

Ward Rivervalley Bird Survey May 2020.



Introduction

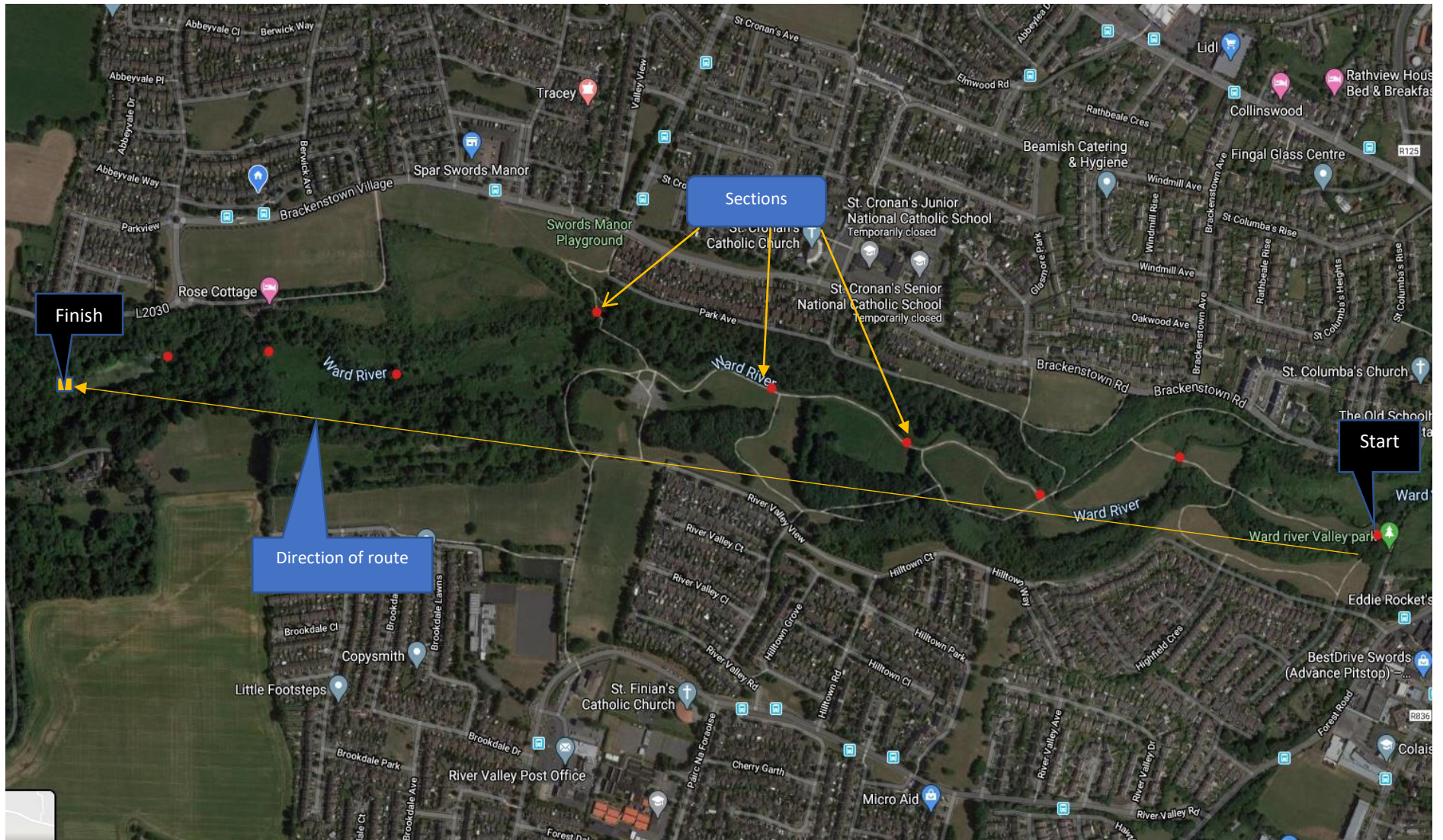
This survey should be taken as a 'snap shot' in time as it was carried out on an early morning walk between 6.10 and 7.30 am through the park on the 13th May 2020. Weather was good. The route was along the path and tracks in the park, beginning at the entrance from the 'Lord Mayors' end to the to the end of the lake near to Knocksedan bridge.

The survey took approximately 45 minutes to do as I walked the route and know it well. The park consists of typical parkland mix of trees, grass, long and short and the Ward river plus a wilder area west of the 'playground' which is rougher and has bracken, rough grassland, gorse and a small lake formerly park of a mill race system which historically held a saw mill and flour mill. Further west there are significant archaeological features.

The route was divided into nine sections which are represented by red dots on the aerial map of the park below beginning at the extreme right.

They were;

- 1) From the entrance to the first bridge.
- 2) From that bridge to the next bridge.
- 3) From that bridge to the seat.
- 4) From the seat to the dog exercise area.
- 5) From the dog area to the next bridge.
- 6) From that bridge to the end of the first clearing.
- 7) From the end of the first clearing to the end of the second clearing.
- 8) From the end of the second clearing to the next bridge.
- 9) From that bridge to the end of the fishing lake.



Results

Below is a list of the total number of birds recorded in the survey. There were other species of birds recorded in the month of May 2020 and these are included separately in the adjacent table. The *sparrowhawk was a flyover but the pair was seen displaying over the park earlier in the spring 2020 and have bred before in the park rearing young. In relation to those species' buzzards breed locally and are regular in the park. Historically, long eared owl and barn owl bred in the park but do not seem to be present now. Yellowhammer was also a resident in the 90's. Twenty-five species were recorded in the survey. The numbers of each species are not definitive of course and species such as Dunnock occur in greater numbers than recorded on the day. However, the species with the higher numbers reflect their abundance, the woodpigeon, and wren dominating with the phenomenal growth in the blackcap's population a good reflection of their national position.

Table 1: Shows the number of individual species recorded in the survey.

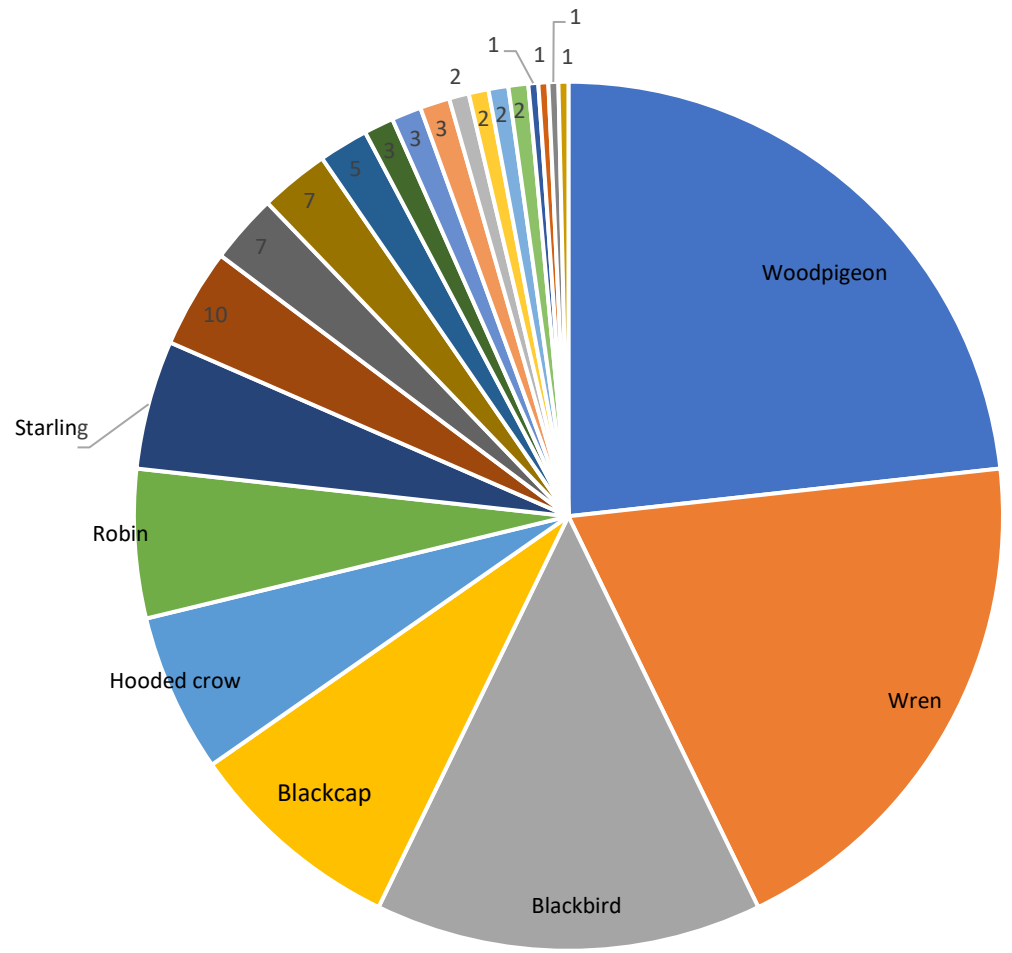
Species	Number Recorded	Species	Number recorded	List of birds seen outside survey in the park during May 2020
Woodpigeon	63	Sparrowhawk	1	Mistlethrush
Wren	53	Little Egret	1	Kingfisher
Blackbird	39	Magpie	1	Blue tit
Blackcap	22	Grey wagtail	1	Coal tit
Hooded crow	16	Bullfinch	1	Long tailed tit
Robin	15	Goldfinch	1	Buzzard
Starling	13	Rook (colony)		Reed bunting
Chaffinch	10			Long tailed tit
Mallard	7			Green finch
Song thrush	7			
Chiffchaff	5			
Jackdaw	3			Species which have bred in the park
Goldcrest	3			Yellowhammer, present into the 2000's
Pheasant	3			Barn owl, historically bred up to the 70's.
Moorhen	2			Long-eared owl bred up to the 2000's
Heron	2			Dipper, present in 2019.
Dunnock	2			
Great tit	2			
Little grebe	1			
There were 26 species of birds recorded in the survey.				

Spatial Ratio

Table 2: Shows how widespread each species was in the survey.

Number of sections each species was recorded in.	Species
9 sections (maximum)	Woodpigeon
"	Wren
"	Blackbird
7 Sections	Blackcap
"	Hooded crow
"	Robin
5 Sections	Chaffinch
"	Songthrush
4 Sections	Chiffchaff
3 Sections	Dunnock
"	Starling
"	Goldcrest
2 Sections	Mallard
"	Heron
"	Great tit
"	Jackdaw
1 Sections	Sparrowhawk
"	Goldfinch
"	Moorhen
"	Little grebe
"	Little egret
"	Pheasant
"	Magpie
"	Grey wagtail
"	Bullfinch

List of Birds



- Woodpigeon ■ Wren ■ Blackbird ■ Blackcap ■ Hooded crow ■ Robin ■ Starling ■ Chaffinch
- Mallard ■ Song thrush ■ Chiffchaff ■ Jackdaw ■ Goldcrest ■ Pheasant ■ Moorhen ■ Heron
- Dunnock ■ Great tit ■ Little grebe ■ Sparrowhawk ■ Little egret ■ Magpie

List of birds seen in each section

1) Park entrance to first bridge. 2) First bridge to second bridge. 3) Second bridge to seat. 4) Seat to Dog exercise area. 5) Dog area to bridge.

6) From bridge to end of first clearing. 7) From end of first clearing to end of second clearing. 8) from end of second clearing to bridge as sluice. 9) From bridge to end of lake.

1 st Stage		2 nd Stage		3rd stage		4 th stage		5 th stage		6 th stage		7 th stage		8 th stage		9 th stage	
Species		Species		Species		Species		Species		Species		Species		Species		Species	
Woodpigeon	10	Woodpigeon	2	Woodpigeon	11	Woodpigeon	8	Woodpigeon	13	Woodpigeon	7	Woodpigeon	5	Woodpigeon	2	Woodpigeon	5
Wren	7	Wren	5	Wren	5	Wren	8	Wren	6	Wren	4	Wren	3	Wren	7	Wren	8
Blackbird	7	Blackbird	2	Blackbird	8	Blackbird	6	Blackbird	3	Blackbird	1	Blackbird	6	Blackbird	2	Blackbird	4
Starling	6	Starling	7	Starling	1	Blackcap	3	Starling	0	Dunnock	1	Pheasant	1	Hooded crow	1	Blackcap	2
Blackcap	4	Blackcap	1	Blackcap	3	Robin	1	Blackcap	4	Blackcap	2	Blackcap	3	Heron	1	Moorhen	2
Robin	3	Great tit	1	Robin	1	Chaffinch	1	Robin	2	Robin	3	Robin	1	Rook colony		Robin	4
Chaffinch	3	Hooded crow	4	Chaffinch	2	Hooded crow	2	Chaffinch	2	Song thrush	2	Chaffinch	2			Little grebe	1
Hooded crow	2	Hooded crow	4	Hooded crow	3	Dunnock	1	Hooded crow	2	Hooded crow	1	Goldcrest	1			Hooded crow	1
Sparrowhawk*	1			Chiffchaff	1			Bullfinch	1	Magpie	1	Chiffchaff	1			Grey wagtail	1
Song thrush	1			Song thrush	1			Goldcrest	1	Little egret	1	Song thrush	2			Song thrush	1
Mallard	1							Jackdaw	1	Pheasant	2	Dunnock	1			Mallard	6
Heron	1									Chiffchaff	1					Jackdaw	2
Goldfinch	1									Great tit	1					Goldcrest	1
																Chiffchaff	2
																Rook (colony)	

Discussion:

The park essentially is an invaluable **green oasis** for both the local human population and wildlife in an increasingly urbanised area. It also acts as part of a corridor from the coast to the farmland of the north county for migrant passerines and indeed water birds and a home for native wildlife of all types.

The birds recorded in the survey represents a reasonably **varied population** of the more common species of Irish passerine birds, with a small number of water birds.

The area also is home to **fox** and possibly **otter**. Anglers have also told me **mink** have been seen and there is a possibility **pine marten** also frequents the area. **Badger** were also present up to a few years ago but their status is uncertain.

I also presume **bats** are present but separate surveys are needed to confirm the animal population.

The **river** now attracts little egret, grey heron and the occasional kingfisher and dipper. The lake has mute swan, breeding mallard, moorhen and little grebe.

People generally are respectful of the park exemplified during the recent pandemic which attracted a large number of people to the area.

The growth of the **human population** is naturally increasing the pressure on the park and its habitats. **Respect** for the park and its regulation are vital for its long-term viability both as a recreational venue for local residents and a safe home for nature. With that local interest an increasing human population can contribute to the **protection** of the park and its environs.

From an environmental view point. The grass has been cut to the edge of the river which is unnecessary and **erodes riverside habitat**.

The vast majority of **dogs walked** in the park are off the leash at all times of the day. The recently posted bylaws and rules are basically ignored. Generally, however, they walk/run alongside their owners on the path or along the grass bordering the path. However, a recent encounter with an off-the-leash pit bull-type terrier in the wilder section, and a chat with a local as he exercised his gun dogs after pheasants are examples of more serious disturbances.

Cats preying birds in the park from the nearby estates are also a problem for nesting birds.

Fires in the park are detrimental to all wildlife, and probably resulted in the disappearance of the long-eared owl as it used to breed in or about the lake area. Smoke will simply kill the nesting birds/ young in the nest.

Direct pollution of the river occurred recently when the inflow pipe, near the playground, feeding directly into the river had what smelled like paraffin in the discharge. The dipper was not seen after this incident. Whether it was a direct result is unknown. This was reported to the council twice at the time. Since then heron and egrets have been seen on the river so presumably it has recovered.

Litter is generally cosmetic but where there is runoff, it is a direct pollutant. The **steps** in the park need urgent repair as they can be dangerous in wet weather.

Suggestions

The level of use by the local community of the park indicates that a **warden or part time warden** is needed, part of whose brief would be education. The recent brave attempt by the council to develop a dog exercise area between the two middle bridges is a case in point. The public needs to be informed and involved.

Schools should be a part of whatever happens in the park, which also opens up an **educational opportunity**.

Signage indicating what the council is hoping to do in the park is also important.

To assist the council in encouraging **biodiversity** in the park, I suggest;

The **river banks** as a habitat be improved by growing reeds/willow or any other appropriate cover, providing additional habitat for bird life which may encourage species like the sedge/reed warbler to breed. Tolka Valley park has the Comma butterfly present this year which is a rare species for Ireland, Balheary park held a sedge warbler and there is no reason why Rivervally park could not attract them also.

In section 2 also, the area between the path and river just past the first bridge could be considered for a **wildflower meadow**. It is an area which is not used too much and could be utilised. It may capture the imagination of the public as well as increasing biodiversity.

There could be more areas of **longer grassland** in the park to create more habitat for insects and consequently bird and animal life. It may encourage species like the meadow pipit (a red listed breeding bird in Ireland) and perhaps skylark into the park. There are four or five pairs of meadow pipit occurring along the busy road between The Ryanair headquarters and Tesco in Airside, the last refuge known to the writer for this species in Swords urban area.

If the public bought into management of the park for wildlife perhaps even a **sacrificial crop** could be considered into the future. This has proved very successful in Turvey nature reserve and could promote the importance of Rivervalley as a **wildlife refuge** as the urbanisation of Swords proceeds apace.

As a means of encouraging **local involvement** a bird and bat box scheme could be started with the local schools monitoring the boxes they have made and erected.

Control of dogs is a problem. Most dogs thankfully do keep close to their owners along the paths. They avoid the longer grassy areas. If the council utilised this and allowed the grass to grow long in the park in most areas and short where the council want the dogs to exercise (namely between the 2 bridges), their objective of encouraging biodiversity and controlling the dog activity may be achieved.

The river bank on the Brackenstown road side of the river should be left wild as it currently acts as a **refuge and nesting place** for numerous birds.

Future

The establishment and enhancements of habitats in the park can be a valuable investment for the local wildlife and human population. Ward Rivervalley Park occupies a prominent place in the connection with the nearby SPA Broadmeadow estuary and a more long-term suggestion might be a **connecting natural corridor/park** from the estuary to the park and on to the surrounding north county countryside.

Brendan Black, May 2020.

