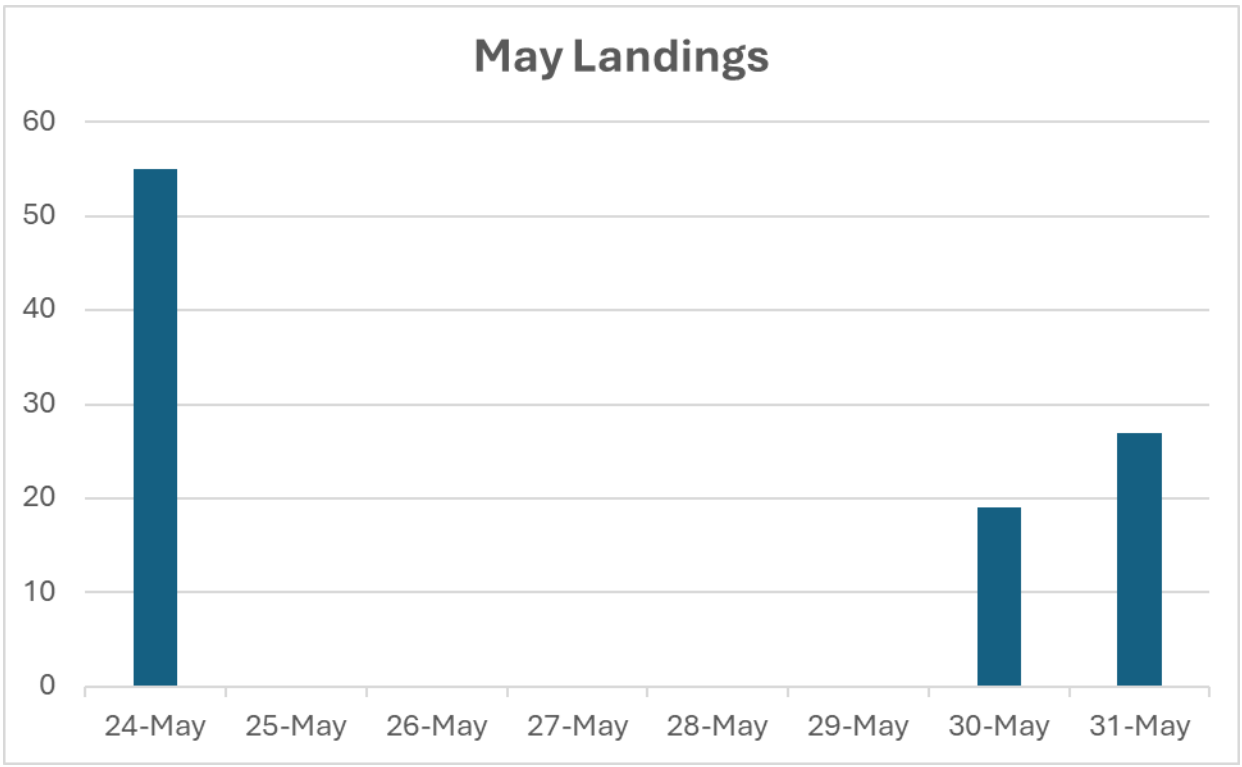

Figure B1: Total number of individuals counted as they landed on Ireland's Eye, on dates in May 2025. Counts were conducted on three days. Note that 24 May was a Saturday and 30 and 31 May were a Friday and Saturday.

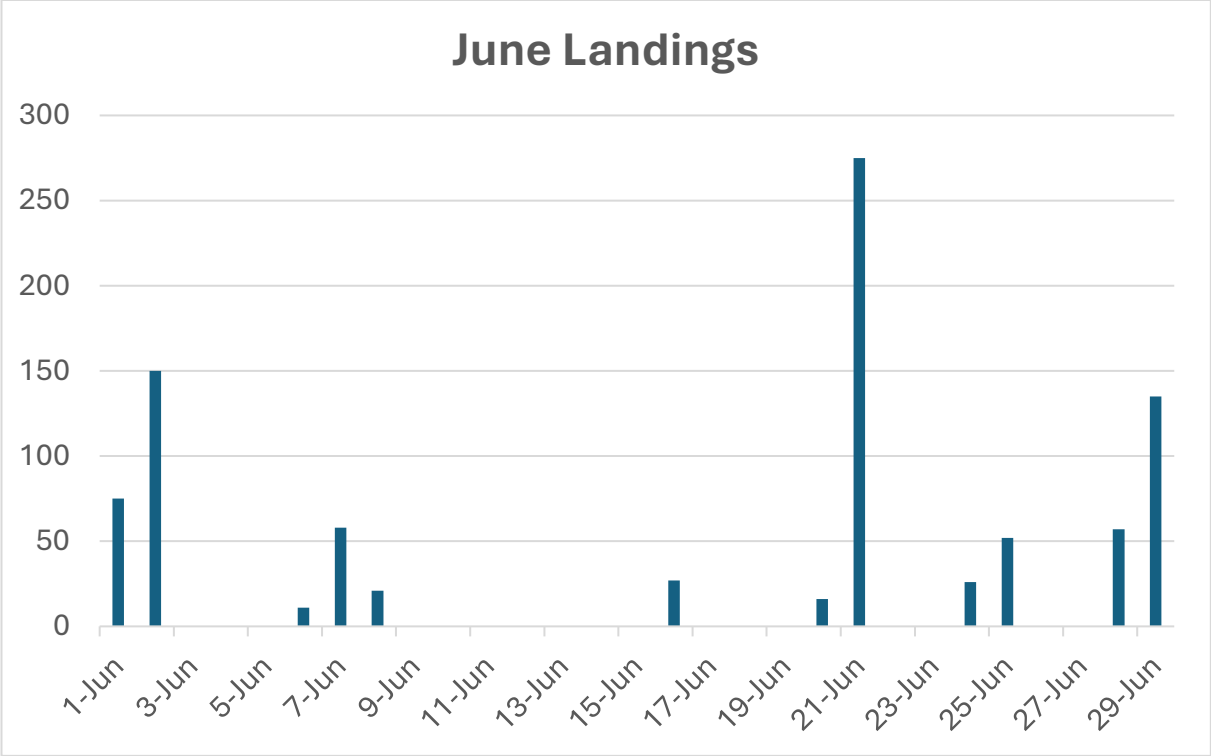

Figure B2: Total number of individuals counted as they landed on Ireland's Eye, on twelve dates in June 2025. For reference, 01 June was a Sunday, as was 29 June. The total number on Saturday 21 June 2025 was estimated at 250-300 people.

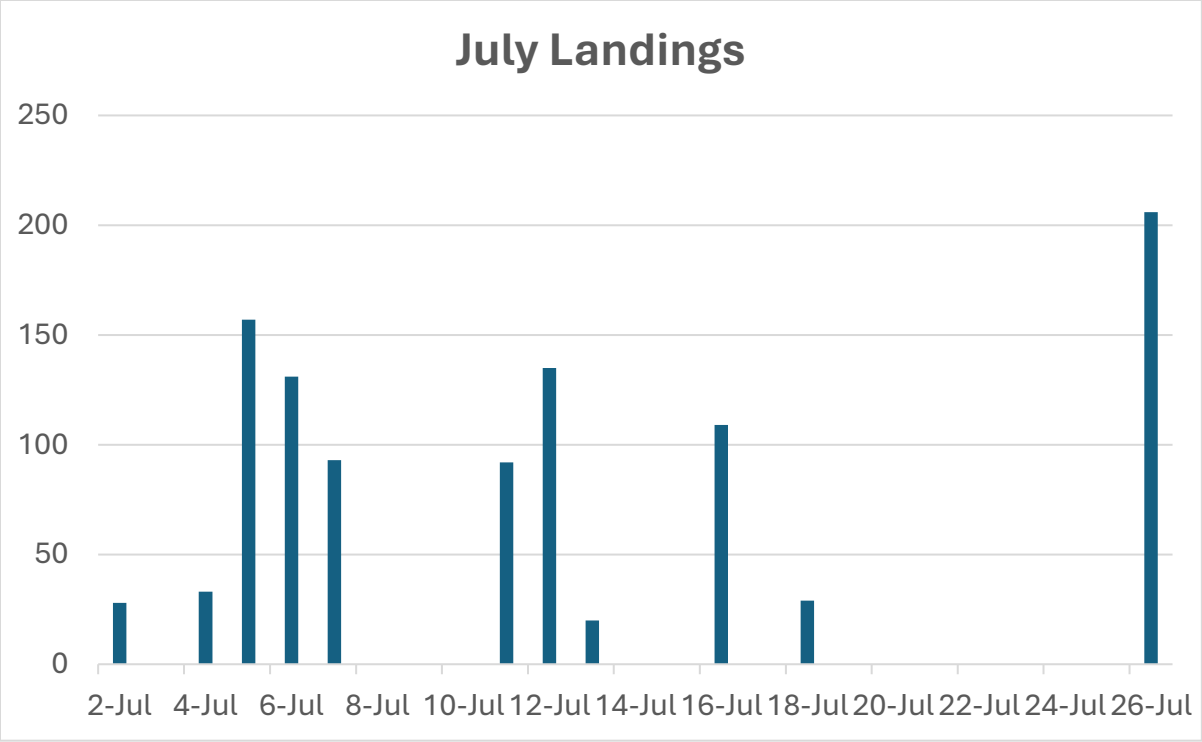

Figure B3: Total number of individuals counted as they landed on Ireland's Eye, on eleven dates in July 2025. For reference, 02 July was a Wednesday, and 26 July was a Saturday.

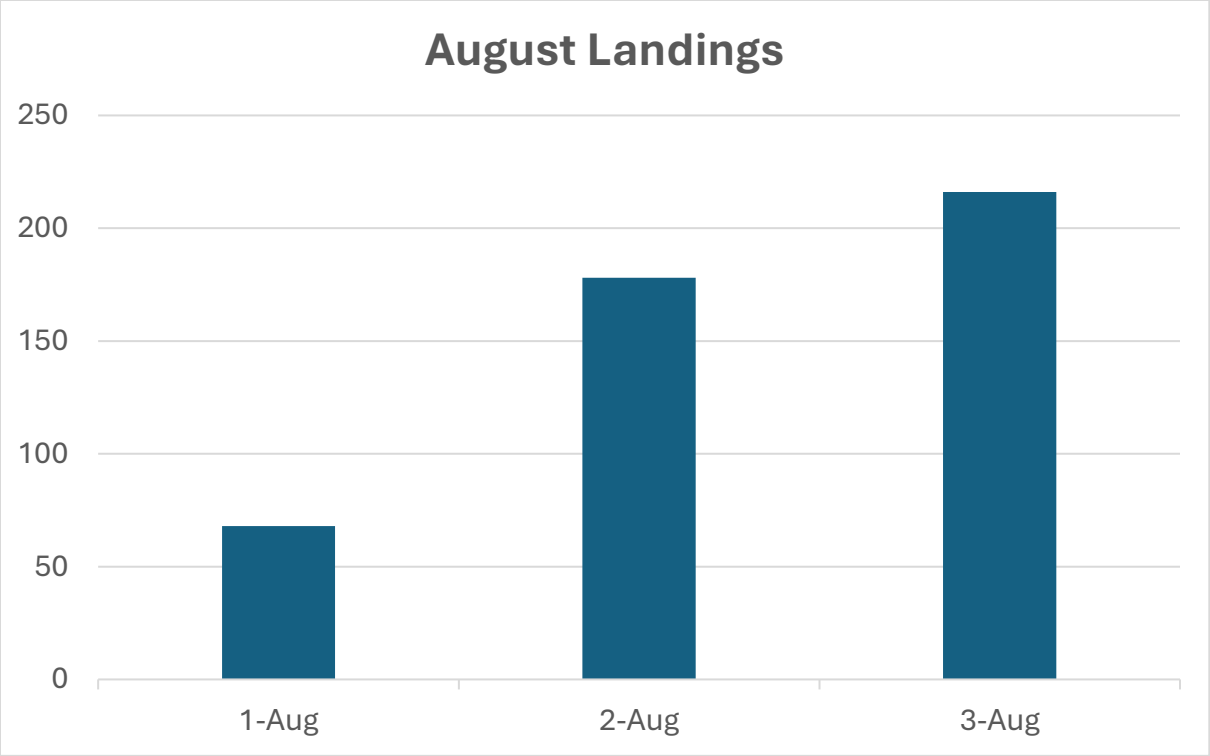

Figure B4: Total number of individuals counted as they landed on Ireland's Eye, on Friday 01 August to Sunday 02 August 2025.

Appendix C – Disturbance and Visitor Behaviour Notes

This is a non-exhaustive list of disturbances and other visitor behaviours on Ireland's Eye in 2025, with a focus on activities and movements outside of what are permitted or desired on the island. Note that the table (Table C1) for this Appendix is provided separately.

Appendix D – Additional photos of signs, fencing and lectern installed on Ireland's Eye in 2025

Image D1: The lectern installed on Ireland's Eye, near the landing point.

Image D2: Waymarker installed on Ireland's Eye.

Image D3: Chestnut paling fence installed on Ireland's Eye, near the landing point, helping keep people away from key seabird nesting areas.

Image D4: One of the sign designs, featuring a Great Black-backed Gull, with messaging to encourage visitors to keep away from nesting birds.

Image D4: One of the sign designs, featuring a Stonechat, with messaging to encourage visitors to keep away from nesting birds and to stick to paths.

Image D4: One of the sign designs, featuring Razorbills, with messaging to encourage visitors to stick to paths for the protection of the island, its habitats and nesting birds.